

**On Offices and Ministry
in the Independent Evangelical-Lutheran Church (Germany)¹**

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1. Foreword

The Independent Evangelical-Lutheran Church (SELK)² has an ongoing debate regarding the relationship of offices and ministry in the church. This debate includes the question of women's ordination. In past years, new ministry positions and careers have arisen in the church alongside the position of parson, leading to questions about new roles. Therefore, the SELK's 10th synod convention assigned the Theological Commission the task of putting the relationship between these ministries and the ordained office to paper.³

The Theological Commission presented its paper "Amt, Ämter und Dienste in der SELK" to the SELK's Pastoral Convention (APK) in 2005 for debate and acceptance. The paper was "basically accepted" and sent to the district pastors' conventions for further discussion and clarification. The Theological Commission was then requested to make improvements as deemed necessary based on decisions from the district pastors' conventions.⁴ Based on the decisions and opinions voiced, the Theological Commission reworked this paper thoroughly.

2. Introduction

Articles 6 and 7 in the SELK Constitution maintain:

Article 6 Ministries in the Church

All ministries in the church are intended to directly or indirectly proclaim the Gospel.

Article 7 The Pastoral Office

(1) The office which Christ instituted for proclaiming the Gospel and administering the sacraments can only be carried out by a person who has been called and ordained. (2) This office can only be conferred upon a man. (3) Ordination and visitations are the responsibility of the bishop, the director of missions, the regional deans/provosts (Propst)

² Selbständige Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche (SELK); the abbreviation SELK will be used in this translation to notate the Independent Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Germany.

³ "The 10th Church Synod Convention commissions SELK leadership to assign the Theological Commission the task of clarifying questions regarding the relationship between offices and ministries in the church and the one office of the Word and Sacrament. The intended goal is to present a paper to the Pastors' Convention (Allgemeiner Pfarrkonvent – APK) 2005 which, following discussions in the APK, can be presented to the next regular Church Synod for acceptance."

⁴ 10th SELK Pastors' Convention, Berlin-Spandau, June 13-17, 2005, minutes, page 17: "The 10th Pastors' Convention agrees with the basic principles in the paper 'Amt, Ämter und Dienste'. The Convention refers the paper to the District Pastors' Conventions for a process of advising and reception [...] Decisions from the District Pastors' Conventions will be reviewed by the Theological Commission and, where possible, included. Following further consultation on the parts of church leadership and the District Presidents, the paper will be presented to the Church Synod in 2007 for acceptance. [...]" The Pastors' Convention (APK) itself gave the Theological Commission a number of questions to consider (ibid.).

and the district presidents (Superintendent). They do these in mutual consent. (4) The church provides theological study and training for those who desire to enter the ministry and maintains centers necessary for study and training, especially the Lutheran Theological Seminary (Lutherische Theologische Hochschule).

Ordination and a call are therefore absolutely necessary to hold the “office of proclaiming the Gospel and administering the sacraments”, yet other “ministries” are possible and currently exist that have a different role in proclaiming the Gospel. Ordination is not a prerequisite for these ministries.

The SELK Constitution holds the office of proclaiming the Gospel and administering the sacraments to be “one” office. This specification apparently has two purposes: First, it distinguishes the pastoral office with its responsibility of proclaiming and administering from all the other ministries that are part of the church's commission; second, it proclaims the belief in the basic unity of this office, even when this unity allows for differentiation.

A call and ordination (“rite vocatus”, see CA XIV)⁵ are absolute prerequisites for the Office of the Church thus described. The SELK does not ordain for other ministries – such as the role of a Lay Minister or a Pastoral Theologian. The SELK also does not require a further ordination for the role of District President (*Superintendent*), regional dean/provost (*Propst*), or bishop.

A number of ministries which fall under Article 6 of the SELK Constitution have become permanent institutions of the SELK. For example, the SELK has regulations for the female profession of a Pastoral Theologian (*Pastoralreferentin*) “in her congregational, missionary, and charitable ministry.”⁶ For other areas, however, such as deacons (Diakon) and deaconesses (Diakonin), religious education teachers, and readers (male or female: Lektor/Lektorin), the roles in the church and (in some cases) the employment positions must still be clarified. Lay members of the church governing board, church elders, cantors, treasurers and ushers must also be named in this context. Current church law provides an exception for the “office” of Lay Minister (Pfarrdiakon), as this office “derives from and participates in the one Office of the one, holy church”⁷. Vicars are placed under a pastor in

⁵ CA XIV. In: Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche. Herausgegeben im Gedenkjahr der Augsburgischen Konfession 1930, Göttingen: V&R 9th edition 1982 [BSLK], 69; The Book of Concord. The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, ed. Robert Kolb/Timothy J. Wengert, Minneapolis: Fortress Press 2000 [BC]. P. 46–47.

⁶ SELK statutes (*Kirchliche Ordnungen für die Selbständige Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche [SELK]*, ed. Church Governing Board of the SELK, Hannover), statute 113: Regulations for a Pastoral Theologian in the SELK (as amended on June 21, 2003) – (*Ordnung für eine Pastoralreferentin in der Selbständigen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche*): The goal of her education is the “ministry as Pastoral Theologian” [§ 4(3)].

⁷ SELK Statute 117: Regulations for the service of a Lay Minister in the SELK (*Das Amt des Pfarrdiakons in der Selbständigen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche*), § 1.

a congregation for a portion of their training and work towards ordination; for this reason, their position must be discussed separately.⁸

The assignment to the ministries listed above and the call into the “office” of lay minister have thus far occurred on the basis of individual gifts. We cannot ignore the fact, however, that the SELK will need lay ministers, pastoral theologians, deacons and deaconesses more and more to provide pastoral care and worship services for the congregations in the future.

3. Current offices and ministries in the SELK

Two special forms of church ministry have become established in the SELK that can be called “institutionalized charisma”: the Lay Minister (*Pfarrdiakon*) and the (employed) Pastoral Theologian (*Pastoralreferentin*).

Deacons (*Diakon*) and deaconesses (*Diakonin*) should also be considered, and – on a different level – readers (*Lektor/Lektorin*).⁹ Finally, the vicars (*Vikar*) are a special case, as the vicar is working towards his ordination, but is not yet ordained.

a) Lay Minister (*Pfarrdiakon*)

Lay Ministers have acquired and demonstrated biblical-theological knowledge, practical skills and confessional ties as teachers of religion, theologians, participants in theological correspondence courses or privately educated persons. Current church law grants them the right to preach independently in a “service of public worship”, but does not ordain them.¹⁰

Lay Ministers are baptised Christians who have the gift of evangelising. The church grants them the right and the responsibility to use their gift in strengthening the congregation.

The SELK statute 117.1 defines the role of the Lay Minister as individual functions

⁸ SELK statute 123: Regulations for the training of vicars and pastors in their first year (as amended on March 22, 203/May 24, 2003) – (Ordnung für die Ausbildung von Lehrvikaren und Pfarrvikaren der Selbständigen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche).

⁹ “Instituted charismata” are all possible charismata of a person on a permanent base, in an orderly fashion, within the church. There are also “free charismata” which appear in a church every now and then and not in the shape of a permanent ministry. An example could be the charisma of comfort by which one Christian supports another. The charisma of “kybernetics”, usually permanent, can also be manifest for particular occasions only (e.g. the preparation of events in the congregation).

¹⁰ “The lay minister should take over special tasks which are restricted to the ordained office, but can be separated from it and assigned to qualified men. The lay minister is generally called to the service of the whole church without temporal restriction, because his ministry takes part in the one office of the one church. His ministry can be temporarily suspended. He always works as the helper of the pastor to whom he is assigned. There is a difference between a generally unlimited blessing (...) and a temporally and locally restricted installation (...).” – SELK statute 117 (as in note 7), § 1(2).

of the Office of the Church granted unto suitable persons (men¹¹). Theologically, breaking down these individual functions can be defended, but the role would require an ordination in accordance with CA XIV which is not identical with the “blessing” and “installation” currently used¹². This is a formal conflict which has not yet been resolved.

b) Pastoral Theologian (*Pastoralreferentin*)

Pastoral Theologians are women who have completed the full theological study program and internships in congregations and are qualified for church work, but are not ordained. Their work includes primarily Christian education and diaconical tasks (see SELK statute 113 § 5).

According to the SELK statute, the pastoral theologian's tasks include holding devotions. On occasion, “devotions” have been held in public worship services, and occasionally even with the responsible pastor present. These devotions have consisted of an explanation of scripture in such a form that they could not be differentiated from a sermon. This has happened although § 5 states: “A pastoral theologian can take on the following tasks: (...) 5. devotions, for example in institutional homes and congregational groups. (6) Participation in planning and holding worship services.”

Installation for Pastoral Theologians “occurs in a church service by the district president or a pastor appointed by him” (statute 113 § 7.1). Currently, the SELK does not have an Order of Installation for Pastoral Theologians.

Despite differences in education, approaches and rights of employment between Lay Ministers (who are volunteers and are not employed) and Pastoral Theologians (who can be full-time employees), Pastoral Theologians likewise are to be viewed and valued as baptised Christians who have the charisma of “teaching” in witnessing for the Gospel¹³. For this reason, the church grants them the right and responsibility to use their gifts of grace in serving and building the congregation. The SELK statute 113 § 5 states: “A Pastoral Theologian serves the proclamation of the gospel.”

Our church laws therefore allow Lay Ministers to hold services of the word, which are liturgically equal¹⁴ to worship services without communion, on a regular basis and to hold “sermons” that they have prepared independently and which cannot be formally

¹¹ The gender specification results from the structure of lay ministry as individual functions of the office of the church.

¹² See: Agende für evangelisch-lutherische Kirchen und Gemeinden. Band IV, hrsg. von der Kirchenleitung der VELKD, Berlin/Hamburg, 2. Aufl. 1966, 42ff: “Einsegnung eines Diakons/einer Diakonisse“.

¹³ ..., which includes teaching, theological research, etc. (see Aufgaben der PastRef, SELK statute 113 § 5).

¹⁴ There is no clear rule that prohibits the Lay Minister from using the *Salutatio* or the Aaronitic blessing.

differentiated from a sermon by an ordained minister.

Pastoral Theologians, on the other hand, are not allowed to do this, even though they bring with them the same academic qualifications and exegetical and homiletical requirements as a pastor, and even though theologically a Pastoral Theologian's ministry as well as a Lay Minister's ministry is valid as the testimony of baptised Christians, and yet must be differentiated from the "public teaching and preaching" in CA XIV.

c) Deacons (*Diakon*) and Deaconesses (*Diakonin*)

Deacons and Deaconesses have a degree in education or health care and have completed a theology degree at a deacon/deaconess institute or school. They have committed themselves to holy scripture and the Lutheran confessions and are "consecrated"¹⁵ for their work; the same liturgical form is used as for the consecration of a Lay Minister.

However, this consecration does not include the right to preach the Gospel in worship services. Deacons can do further education and attain the role of Lay Minister, but this is not possible for deaconesses. This discrepancy particularly shows where theological clarity is needed.

Lay ministers, pastoral theologians, deacons and deaconesses have one thing in common: *their theological call as baptised Christians with specific charismas that are put to service for building the church and the congregation.*

d) Vicars (*Vikar*)

Vicars are theologians who have completed their academic studies and are preparing for their ordination and entrance into the office of the church. This involves a term of congregational service under the guidance of a pastor. Their tasks are described similarly to those of a pastoral theologian; however, the vicars prepare and give sermons and lead services of the word on a regular basis. Academic training guidelines for vicars in the SELK provide for an induction into their work¹⁶ in a worship service, but do not have a set form for this. The laying on of hands is not necessary, but is at times practised.

This description of different ministries in the SELK clearly demonstrates the blurred theological and liturgical lines and the problems associated with them.

¹⁵ Agende für evangelisch-lutherische Kirchen und Gemeinden. Band IV (as in note 12), 42ff: "Einsegnung eines Diakons/einer Diakonisse".

¹⁶ SELK statute 123 (as in note 8), § 4 (2)

4. The foundations of our understanding

Before the questions associated with these distinctions can be answered, it is necessary to clarify the relationship between the Office of the Word and Sacrament on the one hand and Ministries (charisma) in the church on the other hand. For a more thorough explanation of the pastoral office, the Theological Commission refers readers to its paper presented in 1997¹⁷. The present paper concentrates on clarifying the *relationship* between the office, the offices and the ministries in the church.¹⁸

1. Where Christ is, there is the church.

The church is the body of Christ. Her one foundation is Jesus Christ, her Savior and Lord. She lives and continues because her Lord, who sent his apostles into the world, promised: "See, I am with you always, until the end of the age" (Matth. 28:20)¹⁹. The unbreakable truth of Christ's promises awakens faith and, in so doing, creates Jesus Christ's church. For this reason, the office of the church and the congregation belong together inseparably in the body of Christ.

2. Where the Gospel is, there are the command and authority to preach the Gospel, to administer the sacraments and to forgive sins.

The church, as the body of Christ, has the command and authority ("ecclesiastical power") to proclaim the Gospel and administer the sacraments. The church as a whole has been given this command to proclaim the Gospel and administer the sacraments²⁰, yet the command is carried out in individual or local congregations. This is where the Gospel is preached, sins are forgiven, people are baptised, communion is held. This service, this office, may not be confused with nor separated from the people who carry out the office. Neither can the "office" simply be reduced to the command to proclaim the Gospel.

The Pastoral Epistles and the office of the presbyterian-bishop in the early church²¹ formed the basis for the Lutheran reformation's understanding of the office of the church. The basic task and content of this office was determined as to preach the gospel, "to

¹⁷ Das Amt der Kirche. Eine Wegweisung. Herausgegeben von der Theologischen Kommission der Selbständigen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche, Hannover 1997. English translation not yet found.

¹⁸ The following statements are based primarily on writings by Hermann Sasse from the collection: Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf (ed.): In Statu Confessionis. Gesammelte Aufsätze und Kleine Schriften von Hermann Sasse. Bd. I. u. II. Berlin u. Schleswig-Holstein 1975-1976. – See also Werner Klän: Ubi Christus, ibi ecclesia. Hermann Sasses Beitrag zur Verhältnisbestimmung von "Kirche" und "Amt", LuThK 31 (2007) 135-159.

¹⁹ All scripture passages from the New International Version.

²⁰ Ministerium docendi evangelii et porrigendi sacramenta – CA V (BSLK 58; BC 41).

²¹ Episcopi seu pastores; see CA XXVIII. In: BSLK 129,53; comp. BC 99.

forgive sin, to judge doctrine and reject Doctrine that is contrary to the Gospel, and to exclude from the Christian community the ungodly whose ungodly life is manifest..."²²

This office of the church ("ministerium ecclesiasticum") is therefore not above the congregation, but is in the congregation, because whatever is true for one is true for the whole. This is also true for the "power of the keys", a focal point of the reformators' understanding of the Gospel. The Twelve, who are simultaneously the church *and* its pastors, are commanded to administer baptism and celebrate communion. For this reason, "the office is not above the congregation (2 Cor. 1:24), the congregation is not above the office (Gal. 1), rather they have one Lord over both of them, through whom they are one."²³

3. Where God's command and authority are, the Office of the Word and the Sacrament will also be found.

The Lord's command to his church and to his Christianity – to proclaim the Gospel, to baptize, to administer the sacrament of his body and blood, to forgive and withhold sins – is fulfilled by administering the word and sacrament through the service He instituted. Therefore, the office of the church is characterized by carrying out the Gospel's command: the office consists of service.

This service had many facets in the early church. In New Testament times, offices can be found which Christ filled directly through the congregation (for example, episkopes, deacons, presbyters). In spite of the variety in tasks, the office is still a characteristic of the church, because the church can only exist wherever the true Gospel is preached and the sacraments are administered correctly. For the sake of good order in the church, it is best when the spiritual office retains a maximum of possibilities for carrying out its service.

4. Where the Office of the Word and Sacrament is, workers will also be found.

Where the Office of the Word and the Sacrament is, workers ("ministri") will also be found, physical people who carry out the ministry of preaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments. These specific people in the spiritual office or pastoral office serve the church in these roles and do not rule over the church. However, in as far as they represent Christ in their office²⁴, they also hold a position facing the congregation.

²² BSLK 123f., 21; "... ministerium verbi et sacramentorum, remittere peccata, reicere doctrinam ab evangelio dissentientem et impios, quorum nota est impietas excludere a communione ecclesiae..." (BSLK 124,21; English translation of the German text: BC 94).

²³ Hermann Sasse: Zur Frage nach dem Verhältnis von Amt und Gemeinde (1949), in: In Statu Confessionis Bd. II, S. 130.

²⁴ "repraesentant Christi personam", AC VII 28 lat., BSLK 240,42; comp. BC 178. „als Christus“, AC VII 28 dt., BSLK 241,2; „an Christus statt“, AC VII 28 dt., BSLK, 241,4; „Christi vice et loco, AC VII 28 lat., BSLK

The spiritual/pastoral office leads the congregation in fulfilling the Lord's commands to his church, particularly in the office of a pastor for the congregation or parish. Preaching the Gospel, administering the sacraments, excluding people from and admitting new members into the congregation, responsibility for the church's teaching in instruction, sermons, counselling and witness are the bishop's or pastor's central responsibilities stated in CA XXVIII²⁵, which correspond with the congregation's duty to obey. This is the "Church Regiment" (CA XIV) by which the office of the church ("ordo ecclesiasticus") rules.

5. Where the Word and the Sacraments are, the Holy Spirit and Christ himself are present.

When those called by Christ through the church into the office of the Word and Sacrament fulfill what is commanded – where the Word of the Gospel is clearly preached, and where baptism, eucharist and absolution are administered – the congregation and all believers can be certain that they receive God himself in the Holy Spirit through these means (CA V)²⁶. This is most certainly true regardless of the fact that God's sovereignty is not lessened by God the Holy Spirit binding himself to these means of grace. Because God the Holy Spirit belongs inseparably to Jesus Christ, one must also speak here of Christ's presence with and in his Christianity.

6. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, freedom will also be found.

In addition to the central tasks of the pastoral office, bishops and pastors have other leadership tasks, such as decisions regarding worship services²⁷. They do not have a monopoly on these competencies, as the church has the privilege of "changing, reducing or expanding" ceremonies based upon their necessity²⁸. In these situations, "teachings on Christian freedom" play a predominant part in discussions about ecclesiastical order.²⁹

For this reason, the church, as the "subject of ecclesiastical order",³⁰ has the freedom to allow fellow Christians, male and female, to give witness in church services when it helps to encourage and strengthen the congregation, and if the person has the spiritual gift ("charisma") of interpreting God's Word, is in agreement with church doctrine,

240,47.

²⁵ BSLK 120-133; §§5.8.20.21; BC 90–103.

²⁶ BSLK 58; BC 40.

²⁷ CA XXVIII 53, BSLK 129; BC 98.

²⁸ FC SD X 9, BSLK 1056; BC 637; see also FC Ep X 4, BSLK 814; BC 515.

²⁹ CA XXVIII, 51, BSLK, 128,33–129,9; BC 98.

³⁰ Hermann Sasse: *Kirchenregiment und weltliche Obrigkeit nach lutherischer Lehre*, München 1935 (BeKi 30), 70. Sasse emphasises that the church not only possesses "ecclesiastical power in the sense of potestas clavium, but also in the further sense of legal functions in the church"; *ibid.*

has passed theological exams and has been granted permission to speak in this role. God the Holy Spirit uses his congregation and Christianity “to teach and preach the Word. By it he creates and increases holiness, causing it daily to grow and become strong in the faith and in its fruits, which the Spirit produces.”³¹ Under these conditions, the possibility of having Christians, male and female, who are not ordained fulfill tasks of proclaiming the Gospel in the sense of evangelism, catechism, or counselling, is granted. Without a doubt, “public teaching” (“publice docere”) in CA XIV in the sense of preaching the Gospel (lat. Ministerium verbi et sacramentorum), means “to forgive sin, to judge doctrine and reject Doctrine that is contrary to the Gospel, and to exclude from the Christian community the ungodly whose ungodly life is manifest – not with human power but with God’s Word alone” (CA XVIII, § 21), and must be understood as the central responsibility of the ordained, called and installed pastor, whom the congregation has entrusted with this responsibility for all teaching and proclamation.

This responsibility does not prevent other people from interpreting and applying God's Word in a specific congregation and setting, such as in Bible study group, in catechism class or other church groups, even in worship services. Cases where the Gospel has been interpreted in church ministry by Christians, male and female, qualified spiritually and academically, yet not ordained, do not contradict the intention of CA XIV.

This ministry is understood as an “institutionalised Charisma” of Christian testimony, used to build the body of Christ. It is not defended with Eph 4:11 (“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers...”), it is defended with 1 Pet. 2:9 (“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light...”).

5. Clarifying current regulations in the SELK

Overview

A. Ministries in the church (not ordained)

1. Positions such as: certified school teacher of religious education (kirchlich vozierter Religionslehrer/Religionslehrerin) , reader (Lektor/Lektorin), church musician (organist, choir director), Sunday School teacher, lay member of the church governing board, elder, treasurer, verger³²
2. Deacon (*Diakon*) and Deaconess (*Diakonin*)/congregational deacon/deaconess

³¹ Martin Luther, Large Catechism, Creed, 3rd Article, § 52-53, BSLK 657,43–658,2; BC 438.

³² All of these tasks can be fulfilled by men and women in the SELK.

3. Lay Minister (*Pfarrdiakon*)
4. Vicar (*Vikar*)
5. Pastoral Theologian in training (*Pastoralreferentin in Ausbildung*)
6. Pastoral Theologian (*Pastoralreferentin*)

B. The Office of Proclaiming the Word and Administering the Sacraments (ordained)

1. Pastor in his first year (Pfarrvikar)
2. Pastor
3. Parson

The ministry positions listed in A. can be held by full-time employees within a church body or congregation, by volunteers in a church body or congregation, or by persons specifically commissioned by the church for their roles. Workers who qualify for these positions and are called by the church are blessed for their ministry in a worship service; employees are blessed for their work and can be blessed again, should they begin work in a new place.

Further, the church and the congregations can set up additional institutionalised ministries and bless the people for their work in a worship service (for example, readers, Sunday School teachers, Bible study leaders, etc.).

Further Explanation

A1. Positions such as certified teacher of religious education, reader, church musician (organist, choir director), Sunday School teacher, lay member of the church governing board, elder, treasurer, verger

Baptised and confirmed Christians who, based on their professional qualifications and their Christian way of life, are deemed suitable for these ministries can be placed in these ministries in service to the church and/or carry out their work in the name of the church. It is necessary that they commit themselves to the church's confessions.

Certified teachers of religion, readers, church musicians (organists, choir directors), Sunday School teachers, lay member of the church governing board, elders, treasurers, and vergers/altar guild members work in their particular areas toward building and strengthening the congregation (*oikodomé*).

Each person should be blessed for their ministry/ministries *pro tempore et loco* so that the spiritual and theological character of their ministry is emphasized and they can be certain that the congregation prays for them.

Ministries within the congregation fall under the spiritual responsibility of the congregational pastor (parson).

If the ministry is outside of the SELK, a SELK representative should provide spiritual guidance for the worker(s), wherever possible. Teachers of Religious Education are certified (receive a *vocatio*), if possible by the SELK, for their work in schools.

A2. Deacons (Diakon) and deaconesses (Diakonin)

Deacons and deaconesses are baptised and confirmed Christians who have successfully completed studies in the area of religious education, social pedagogy and/or health care and use their qualifications to build and strengthen the congregation (*oikodomé*).

The church officially recognizes that the applicants have the necessary theological and academic or professional qualifications to become deacons/deaconesses and that they are committed to the Lutheran confessions.

Deacons and deaconesses are blessed for their work. Their tasks vary depending on their qualifications and where they are placed. In a congregation, deacons and deaconesses can conduct reader services and daily prayer services (matins, vesper, complet). The pastor retains spiritual responsibility for teachings and sermons in his parish. Deacons and deaconesses are commissioned *pro tempore et loco* for their work in a congregation or church organisation in a worship service. Ministries within the congregation fall under the spiritual responsibility of the congregational pastor. If the ministry is outside the SELK, a SELK representative should provide spiritual guidance for the worker(s) wherever possible.

A3. Lay Minister (*Pfarrdiakon*)

The term "Lay Minister" is confusing and inadequate because it creates the impression that the lay minister is a pastor who simply works on a volunteer basis rather than as a full-time employee (which is the case with a parson). In truth, a lay minister is a baptised and confirmed Christian who, through theological study and pastoral experience, has acquired the knowledge and skills that enable him to work towards building and strengthening the congregation (*oikodomé*).

The church officially recognizes that the lay minister applicant fulfills the necessary theological requirements, has pastoral experience, and is committed to the church's confessions.

The lay minister is blessed for his work. His tasks include: leading Bible studies,

assisting volunteers, leading congregational groups (such as seniors' groups, women's groups, youth groups, prayer circles, etc.), pastoral visits, participating in worship services (readings, prayers, communion assistance), and assisting with official church actions.

Lay Ministers can hold reader services and daily prayer services (matins, vesper, complet) and, when theologically qualified, can hold worship services of the word without communion.

The sermon in the Sunday Divine Service (with communion) should be reserved for the congregation's pastor or another ordained pastor, unless unusual circumstances render an exception necessary.

The pastor retains spiritual responsibility for teachings and sermons in his parish. Lay Ministers are commissioned *pro tempore et loco* for their work in a congregation or church organisation in a worship service.

Lay Ministers work on a volunteer basis.

A4. Vicar (*Vikar*)

The term vicar is confusing and inadequate because it creates the impression that the vicar is the representative of the pastor to whom he is assigned. In truth, a vicar has passed his First Theological Exam³³ and is preparing for his Second (church) Exam³⁴ with practical training in a church congregation. It is assumed that the vicar does this service because he desires ordination into the pastoral office after passing his second exam and wants to be a pastor in the church. The church views this wish and the vicar's academic background as a *vocatio interna* and commissions him to a congregation for a set amount of time, under the spiritual responsibility and guidance of a pastor.

Within this framework, the vicar should work towards building and strengthening the congregation where he is placed, examine his conscience carefully as to whether he is called to the pastoral office, and complete his Theological Exams.

The vicar is blessed and commissioned at the beginning of his vicarage for his work in a specific congregation *pro tempore et loco*.

When the vicar is entrusted with the proclamation of God's Word in a public church service, he does so under the spiritual responsibility of his mentor, the congregation's pastor. This requires the vicar to present his sermons to the pastor before holding them;

³³ The First Theological Exam is the examination SELK students undergo at the conclusion of the academic studies, before being assigned a vicarage.

³⁴ The Second Theological Exam is the examination SELK candidates for the pastoral office undergo at the conclusion of their vicarage, before being ordained.

they fall under the pastor's spiritual responsibility for teachings and sermons in his parish.

Vicars can assist the pastor in official church acts (such as baptisms, weddings, funerals, confirmations). Whether or not the pastor can commission the vicar to carry out baptisms, weddings or funerals independently³⁵ remains to be clarified.

A5. Pastoral Theologian in training (*Pastoralferentin in Ausbildung*)

A pastoral theologian in training is a baptised and confirmed Christian woman who has completed academic study in theology by passing her First Theological Exam and who is sent to a congregation for practical training in preparation for her Second (church) Theological Exam.

The church views the candidate's spiritual and the academic background as a *vocatio interna* and commissions her to a congregation for a set amount of time to gain practical-pastoral knowledge and skills under the spiritual responsibility and guidance of a pastor.

Her training includes the following areas of church or congregational work: confirmation or religious instruction in the church or a school, leading Bible studies, assisting volunteers, leading congregational groups (seniors' group, women's group, youth group, etc.), visiting members, assisting in church services (readings, proclamation, prayers, communion assistant), and assisting in official church acts.

The pastoral theologian in training should work towards building and strengthening the congregation in this framework, examine her conscience carefully as to whether she is called to this ministry, and complete her Theological Exams.

The pastoral theologian in training is blessed for her work at the beginning of her practical training *pro tempore et loco*³⁶.

When the pastoral theologian in training is entrusted with proclaiming God's Word in a public church service, she does so under the spiritual responsibility of the congregation's pastor. This requires the pastoral theologian in training to present her devotions to the pastor before holding them; they fall under the pastor's spiritual responsibility for teachings and sermons in his parish.

³⁵ The vicar cannot confirm, because confirmation is a legal act in the congregation which allows the confirmands to accept the office of godparent and which grants them more vocal rights as members. For this reason, confirmation remains the responsibility of the pastor.

³⁶ As with a vicar (A4), this is understood as a commission for the specific term of service; the word "blessing" is used when the pastoral theologian begins work as a fully-certified employee.

A6. Pastoral Theologian (*Pastoralreferentin*)

Pastoral Theologians are baptised and confirmed Christian women who have completed their studies of theology and passed their First Theological Exam, completed practical-pastoral training, have passed their Second Theological Exam and are qualified as “full theologians” to work towards building and strengthening the congregation (*oikodomé*).

In her first year of service after the Second Theological Exam, a pastoral theologian has the status of Pastoral Theologian in Wait (*Pastoralreferentin zur Anstellung [z.A.]*). She fulfills her tasks independently, yet has a pastor assigned to her as a mentor. For all other purposes, the pastoral theologian in her first year has the same rights and duties as any other pastoral theologian.

The church officially recognizes that the pastoral theologian applicant fulfills the necessary theological and pastoral-practical requirements and commits herself to the church's confessions. Pastoral Theologians are blessed for their work.

Their tasks include: confirmation or religious instruction in the church or a school, leading Bible studies, training volunteers, leading congregational groups (seniors' group, women's circle, youth groups, prayer circles, etc.), visiting members, assisting in church services (readings, proclamation, prayers, communion assistant), assisting in official church acts.

Pastoral Theologians can hold reader church services and daily prayer services (matins, vesper, complet) and in some cases can hold services of the word without communion.

The sermon in a Divine Service on Sundays (with communion) should be reserved for the congregation's pastor or another ordained pastor unless special conditions warrant an exception.

All proclamation falls under the spiritual responsibility of the pastor for teaching and preaching in his parish.

Pastoral Theologians are commissioned for their work in a local congregation or a church organisation in a worship service *pro tempore et loco*.

Pastoral Theologians, as a rule, are employed full time for their work.

B1. Pastor in his first year (*Pfarrevikar*)

Legally, the SELK employs pastors “on a trial basis” for their first year (SELK statute 110 §9 [2]), even though they receive ordination at the conclusion of their vicarage.

Technically, the congregation is considered vacant during this year, as they do not

have an installed pastor. The pastor in his first year is assigned to a Vacancy Pastor, who takes on the role of a mentor.

Although ordination is valid indefinitely, church regulations assign the pastor in his first year to a pastor as an “assistant pastor” for one year. This presents an unresolved conflict between the ordination, which is valid indefinitely, and the assignment to a position for a limited amount of time (in spite of full qualifications for the pastoral office).

In most cases, the pastor is sent (by the SELK governing board) to a vacant congregation. He works independently, yet under the responsibility of a vacancy pastor assigned by the District President. The District President can give the pastor in his first year assignments for his work.

Similarly, when a pastor in his first year is sent to a congregation that has a pastor, this pastor retains his responsibility for the congregation and can give the pastor in his first year assignments for his work. The SELK governing board can assign an additional mentor besides the vacancy pastor or pastor responsible (SELK statute 123 § 9(2) d-e).

Until a congregation (or parish) calls the pastor, he is sent by the SELK governing board. The board takes on the congregation's responsibility for proclaiming the Gospel and administering the sacraments in their geographical area for this year.

Should the pastor be assigned to a vacant congregation, the congregation can call him to be their pastor at the end of the first year. Following the call and installation, he is a called and ordained Servant of the Word and pastor in his parish, with all the rights and responsibilities of such.

The vacancy pastor introduces the pastor in his first year to the congregation(s) in a Divine Service. Any and all actions that are reminiscent of an installation are to be avoided.

B2. Pastor (*Pastor*)

Ordained ministers who are not in service as pastors of a congregation should be titled “pastor” (*Pastor*). However, other issues come into play here, such as regional customs and the fact that the title “parson”, in the German-speaking oecumenical context, signifies a man holding a pastoral position and includes a particular standard of academic education.

The office of volunteer pastor or parson (*Pastor/Pfarrer im Ehrenamt*)³⁷ still requires juridical clarification..

For questions regarding the relationship between the pastor and the congregation

³⁷ A volunteer pastor can be called by a congregation or by the SELK governing board.

please see the paper “Das Amt der Kirche”³⁸, published by the SELK Commission for Theology.

The SELK has official regulations for pastors (*Pfarrerdienstordnung*) that apply to all ordained theologians in the SELK.

B3. Parson (*Pfarrer*)

Parish pastors (parsons) are ordained for the pastoral office and called and installed in a congregation as their pastor. They carry out the office of proclaiming the Gospel and administering the sacraments in the congregation in the context presented in this paper. They rely on manifold services of other persons in the congregation in order to build and strengthen the congregation (*oikodomé*).

6. Aspects for liturgy and ecclesiastical law

1. What is a blessing?

A blessing is understood as a benediction for a particular person through which he or she is placed in the service of the church and blessed with Word and prayer.

This blessing must be noticeably different from an installation for a specific area of service.

Hands are often placed on the person's head for the blessing. This sign can be interpreted in different ways and requires a word of explanation, yet emphasizes the congregation's personal interest and intercession in prayer for the person and his/her work. The blessings (personal benedictions) should be so carried out that they can be clearly differentiated in content and liturgy from a concrete commissioning (installation into a specific area of work).

It may be necessary for the church to consider whether or not the parties responsible for blessings should be more clearly determined.

Requirements could include the area of service: a pastor could bless someone for service in the local congregation or parish, the district president could bless a worker for service in the district, the regional dean for tasks in the region, and the bishop for service in church body leadership.

This would avoid the impression that a blessing from a bishop is more valuable than a blessing from a local pastor.

District presidents (*Superintendent*), regional deans/provosts and the bishop retain

³⁸ Das Amt der Kirche. Eine Wegweisung, herausgegeben von der Theologischen Kommission der Selbständigen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche, s.l. (Hannover) 1997. English translation not yet found.

their responsibility for ordination.

2. Wording of the blessings

Ideally, the SELK should have a uniform blessing liturgy that provides specific readings, options for prayer, and options for blessing votums for each individual type of service.

When selecting readings and prayers, direct reference should be made to the person's baptism and to the priesthood of all believers as the foundation for all work in the church. **Reference can also be made to the person's confirmation as “the promise of the Holy Spirit” (see: Mit Christus leben. Eine evangelisch-lutherische Wegweisung. Hannover 2009. Pages 15-16.).**

7. Summary/Conclusions

1. On the relationship between Articles 6 and 7 in the SELK Constitution

The thoughts presented here on office and theology are not intended to expand on Lutheran understanding of the office and ordination, nor do they intend to replace the paper “Das Amt der Kirche” (Theological Commission of the SELK, 1997). Instead, this paper assumes that earlier understandings will be maintained. As the synod convention requested, this paper presents a theologically sound explanation of the relationship between the Office of the Church and ministries in the church.

In this context, we hold to the following:

1.1. There is only *one* Office of the Church and *one* ordination into the Office of the Church.

The Office of the Church is defined as the “one office instituted by Christ to proclaim the Gospel and administer the sacraments”; this can only be carried out by a “called and ordained” servant of the Word (see SELK Constitution Art. 7.1). The Office understood here is reserved for the person leading a congregation (through the means of Word and sacrament and, in that position, as a representative of Christ, *vice et loco Christi*).

Regarding ordination, we maintain the following: “The ordinand receives the gift of the Holy Spirit for his work through the laying upon of hands in the ordination. This gift is bestowed effectively, not only deprecatively.”³⁹

³⁹ Das Amt der Kirche. Eine Wegweisung, herausgegeben von der Theologischen Kommission der Selbständigen Evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche, s.l. (Hannover), 2nd Edition 1999, 24.

1.2. At the same time, all “ministry in the church [...] is intended to directly or indirectly proclaim the Gospel” (see SELK Constitution, Article 6). As new church ministries and careers (lay ministers, pastoral theologians, deacons, deaconesses) have appeared, questions have arisen about the needs, possibilities, and theological and religious reasons for the participation of these ministries in proclaiming the Gospel, as is intended in Article 6 of the SELK constitution, but not named with concrete roles.

1.3. The Theological Commission's recommendation can be summed up as follows: “All proclamation falls under the spiritual responsibility of the pastor for teaching and preaching in his parish.” This coincides with the “potestas clavium” in CA XXVIII as it is unfolded in this paper with regard to the church's command and authority, “ecclesiastical power”⁴⁰, and the authority of the spiritual office⁴¹. Ministries (“Institutionalised Charisma”) play their part in proclaiming the Gospel within the “pastor’s spiritual responsibility for teaching and preaching in his parish.”

2. Ecumenical compatibility

Suggestions made by the Theological Commission respect the continuity of Lutheran theology on the one hand and the Lutheran church's responsibility for common ecumenical ground on the other hand, and assumes the basic ecumenical orientation of Lutheran theology and church.

This paper presents a model for not ordained church workers to publicly participate in proclaiming the Gospel under the circumstances listed above. The model takes into consideration the theological challenges presented by the creation of new areas of service and new church careers that have appeared in many churches in Europe since the 20th century⁴². The model retains the special position for the Office of the church (proclamation of the Gospel and administration of the sacraments) because it retains the unity and uniqueness of the Ordination. At the same time, it provides theologically legitimate

⁴⁰ “potestas ecclesiastica” – see CA XXVIII (Latin title!), for example 21 and following, BSLK 122-124; BC 94.

⁴¹ See the section “The foundations of our understanding.”

⁴² At the same time, this paper takes a route which differs from the VELKD (United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany) recommendation. Their bishops' conference recommended differentiating between an ordination and a commission in their paper “Properly Called”, TVELKD 136 (2006). In our opinion, our paper here coincides well with the Lutheran Church's commitment to Scripture and Confession and respects our ecumenical responsibility.

possibilities for church workers who are not ordained to give witness in a worship service.⁴³

Appendix: Order of worship for blessings/commissions and for ordination⁴⁴

I. Blessing/commission for service in the church (not ordained)	II. Ordination into the Office of the Word and Sacrament
Sermon	Following the creed:
Hymn	Presentation of the candidate
Presentation of the candidate	Congregational prayer
Scripture Readings	1. Scripture Reading
Confessional Subscription	2. Scripture Reading
Promises	Confessional Subscription
Congregational prayer	Promises
Words of blessing	Lord's Prayer
(such as: "The Triune God bless you for your work...")	Ordination prayer
	Words of ordination ("I bless, ordain and send you..."; "I ordain and consecrate you to the Office of the Holy Ministry of the Word and Sacrament...")
	[Presentation of a sign with a word of explanation.]
	Word of Commission

⁴³ Parallels to this can be found in the Roman-Catholic term "lay sermon" and the rules associated with such. Canon 759 says, „The laity, due to their baptism and confirmation, witness for the Gospel through their words and their examples of Christian life; they can also be called to work with the bishop and the priests in carrying out service to the Word (lat.: exercitium ministerii verbi).“ Canon 766 expands on this: "Laity, in accordance with the Bishops' Conference and under the conditions in can. 767.1, are allowed to hold sermons (lat.: ad praedicandum) in a church or a chapel when it is deemed necessary or useful in individual situations." The homily in the eucharist service is reserved for the priest or the deacon. Codex Iuris Canonici – the Codex for Canonical Law (CIC), Kevelaer 3. Edition 1989. – The German Bishops' Conference, for example, allows candidates for the priest's office (before taking priest's orders) to preach. We consider this a parallel to allowing vicars to preach. DBK 24 Feb. 1988; see LThK 3rd Edition, vol. 6, 606, Freiburg i.B., 2006.

⁴⁴ Introduction into supervisory (ephoral) offices is to be distinguished from ordination. The SELK has liturgical forms in the order of worship for this. The SELK Theological Commission is working on liturgical wording for blessing workers for their ministry in the church and will send their suggestions to the Liturgical Commission for further preparation. – *The LC-MS has a complete Order of Worship for Ordination and Installation available on their webpage cph.org.*