

THE ORDAINED MINISTRY FOR THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS (C)

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I greet you in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ. I first would like to thank Bishop Phaswana and the Central Diocese for inviting me to this Synod, for the purpose of making this address. When the Executive Secretary sent the invitation he informed me that the theme of this 2010 18th Synod is about Building a Healthy Church.

When you talk about building a healthy human body, you mean creating a healthy environment in the body which will enable its different parts to be what they should be and function as they should. The church as the body of Christ consists of its members, which is all of us. Within this body God instituted the ordained ministry. I am going to read from Ephesians 4: 11-16 in full, because this passage touches on things I shall come back to later. It reads:

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith. Then we will no longer be infants tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and its work.

When I reflected on this passage I identified the following things Paul is teaching us:

- The ordained ministry and the ministry of the laity are equal and inseparable partners, both instituted by the same Lord for different but mutually supportive purposes.
- The ordained ministry is to teach and train the laity in the things and purposes of God, and the laity “to do the works of service.” Therefore the ordained are the teachers and trainers and the laity are the doers.
- Where doers are not doing, it is EITHER because teachers and trainers are not teaching and training OR because the doers are not listening and are somehow un-teachable.
- Ignorant followers who do not know where their leaders are leading to are worse than no followers at all, because they get taken up by all kinds of winds and wrong teachings. Informed followers on the other hand are insurance to the health and stability of the church, because when the worse comes to worst, they can say to

their leader, “Father, yesterday, you taught us this, but today you are teaching us something totally different on the same issue. What are you actually teaching us?” They can outlive unreliable teachers and survive wrong teaching.

In passing let me say that, it is wise practice to refer to and illustrate with people who are late and no more with us. God was gracious in surrounding me with a band of reliable and “back-boned” men and women; clergy and laity. I remember the late Mr. S. Maboja who was a member of the first Diocesan Council of this diocese. I would bring something to the diocese which I thought was a bright idea. He would not just take whatever I brought without asking questions and made of sure that he understood both what I brought and the soundness of it. I could see that what lay behind his questions was love for the church and not a resistant spirit. You will agree with me, Mr. Sepeng, that Mr. Z.Z. Mashao who belonged to the second generation of D.C. members like you, was also a man who was not afraid to ask probing questions. What about the late E.N.S. Mutshekwane? In jest I used to say to myself this about him. “All you need to do is to ensure that Mutshekwane is facing the right direction. Then the rest will take care of itself.” He had the energy and passion of a bulldozer, once he felt strongly about a thing. ELCSA gained lot from him, particularly when it came to his passion for ELCSA unity. When ELCSA came about there was a need to adopt unifying practices. It was not easy. Other dioceses could continue without ELCSA and operate without unifying practices, but the Central Diocese could not, because it was uniquely the testing ground for the actuality of ELCSA unity. The same could be said about the late G. Mbatha. Coming from a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual parish, he always agonized about the fact that the new ELCSA liturgy had not been translated in all languages, and that this fact explained the reality that some congregations still continue with their pre-merger liturgies. As a result of being a leader of such followers, I was forced to be always on guard against any tendency of sloppiness and inconsistency on my part. At the same time I prayed to God to forgive me for instances where I faltered even slightly at this point.

- The constitution of our church is unique in that it is based on a constitutional principle of integration, rather than a principle of caucus. We have no lower house or upper house; no house of laity or house of clergy. In all legislative and administrative structures of the church, the clergy and the laity are integrated in a fixed ratio for serving a common purpose. No decision that has an administrative impact on the whole church is made unilaterally by either laity or clergy meeting alone. In legislative and administrative matters our bishops are also bishops-in-council: a council composed of clergy and laity. A church cannot exist without those who are called by God to serve it in an imaginative committed way in the ordained ministry, just as a church without spiritually well-fed and motivated members can only be a candidate for the graveyard of Church History. An established church without the laity is an ecclesiastical joke, just as the church without the ordained

ministry is an incomplete church.

- Sometimes we take things for granted without knowing why they are there and how important they are. Let me illustrate what can happen when this principle of integrating the clergy with the laity in unified church structures is destroyed. Just imagine lay members saying to themselves:” These pastors boss us and we do not have a meaningful voice in the church. Let us have lay people’ s bodies or committees at congregational, parish, circuit, diocese and church level, and even have a separate General Assembly for lay people only.” That will be the end of the church. For the ordained even to toy in this divisive fashion, is a spectre too ghastly to contemplate.
- You know the phrase, “delicate balance.” Sometimes when you upset delicate balances in the context of human dynamics, you may end up with something worse than what you were trying to achieve.
- It is true that the leadership of the church and our church in particular, is spiritual. As an ordained person I personally would not feel threatened by having a lay person as Chairman of the Congregation Council or even Diocesan Synod in which I may happen to lead. These portfolios like being secretary and treasurers are **service** positions and not **leadership** positions. Mr. Mkhize is not the leader of the Central Diocese, but Bishop Phaswana is. At the Circuit level, the dean is the leader and at the Congregational level, the pastor is the leader, because church leadership is essentially spiritual and not political. Why do I say so?
- **First, in the sense that** Jesus Christ is the Lord of the church. He is among us as a **spiritual** divine reality which is beyond our physical perception. **Second**, in the sense that those who have been called by God to the ordained ministry have the **spiritual** responsibility of equipping and training the rank and file membership of the church with the tools of believing and living as disciples of Christ, under the leadership guidance of the **Holy Spirit**. Jesus said that when the Holy Spirit comes, He will be with the church for ever. In this dispensation The Holy Spirit is the Supreme leader and guide of the church.
- In the course of this address, as announced, I am going to put flesh to all these principles I have enunciated. I am going to do it in this way. I am going to start by tracing briefly the evolution of the person and responsibility of one called by God and ordained, from biblical times to ELCSA. It should become clear in my presentation that the ordained ministry has no reason for existence, other than “to prepare God’ s people for service.” Where the ordained ministry gets tempted to focus aggressively and primarily on itself as a separate group, it does not only impoverish its spiritual integrity, it also loses its purpose for existence: its *raison d’ être*. What remains would not be a healthy church, but the shell of a church.

•THE ORDAINED MINISTRY

Introduction

•The Problem of Terminology

Before I start, let me state that we have a problem of terminology, that is, the proper official name for those whom God has graciously called and placed in our midst. Wrong and inappropriate names may at best be meaningless and at worst be a prescription for wrong self-understanding. Let me spend a few minutes on this point. What compounds the problem is that we are a multi-lingual church and we use English as a language of convenience in addition to our own. The present tendency is to use functional titles rather than office titles, e.g. Moruti, umfundisi, pastor church worker, etc.

1. Because the early missionaries occupied themselves with teaching people new things, like learning to write the letters of the alphabet, to read the bible, to operate modern gardening implements and to wear European clothes, they were properly called teachers or **abafundisi** or **baruti**. But that is no longer the case today. Although the name has stuck the decline in the quality and emphasis on teaching is prevalent and is the mother of many problems in our church. This is suggested by even the sub-theme of this Synod, namely, that church members should not just be church goers, but be disciples of Christ. Discipleship can happen only through systematic and thorough teaching of church members.

2. Shepherding and leading a congregation used to be the routine work of every ordained person. But today ordained people do all kinds of things. It is thus wrong to call an ordained person a pastor while in fact he works in an administration office as treasurer or executive Secretary, or heading a church project or teaching in a theological institution or is retired. Therefore what should be the generic or basic name for an ordained person as such, regardless of the work he or she is doing?

2. What about *Church worker*? In the first place it is a misleading designation because in a Church workers' meeting we do not find office typists, cleaners and night watchmen. We find only the ordained. In addition to being unbiblical, it is a seriously misleading European import. Until recent times many Lutheran churches in Europe were part of a government Department of Ecclesiastical Affairs led by a corresponding Cabinet Minister. Thus pastors and other church executives were church workers alongside workers of other government departments whose service was regulated by applicable labour laws. Bishops and even parish pastors were appointed by the government. I do not need to emphasize that we do not have such an arrangement in ELCISA. I will demonstrate later from biblical evidence that members of the ordained ministry are essentially and theologically **servants of God** and not servants of the church. That is how Paul, Peter, John and

others understood and introduced themselves in the letters they wrote to their congregations. Wrong names sometimes invite unnecessary trouble. But what is then the correct office designation?

Let us look at what congregation leaders were called in the congregations which were established by Paul, Peter and others.

In the congregations which were established by the Apostles among the gentiles, the church leader was called a “presbyteros, a borrowing from the OT Council of Elders. Literally this title meant elder. But they were by no means *lay people*. When reference was made to the Old Testament type of priests, **hyreus** was used **in the LXX** and not **presbyteros**.

As in a number of Germanic languages the English language contracted or abbreviated the word, presbyteros into “priest.” In German and Dutch languages it became **priester**; in Danish and Swedish, **prast**.

There is New Testament evidence particularly in the Roman, Corinthian and Ephesians Epistles which leads me to make the following conclusions.

- Priest or presbyteros was the generic or official title of a member of the New Testament congregation council of leaders or council of congregation pastors
- The problem around the gifts of the Holy Spirit in Corinth suggests that a congregation might have a team of priests or presbyteroi depending of the gifts of the Holy Spirit they have.
- New Testament scholars have observed that bishop or episkopos and priest or presbyteros are very often used interchangeably. Perhaps why? Because a presbyteros who had the gift of oversight or episcopate might supervise the rest of presbyteroi.
- What we have in Ephesians 4: 11 are functional titles of presbyteroi. In the congregation presbyteroi with the gift of mission outreach were called apostles; presbyteroi with the gift of declaring God’ s message or will in a critical situation; were called prophets; those with the gift of preaching evangelists; pastors were those presbyters with the gift of shepherding congregations and teachers with the gift of teaching.

The long and short of it is that I am suggesting that we consider using as a generic or general title of priest for somebody ordained. It does not carry the terminological baggage of Old Testament priesthood. It is a New Testament and early church title, borrowed of course from the O.T. Council of elders. We can then use titles like pastor, evangelist, administrator and bishop where they actually apply. In addition I am arguing that priest is a New Testament generic title of an ordained person at a time when ordained people can function in a wide range of ways: pastors,

administrators, professors, project leaders and even Executive Secretaries and Treasurers. Calling all of them pastors can only be warranted where there is a serious shortage of a biblical alternatives. This is not the case.

Let me then go to the heart of the issue .The crucial question is this. What is it that constitutes the validity of the office and the legitimacy of the work of an ordained person? I suggest three things:

- It is the fact that he was called by God to be he who he is and
- that he was called by God to do what he does and
- that that person did consider and accept the calling of God before drawing the attention of the church to that fact.

The following characteristic distinguish the call to the ordained ministry from other types of “calls.”

- The divine call is different from an ordinary commission which has a limited purpose and is for a limited time span, e.g. delegates commissioned to be members of the Synod for six years.
- There may be a situation when there is a need for lay people to be commissioned to officiate in certain responsibilities routinely done by ordained people. It is not necessary to ordain a person for that. Commissioning would serve the purpose. Otherwise we may run the risk of the inflation of ordained people.
- The purpose of a divine call is not fulfilled merely by doing this or that for God. As a matter of fact even lay people have that general responsibility. I may even add that even the devil and his demons can get themselves impressively involved in the things of God.
- On the other hand all callings of God are inseparably linked to a spiritual relationship with Him for whom no human being has power to set a terminal point. If it is God who in the beginning called you to the ordained ministry for life, nobody else can decree somewhere in the middle otherwise. It is like two people joined by God in marriage. What God has joined together, no man can set asunder. A divine call is between God and the one called.
- Where the living spiritual relationship with God ceases to exist and only the performance of official functions remains, the status of being called by God cease on the part of the incumbent.

•TYPES OF PEOPLE CALLED BY GOD

In the Bible there are three basic types of people who were called by God. Their

calling corresponded and corresponds to the Trinitarian dispensation paradigm: that is, called by God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. `

A. THOSE CALLED BY GOD THE FATHER

•The Call of Abraham (Genesis 12: 1-5)

We notice the following in this passage:

- The visual experience of the presence of God is missing in the text. What is reflected in the record is that God all of a sudden called and gave an instruction, that Abraham should leave his residence and relatives and go to where God will direct him. God is here appointing and hiring him, as it were.

1.2. God accompanied His instruction with a promise of protection and that he will not only be personally blessed, but that he will be a source of blessing to others.

1.3. Abraham did as God had commanded. This means that he had agreed to the terms of his call and entered into a working contract with God. There was no third party. As we know this was a life time call.

•The Call of Moses (Exodus 3-4)

What we notice in this passage is the following.

2.1. God appeared visually through the burning bush and through what He said.

2.2. God took the initiative in calling and using someone with a record of murder. God appointed and hired him nevertheless.

2.3. God gave the details of what Moses was called to do.

2.4. Moses asked questions of clarification and made remarks revealing self doubt. Through words and signs God assured Moses that God would back him up with divine assistance in the face of any personal limitations (4: 11-12).

2.5. God instructed Moses simply to tell others about his calling, that is, Pharaoh and fellow Israelites. Here we see an indication of the involvement of a third party. But this does not involve asking for their permission, buy simple acknowledgement of his call and mission.

2.6. From then on Moses started working. As we know this was a life time calling and contract.

•The Call of Isaiah (Isaiah 6)

- God took the initiative.

3.2. Isaiah saw, heard and felt the touch of God' s presence.

3.3. Isaiah became aware of his personal unworthiness and received God's forgiveness for past sins.

3.4. There was a short dialogue about the vacancy and acceptance ("Whom shall we send... Here am I, send me. It is a life time calling and contract.

3.5. Isaiah started working immediately

B. THOSE CALLED BY GOD THE SON

- Jesus called each of His foundation disciples personally. These were the Twelve apostles
- They spent time with Him before being sent out, not only in order to learn from Him, but also to copy and assimilate His life style into their own lives.
- Since Paul did not belong to the first group of the Twelve Apostles Christ called Him in a special appearance during his journey to Damascus.
- Because of their special place in history, the words, acts and writings of the Apostles have binding authority to what we do and teach, particularly in the office and responsibilities of the ordained ministry.
- Jesus did not call any of His disciples because of their perfect morals or superior intelligence. Think of Peter who denied him; and think of Paul who persecuted the church. He called them simply because He wanted to use them, in the same way we pick and make use of rough and dirty raw material in order to achieve what we want.
- It is true some of the disciples pulled out and deserted Jesus Christ. That is why Jesus was turned to the Apostles in desperation and said: (John 6: 67-68)
- Some of the disciples were called out of their jobs and occupations and followed him full time until they died (Luke 5:1-11). But none, once they started following Him changed course in the middle of their discipleship and only followed Him part of the time. Even the celebrated tent maker, St. Paul fitted this pattern. But nowhere in the Book of Acts or Epistles do we read that once he started spreading the Gospel, somewhere in the middle, he went back to the business of tent making and preached only twice a week. Jesus Himself said: "No one who puts the hand on the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.(Luke 9: 62)
- It was a life time calling and contract.

C. THOSE CALLED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

In His last days Jesus Christ made statements which served as a transition platform to the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

- “I will ask the father who will send you another comforter, the Holy Spirit, who will be with you forever.”
- “He will guide you into all truth and will teach you all things and will remind you of all things I have said.”
- “He who believes in me will do even greater things than I have been doing.”

These words are quite some big stuff! But then, what happened later?

1. On the Day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit was sent to the Whole Church

- Not only a few spiritual luminaries and personages like Moses, Abraham, Elisha and Isaiah were called to the ministry of empowerment by the Holy Spirit, but the rank and file membership of the church could be so called and empowered. The Holy Spirit, another Comforter, had become resident in the church, just as the incarnate Lord, Jesus Christ, was before His Ascension.
- This was in fulfillment of Joel 2: 28-30. *I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour my Spirit in those days...*

1.3. The Holy Spirit became a gift to the whole church. The individual members of the church were, however, called by the same Holy Spirit and given gifts by Him in relation to the particular ministry to which they were individually called.

1.4. This ties in with what Paul writes in Ephesians 4: 11- when he says: *It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up. I will deal with latter part of this passage up to verse 16 later.*

•How the Calling of the Holy Spirit Evolved

From Paul's letters to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 12-14) and Romans (Rom. 12) we observe the following:

- The Holy Spirit who is already in the church would call and equip some presbyters or priests of the congregation with gifts for operating in certain ministries, e.g. teaching, preaching, healing, administration, etc.

2.2. Using their individual gifts they worked together as a team. One of them with the gift of oversight (episcopate or bishop) might emerge and see to smooth working of the team. Things did not always work as expected. Problems would arise, as they in fact did in Corinth and Rome. A spirit of rivalry and destructive competition might emerge. “My gift is more important than yours” or “the Holy Spirit has given me more gifts than you. Therefore I am superior to you,” etc. Somebody might falsely claim to be a prophet and say things many find disturbing and did not agree with.

- In order to address these problems Paul wrote letters to Rome and Corinth. He also wrote a letter to Timothy who was stationed at Ephesus (1 Tim. 4: 1-3) and said: ***“The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons...”***

We need to remember that when the Holy Spirit was given to the church, the demonic spirits were already in operation in the world. It is these spirits which Jesus cast out during His earthly ministry.

3. Guiding Principles Prescribed by Paul and John

When applied to a specific case, these principles should be allowed to balance and complement each other (e.g. an unscriptural consensus of colleagues is not valid)

3.1. The Principle of Order in the congregation: Things should not be allowed to run and drag anyhow. ***“Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way” (1 Cor. 14: 40)***

3.2. The Principle of the Consensus of Colleagues: If colleagues are not one with you and you are one out, watch and bow to them. ***“The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. (1 Cor. 14: 32)***

3.3. The Principle of Testing the Spirits: When something sounds spiritual, but contradicts *one* or more principles of how the Holy Spirit normally operates, test it against those principles. (1 John 4: 1)

3.4. The Principle of Authority of the Word of God: Where there are differences of opinion with regard to truth and norms, let the Word of God rule.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2Tim.3: 16-17.

III. HOW ELCSA HAS HANDLED THE CASES OF PEOPLE

WHO FEEL CALLED THE HOLY SPIRIT

- **“I feel that God has called me to the Holy Ministry”**
- When somebody comes for interview after revealing that he feels called to the ordained ministry, usually the first question is “Why do you feel that God is calling you to the holy ministry? In my experience I have heard different answers to this question ranging from holy dreams to a disguised search for a job. Routinely the interview is done by the Dean and the bishop. It is a process of “testing the spirits.”
- I remember a day when a young man came to me, probably referred to me by his pastor and said something like this: “I have been employed. I lost my work and my employer said that according to his observation, I am unpromotable material. I got another job, but I lost it for the same reason. I then concluded that God in His mysterious ways is driving me to the Holy ministry” I dismissed him by suggesting that he should think the matter over again. He never came back again.
- In the majority of cases the interviewees insist that it is God who is calling them to join the ordained ministry. They used to insist even after I had told them the financial amount they would be getting a month. I would then recommend them to the Church.
- **What the theological Training of students is not and what it is.**
 - Training has nothing to do with qualifying the candidates for being called by God. Students are already called by God at the level of their testimony. On the other hand the training is an exercise in “testing the spirits if they are of God” by using the yardstick of exposure to the various aspects of the Word of God.
- 2. If they fail the discipline of training, they are not being considered for ordination and will be dropped. I know of a case of somebody long before my own theological training. He was very bright in his theological subjects, but fell morally and was expelled. After some years he was given another chance, but again fell morally as before. He was then dropped for good as a candidate for ordination.
- **What Ordination is and what it is not**
 - Ordination is not conducted for the purpose of legitimising one’s call by God. That stands or falls on the veracity of one’s testimony: “**God** has called **me**.” The state of the veracity of one’s call is not accessible to a third party. Only God can say: “You are a liar. I did not call you.”

God has certain ways of doing that somewhere along the line. I know a case of someone who was a candidate for ordination, who was dropped because of an urgent and adverse report from his home parish a day before the service of ordination.

- Ordination, on the other hand has three aspects.

- It is the liturgical platform for the AMEN of the congregation/church:

“Yes, we accept your testimony regarding your being called by God and you agreed to it. Go ahead and do what God has sent you to do amongst us.”

- It is the liturgical platform for the ordinand to recite publicly his faith and promises regarding how he is to conduct his ministry. The latter is represented by his answers to the posed liturgical questions and the liturgical sermon he preaches later.

- It is the liturgical platform for prayers of the support and empowerment by the congregation up to the laying on of hands and blessing.

- What Placement or Assignment Means

- Placement means creating space in the Lord’ s vineyard for somebody who has been called and concluded agreement with God regarding dedicating his or her life as a servant of God and ordained. It is a facility provided for one called by God and an orderly arrangement of linking available human resources with needs in the Lord’ s vineyard.

- The Material Support of one called

- Old Testament Background

- There is a biblical background to this. When the land was divided after settlement in the Promised Land, the tribe of Levi did not get a portion. In other words they did not have normal access to the economy of the land.

- Their portion was in everything that was set aside and belonged to the Lord in Israel. (Numbers 18: 14). The tithe paid by the other tribes and which in principle belonged to the Lord was also for the support of the Levites. On behalf of the other tribes, and in place of their first born, the Levites looked after the sanctuary and everything connected with it. The priests also came from the house of Levi.

- It was this tribe and particularly the house of Aaron that produce priests. Apart from benefitting from the people’ s tithes, the priests also benefitted from the grain and livestock offerings and sacrifices brought to God in the temple for

a wide range of reasons. The Pentateuch details as to which part of the grain and livestock offering went to the priest.

- Therefore the more the people felt sorry for their sins and also felt the need to thank God for the multitude of blessings, the more they brought to the temple related offerings, and the more the priests were fed from what was given to God for these purposes.
- The Situation in ELCSA
 - During every Sunday service the members make offerings to God for different purposes: Sunday offerings, tithes, thanksgiving offerings, etc.
 - All this is brought to the altar, blessed and lifted up by the pastor as the congregation sings “Praise God from whom all blessings flow.” That act symbolizes that what is in the offering plate now belongs to God: it is no longer human property.
 - It is from the accumulation of this money which now belongs to God, Sunday by Sunday, that monthly salaries are paid to the ordained, and spent for other divine purposes. Theologically, spiritually and practically, the running of God’s business is supported financially from God’s own resources.

Let us return again to the basic question: Why does God call people to the ordained ministry in the first place? We have established that the answer is in Ephesians 4: 11-16: **To prepare or groom lay people for service in the church. .**

V. GROOMING THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS FOR SERVICE

A. In 1 Peter 2: 8-10 lay people are described as the priesthood for all believers. Let me first explain the main points in these verses.

- All baptised people in our congregations are described as a nation of priests and kings. If you look at the meaning of these verses carefully, it does not say that each one is an independent and isolated priest and king, but that the whole community is corporately of the house of royalty and priesthood. Princesses and princes in the church enjoy the privileges of royalty and priesthood.
- Peter speaks this way because the people of Israel were referred to as the chosen children of God. John 1: 12 say that those who believe and have received Jesus Christ have the rights of children of God, the king. They are princes and princesses and can enter the king’s palace. In Israel the palace of God was the temple where only the priest was allowed to enter.

- The church, any Lutheran church, is the house of God, our king. As his children we have the right of entrance into his royal dwelling place. In this sense we are royal priests. As royal children we can talk to God directly through prayer; we can listen to his Word directly when it is preached. As children of God, believers are fellow heirs with Christ (Rom 8: 17). That means that they are “sisters” and “brothers” of Jesus Christ.
- If princes and princesses are not told while they are still young who they are, they can take themselves to be commoners and behave like commoners. In the church they can take themselves as visitors and guests: spectators. They need to be taught to live up to who they are. That business of “telling” is the ministry of Christian discipleship, which is carried out by an ordained.
- In your case, lay delegates/people, it is your ordained pastor who has the responsibility of teaching and grooming you, so that you may grow into mature Christians and members of a healthy church, and not permanent Christian babies.

B. The Christian Growth Crisis

1. Unfortunately Christian growth is different from physical growth. Educationists know that if intellectual growth does not keep pace with physical growth, you are bound to face a problem: when 45-year olds still wallow in Standard one. How do they solve the problem? Children have to go daily to school and remain there for about 8 hours daily. Who said spiritual teaching and nurture can be successfully done in less time?

2. Unfortunately the children of God are not taught about their priesthood and royalty at an equivalent rate. Even on Sunday there is not enough time for programmed and meaningful teaching by the pastor. We all know that most, if not all, church doors remain closed and open only once a week. It is not surprising that there are so many baby Christians in our churches

3. Even though our ordained people get a reasonably high education, the church working environment has not created space for letting the members of the congregation benefit from their high training. Some of them go overseas and come with senior university degrees. Given the present working environment, all this training given to pastors is wasted. Why?

3. Baptising children and administering the Holy Communion are the only activities which nobody else but the ordained pastor is officially allowed to do. Lay people can do the rest. If that be the case, why should we give our ordained ministers all this training? Just to hold babies and pour water on their heads? Just to serve bread and wine to the kneeling Christians?

The level of pastoral delivery is low because there is not enough space for teaching in our congregations. The bulk of the pastor’ s time is consumed in going from

congregation to congregation, baptising children and administering Holy Communion. The effect of all this is that members of the church are spiritually starving in the midst of plenty. The sacraments are important, but they do not constitute the totality of what makes the church a healthy church. The delivery of the word is more than what can be done in a thirty five minutes sermon.

I was once asked by a pastor to help him in administering Holy Communion during a crowded service, where he himself would be conducting confirmation and adult baptism. I was already dressed up for the service when I saw who was to be confirmed and who were to be baptised as adults, because this was my home congregation. I knew these boys. They were wearing new suits, but they never came to church services at all. They had never been taught anything at all, because I would have seen that happening. I was so shocked that I decided to move out of the church the moment the baptism and confirmation services started. At the conclusion of these services I rejoined the service. But I almost fainted at the realization that I had not escaped: I had to administer to them Holy Communion. The whole of that day I felt as if I needed a thorough bath all over my body. Psychologically I felt as if I had been immersed in something not clean: I had participated in a spiritual fraud. That is reality and not a fairy tale. I do not know how many hundreds of people that pastor had entered into the membership register of the church so cheaply.

I am not surprised that we are in the midst of a multi-dimensional crisis. The crisis is not just the material starvation of our ordained people, but the spiritual starvation of our people at congregational level as well. Farmers know that you cannot expect rich harvest from a starving and poorly watered soil. Theologians and pastors should learn this elementary truth. What frightens me even more is awareness of what is happening in the milieu of our church.

- ELCSA is caught up in a vicious circle. The new South Africa has lifted the general social and economic standards of black people. We can no longer hide behind saying that our members are financially poor. No! They are victims of a raging spiritual famine because we have now Lutheran MP' s, medical doctors, lawyers, judges, scientists, BEE business tycoons, etc.
- The unfortunate thing is that this is happening at a time when ELCSA is busy releasing trained and gifted ordained pastors to seek work outside the church. That means that the level of spiritual teaching and general delivery is sinking lower and lower. In the face of this changing profile of the demography of our church, I sometimes ask myself: Does ELCSA have a home for this new class of Lutherans, I have described above.
- We should not fool ourselves. ELCSA loses for every ordained person who takes up self-supporting ministry. It does not matter how many lay people we ordain to replace them as new self-supporting pastors, as well. The situation at the moment is that

“everyone who **can** get out **may** get out.” What will be the cumulative effect of this development? The basic question is “Who is going to remain?” What will be the future of the church under these circumstances? Does our church have its priorities right? Do we have a turn-around strategy? I do not see it as long as this dismantling of God’ s work force is continuing.

- If I use business language, lay as I am in that field, let me say that, our commodity and product we are there to sell is God. If we cannot sell him sufficiently to our captive members as a result of inadequate teaching in the congregations, are we still qualified to sell Him to the spiritually hungry world at large outside, so as to attract new lay members to join our congregations? Why should new lay people join our congregations? To starve? That is not fair. A company that fails to sell its product runs bankrupt.

Let us stop beating about the bush. We are failing to sell our product, God, even to our members. It does not matter what secular, technical and scientific strategies we adopt; we are doomed to fail, as long as we seem to have lost the art of how to manage God’ s work force, and how to prioritize the factor of selling God in our spiritual business. I can understand why the theme of this Synod is centred on the quest for **building a healthy Church. No healthy church can be a reality without God. God is the life and the vitamin of the church.**

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