

**Brief on the
Policy and Practice of Interim Ministry**

**Prepared for
Synod Council
Saskatchewan Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada**

by

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Executive Summary

The Saskatchewan Synod is drafting a new policy on interim ministry. According to Bishop Halmarson, the need for this new policy is required in light of:

1. The national Church's new guidelines on non-stipendiary calls;
- 5 2. The growth in the number of ministers within the Synod trained in interim ministry; and
3. The need to build a policy in a manner consistent with the Augsburg Confessions, particularly article XIV with respect to the issue of "Order in the Church."

To fully understand the issues of the proposed policy changes, two independent issues need to be examined: the nature and purpose of interim ministry, and the nature and authority of "call."

10 While the proposed policy addresses the need for special skills among interim ministers, it does not identify what those skills and abilities are. The definition and articulation of the Body of Knowledge required of interim ministers is needed to both help candidates for this specialization examine their sense of vocation and to help and protect congregations in transition between permanent pastors. The definition of a Body of Knowledge is also consistent with best practices in
15 other professions and organizations.

The second issue concerns the entire issue of call to ordered ministry. A call is the culmination of a complex interaction of events and experiences involving an intensely spiritual sense of vocation, confirmation by the church of that vocation, academic and professional preparation, and the extension by a congregation or agency of an invitation to provide spiritual ministry.

20 By its nature, a call is a theological and ecclesial concept; it does not include any definition of compensation or stipend as a material condition of its issuance. In our practice, whenever compensation is attached to a call, it is in a separate memorandum or agreement and is not part of the call document proper. In the case of calls to specialized ministry, the agreed compensation is documented in a separate offer of employment or collective agreement. Thus, all calls are non-
25 stipendiary in their essence.

Another aspect of our Lutheran understanding of call concerns itself with the authority to issue a call. Article XIV of the Augsburg Confession makes a “call” a precondition of a minister’s ability to proclaim the Word and administer the sacraments within a community. Article XIV clearly asserts that a call is a necessary precondition to both proclaim the Word (preach) and administer the sacraments. If the authority for this call rests with the Synod, then there are many retired pastors, 30 pastors with the status “on leave from call”, students and lay people who are currently providing pulpit and altar supply without a proper call. On the other hand, if the authority for this call rests with the congregation, then there are fewer inconsistencies in our practice since congregations essentially “call” a minister to provide pulpit supply for a day. In either case, a number of current 35 practices need to be revisited not only to bring them into harmony with Article XIV, but also to make them internally consistent with our understanding a call to ordered ministry.

With these questions more fully explored, we can turn to a discussion of the proposed interim ministry policy of the Synod. In particular, we can see that Interim Ministry and the national Church’s “Guidelines Related to Non-Stipendiary Ministry” (Guidelines) are really separate and 40 distinct issues.

For one, non-stipendiary ministry covers a wide range of ministry opportunities including pulpit supply and ministry in non-parish settings. The Guidelines do not even list “interim ministry” as one possible application of the Guidelines.

Secondly, the Guidelines propose a restrictive definition of non-stipendiary ministry that is 45 essentially voluntary in nature yet compels the volunteer pastor to minister at least a quarter of a fulltime position and requires the volunteer pastor to have significant other sources of income to support their voluntary endeavours. The ethics and legality of such a proposal are, at best, suspect.

Thirdly, the Guidelines contradicts the Lutheran confessions and severs the normal relationships of accountability that currently govern the Church by requiring a candidate for non-stipendiary 50 ministry to be approved by a body with no formal accountability to the candidate or the communities to which the candidate will minister.

Upon reflecting on all this issues, it is recommended that the Synod develop its interim ministry policy without regard to the national Church's Guidelines. Indeed, any decision that pastors should always be fairly compensated for their public ministry would necessarily render the Guidelines moot.

55 The Policy on Interim Ministry needs to articulate more clearly a Body of Knowledge comprising the specific skills, knowledge and qualities required of interim ministry for the benefit of both interim ministry candidates and congregations in transition.

60 The question of how the Synod's practice can be in harmony with Article XIV is a separate yet important issue. Resolution of this question first needs a discussion as to the source of authority for issuing a call. Does this authority rest with the congregation or the synod? Arising from the outcome of that decision, the Synod would then be able to attribute the authority to call and empower interim ministers to the appropriate source.

Introduction

In an electronic communication from Bishop Cindy Halmarson to the author dated October 5,
65 2004, the Bishop introduced the question of amending the interim ministry policy of the
Saskatchewan Synod (the Synod). These changes were apparently predicated by at least three
precursory events:

1. The ELCIC National Church Council (the Church) adopting a new document entitled
“Guidelines for Non-Stipendiary Ministry;”
- 70 2. The growth of a “cadre of pastors in our synod trained through the Interim Ministry
Network;”¹ and
3. The decision by the Lutheran Bishops of the Church that “licensing lay persons for
sacramental ministry is contrary to our practice based on the Lutheran Confessions XIV,
Order in the Church.”²

75 While the proposed policy may be a pragmatic response to these issues, a clearer course of action
may benefit from an examination of the best practices of other professions and a more detailed
understanding of the theological and historical roots of the Lutheran understanding of ecclesial call,
especially within the Canadian context.

As well, the Synod policy relates to Interim Ministry, while the national Church policy relates to
80 the question of non-stipendiary calls. These two concepts are not necessarily entwined: a non-
stipendiary call does not need to be a call to Interim Ministry, nor does an interim pastorate need to
be non-stipendiary.

This brief sets out to propose some valuable considerations for the Interim Ministry policy as
well as explore more fully the nature of the Canadian Lutheran sense of ecclesial call. To achieve this
85 task, we will separately discuss the two topics: Interim Ministry and “Ecclesial Call” as referenced by

¹ Memo from Bishop Cindy Halmarson dated October 5, 2004 to Rev. Daryle Niedermeyer (*sic*).

² *Ibid.*

Article XIV of the Augsburg Confession. We will then discuss the proposed policy changes in light of the understandings of these two topics.

Glossary

In preparation for our discussions, a number of terms require some clarity. Considerable
90 ambiguity exists in the current use of these terms. To help achieve clarity, the following terms will
have the associated meanings for the purpose of this brief:

Interim Ministry

Ministry performed within a defined community or congregation following the resignation
of a permanent pastor with the view to facilitate a transition within the congregation or
95 community towards achieving greater potentiality in fulfilling its mandate. This transition is
intended to preemptively address issues and patterns that the community or congregation is
likely to experience with the subsequent permanent pastor.

Interim Minister

An ordained pastor who performs interim ministry.

100 Non-Stipendiary Call

A call to ministry where the terms of the minister's call do not include any reference to
salary, benefits or other financial remuneration.³

Call

An authorization by a community or congregation to an ordained or deaconate minister to
105 perform or supply ecclesial ministry and services to that community or congregation.

³ Note that this definition is not congruent with that proposed by the Church as adopted in its "Guidelines Related to Non-Stipendiary Ministry." This discrepancy will be addressed later in this brief. To minimize confusion, the term "non-stipendiary call," when used throughout this document, will have the meaning as defined here; the term "non-stipendiary ministry" will be used as defined in the Guidelines.

Permanent Pastorate/Pastor

A pastor called by a congregation or community to a term of indefinite or undefined length. Such a call is normally terminated when the pastor feels the need to “move on” or the congregation has expressed concern that the pastor’s ministry is no longer suitable to that congregation or community. In these cases, the call normally ends by resignation of the pastor. In extreme cases, invoking an appropriate action of the synod or congregation’s constitution terminates a permanent pastorate.

Vice-Pastorate

A pastor who is tasked with the oversight of a congregation or community to ensure that the Word is faithfully preached and the Sacraments faithfully administered during a pastoral vacancy. He or she is only responsible that weekly services and other routine functions are conducted and maintained as well emergency ministry performed in the subject congregation until such time as the subject congregation calls and installs a new permanent pastor. A Vice-Pastorate differs from Interim Ministry in that the former does not include any role of transformative ministry. Normally a Vice-Pastor is a called permanent pastor of another local congregation or community.

The Role and Need for Interim Ministry

The role and need for Interim Ministry within the church has long been identified and documented.

In addition to word and sacrament ministry, interim ministry may provide the following:

1. healing congregations that have recent or long-term histories of conflict or face a particular crisis
2. enabling transition from the extended service of a previous pastor to the new pastor
3. expediting any transition the congregation must make as it responds to a changing context

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4. matching the special skills of a pastor with the special needs of a congregation in transition.⁴

Given this nature of interim ministry, it is quite reasonable that ministers engaged as interim ministers do need additional training and specialization not normally developed through seminary
135 education or the normal process of experiential development undertaken by most pastors.

This is consistent with the nature and practice in other professions: while there is a Body of Knowledge (BOK) forming the core of medicine, engineering, law, or information technology, not every doctor is a surgeon, not every engineer can build bridges and not every lawyer is able to mount a rigorous defence in criminal cases. Similarly, while all pastors ordained and ministering with the
140 Church share a common BOK, the skills, knowledge and abilities to perform interim ministry are not required to be present in all pastors.

To help candidates for interim ministry discern their spiritual vocations and to protect the needs and interests in congregations in transition, the specific skills and qualities required for interim ministry must be defined and explained. To say “the interim pastor will be expected to have received
145 interim ministry training”⁵ is analogous to saying a Medical Doctor will be expected to have medical training. A definition of the specific skills required of a medical doctor (“must be able to set bones”, “must be able to administer medicine intravenously”, etc.) and a test of competencies around these skills (“must not kill patient while setting bones”, etc.) is a required component for professional certification in these disciplines.

150 A definition of the BOK specific to Interim Ministry and a test of how competence in those knowledge areas is evaluated should be part of the policy. It is insufficient to say that Interim Ministers need to be ministers trained in interim ministry; such a definition is tautological.

⁴ Metropolitan Chicago Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,
http://www.mcselca.org/call_packet/1definition.html

⁵ Memo from Bishop Halmarson, *op. cit.*

Similarly, it is inadequate to say that Interim Ministers must be trained by a particular program, organization or institute.⁶ What makes this training preferable or superior to other avenues of training? Is this endorsement *a priori* or *a posteriori*? If a new organization offers similar training, what qualifications must it demonstrate to be similarly endorsed? If the preferred institution changes its curriculum, replaces instructors, alters the qualifications of its instructors, reduces the length of its program, or otherwise alters its program, will it still be endorsed or does it have to meet some set of criteria for endorsement? How can training from the preferred institute be measured for equivalency with other organizations, professions, or experience?

The only satisfactory answer to these questions is to formally define the Body of Knowledge specifically required of interim ministers and then evaluate training opportunities and candidates against that body.

The Nature of Ecclesial Call

The second issue germane to the proposed policy is that of call, specifically non-stipendiary calls. The Lutheran concept of “call” involves a complex set of relationships and circumstances that are recognized in a formal document we call a “Letter of Call.”

Within the ELCIC, a call has the following essential requirements:

1. The individual must feel a spiritual sense of a divine vocation within the ordered ministries of the Church;
2. That spiritual sense of call must be confirmed and affirmed by the Synod through its committees and processes;⁷

⁶ This is the practice of the American Baptist Church who defines Interim Ministers as ministers trained by the Interim Ministry Network. Cf. <http://www.interimministries-abc.org/local/definition.cfm>

⁷ As the ELCA points out, “Ordination to the office of Word and Sacrament in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is a rite of the church administered according to the practices of the church in order to

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3. The individual must possess suitable educational and experiential training as defined by the Church;
 4. The individual must be ordained to their respective order by the laying on of hands and the action of their sponsoring Synod; and
 5. A congregation or agency must invite the individual to provide a spiritual ministry to its members through a letter of call or offer of employment.

180 Only when these conditions are met, is an individual recommended for “Call” although an anomaly to this process exists in the case of new ordinands where the invitation to minister precedes the rite ordination.

The Question of Stipend

185 Given this definition and process, all calls are *de facto* non-stipendiary. The call to ministry is not dependent on the sum of money or other benefits to which an individual will be entitled should they honour the call. A minister’s call is not diminished if he or she only makes \$20,000 a year instead of \$50,000. It is true that the minister’s ability to provide for his or her family may be compromised, and their ability to work full-time for the community may also be curtailed, however the sense of call itself is not confined to a certain dollar figure.

This reality is also reflected in our practice:

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- The compensation which a pastor is offered is not included in the letter of call, but is referenced in a separate memorandum;
 - The compensation to which a pastor is entitled is not prescribed by the synod, but only suggested as a guideline (albeit a minimum one);

extend the mission and ministry of the church. It is not a personal privilege to be determined by the candidate.”

<http://www.thelutheran.org/gouc.html>

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- Pastors normally have their salary increased every year but this does not involve issuing a new call to the pastor as would be the case if the salary was integral to the call; therefore the stipend received by a pastor is not a material condition of the call;
 - Pastors who serve in non-parish settings such as colleges, hospitals or prisons do not have a call that specifies their rate of pay, as their salary is determined by the employing institution or by collective bargaining agreements.

200 For these reasons, it is clear that calls are by nature, non-stipendiary. It is only by action of the calling organization that any stipend becomes attached to the call.

In a similar way, the Synod or the national Church often calls ministers called to administrative or institutional ministry. These calls differ from parish calls in that the calling body and the employing body are separate. Because it has been our practice as Canadian Lutherans to stipulate that the call must come from a community of faith, the Synod or the Church performs this role when there is no clear attachment of the ministry to a specific congregation. However, in these situations, the Synod or the Church incurs no liability or obligation to compensate a minister for his or her salary. If they are laid-off, terminated, or otherwise on leave from their employment, the responsibility for their remuneration remains with the employing institution or its insuring agencies and not with the calling agency.

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Clearly it is evident that ministry is normally non-stipendiary. While it has been our practice that calls to parish ministry are presented concurrent with a memorandum specifying the initial stipend to which a pastor will be paid, the presence or absence of such a memorandum does not alter the status or quality of the call; all calls, by their nature, remain non-stipendiary.

215 ***Article XIV Revisited***

It has also been the practice of the Canadian Lutheran Church that, as a condition of preaching the word and administering the sacraments, ministers must be under call. The invocation of Article 14 of the Augsburg Confession is frequently cited in reference to this practice:

220 “It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call.” (from the German) or

“Our churches teach that nobody should preach publicly in the church or administer the sacraments unless he is regularly called.” (from the Latin)⁸

225 The invocation of this article is always problematic. On the one hand, it is the shortest of all articles in the Confession, yet it is used to “solve” a plethora of troubling issues and questions. Using this article, our Church has frequently articulated the need to ensure that only ordained ministers can preside at the sacraments⁹ while few use the equally valid arguments that this article also requires ordination as a condition for anyone to preach from our pulpits, and that all ministers require a valid call to do either.¹⁰ This is contrary to the Confession’s own rhetoric that even “unworthy men” [*sic*]¹¹

⁸ Tappert, Theodore G. ed. & trans. *The Book of Concord*. Fortress Press, Philadelphia. 1959.

⁹ Cf. memo from Bishop Halmarson, *op. cit.*

¹⁰ The inclusion of “teaching” as a ministry requiring a “regular call” within the German translation is also illustrative. Public teaching such as Sunday School, confirmation instruction, Bible study, or university or college classes have not traditionally required a formalized “call” within Canadian Lutheranism. The people performing these roles of public teaching have for the most part been left to the congregational polity to recruit, select, train, and install, thereby lending additional weight to the argument that the authority to call, whether formalized or not, rests with individual congregations.

Philip Melancthon, the initial drafter of the Augsburg Confession and a teacher who was not ordained, very much felt that the teaching ministry also needed to be accountable to “Order in the Church” in CA XIV. (Wengert, Timothy, “The End of the Public Office of Ministry in the Lutheran Confessions.” This article is available from www.elca.org/ministry/essays/pdf/wengert.pdf)

¹¹ Apology to the Augsburg Confession, Articles 7 and 8, section 28 in Tappert, *op. cit.* “When the sacraments are administered by unworthy men, this does not rob them of their efficacy.”

can rightly administered sacraments; it is the preaching of the Word by untrained and unexamined
230 preachers that is the dangerous thing.¹²

Clearly, CA XIV needs further analysis on a deeper level. The point and intent of the article cannot be adequately understood by simply quoting its single sentence.

235 Timothy Wengert of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia provides such an analysis. He argues that this article needs to be understood from the perspective of the eschatological significance it held for the early reformers.¹³ Wengert looks at the organization of the Augsburg Confession and points out that “CA XIV stands where it does—right next to the sacraments (IX-XIII) and associated with the church (VII, VIII, XV)—because those opposed to the evangelical party at Augsburg did not link ordination to the proclamation of God’s Word. Instead, they viewed it as a ‘sacrificial office.’”¹⁴ This article thus advocates that CA XIV “Order in the Church” requires that not
240 only the sacraments remain the reserve of ordained ministry, but for the proper growth and benefit of the community and proclamation of the Gospel, the responsibility of publicly proclaiming the word is also properly given to ordained ministers. Theologically and historically, the two roles of

¹² Apology to the Augsburg Confession, Article 13, section 11 in Tappert, *op. cit.* “If ordination is interpreted in relation to the ministry of the Word, we have no objection to calling ordination a sacrament. The ministry of the Word has God’s command and glorious promises: ‘The Gospel is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith’ (Rom 1:16), again, ‘My word that goes forth from my mouth shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it’ (Isa 55:11).

See also Tappert, Theodore G. ed & trans. *Luther’s Works*, volume 54, *Table Talks*. Fortress Press, Philadelphia. 1967. pp. 157-158, “When you are to preach, speak with God and say, ‘Dear Lord God, I wish to preach in thine honor. I wish to speak about thee, glorify thee, praise thy name. Although I can’t do this well of myself, I pray that thou mayest make it good.’”

¹³ Wengert, *op. cit.*

¹⁴ Wengert, *ibid.* p. 3.

ordination: proclamation of the Word and administration of the sacraments cannot be divided into different orders or responsibilities.

245 Here our Canadian practice does not align with our theology; we have no justification to say that sacramental administration is restricted to ordained people under a letter of call, while anyone can preach from our pulpits. If we are to be true to the confessions, we must instead say that preaching and sacramental ministry are both proclamations of the Word equal in power and importance and both require a call before they can be performed for the benefit of a community. We must also say

250 that the role of the ordained ministers is to proclaim this Word in a way that furthers the Reign of God, and we must maintain the accountability of the office of ordained ministry to the church which it exists to serve.¹⁵

The Authority to Call

The practice of Lutheran ministry in Canada has evolved over time from a synergy of different

255 approaches, heritages, ecumenical agreements, practical responses to local situations, and understandings. As a result, sometimes our practice seems incongruous and inconsistent.

For example, it is the Synod's practice that people do not need theological training to preach. However, only a rostered pastor or an Anglican priest can preside over a sacrament.

¹⁵ See also Lutheran World Federation (LWF), *The Lutheran Understanding of Ministry: Statement on the Basis of an LWF Study Project*. Published by the Department of Studies, LWF, Geneva Switzerland. 1983: "Ordained ministers stand both within the congregation and over against it. They stand with the whole people of God because all share in the one ministry of the Church. They stand over against the congregation because in God's name they proclaim the saving Gospel to God's people, and therefore bear the authority of God's word – but only insofar as their proclamation is faithful to the Gospel. The Christian community, therefore, has both the right and the duty to hold those ordained accountable in terms of their mandate. Thus a balance is created which prevents unilateral domination or dependence." Paragraph 21, p. 10.

It is also the Synod's practice that pastors do not need a call to preach or administer the sacraments provided they are either retired or on leave from call but still on the roster.

Finally the status of ordained ministers who have been inactive or are otherwise not on the Synod's roster of ordained ministers is also problematic. As Lutherans, we affirm "ordination gives authority publicly to preach the Gospel and administer the sacraments according to Christ's command and promise", and "ordination is for life. It is not to be repeated, even if persons ordained have ceased to exercise their ministry during a certain period."¹⁶ Even the ELCIC asserts that a bishop's permission is only required to permit non-ordained persons to administer the sacraments; ordained persons, even those no longer "rostered", do not require episcopal permission to administer the sacraments.¹⁷ However, synodical practice in this respect across our Church varies in this regard with some synods recommending or requiring non-rostered ordained ministers to obtain the bishop's permission before administering any sacrament.

The resolution of these paradoxes requires an answer to a simple question: by whose authority is the call issued? There are three possible answers: the Church (or the Synod as the agent of the national Church), the Synodical Bishop, or the local congregation or community.

If the answer is the Church or the Bishop, then as a church we need to start issuing calls to everyone who ever steps into a pulpit or behind an altar. We also need to remove the categories of "retired pastor" and "on leave from call" if we want to enable these individuals to perform pulpit and

¹⁶ LWF, *The Lutheran Understanding of Ministry*, *op. cit.* paragraphs 47 & 48. p. 15.

¹⁷ The ELCIC "Statement of Sacramental Practices", approved by the Church in convention in 1991 states: "In accordance with traditional church practice and the Lutheran Confessions, an ordained minister, as one whose ministry originates within and is affirmed by the whole church, presides over the eucharistic celebration. Only one ordained minister presides.

"Persons not ordained may be authorized by the synodical bishop to preside at the Lord's Supper in those situations where an ordained minister is not available for an extended period of time. Such exemptions are allowed for only a specific time, place, and person." (Practical Principles: Holy Communion, paragraphs 2 & 3),

altar supply during pastoral vacancies or vacations. To allow these individuals to preach or administer the sacraments without a call is in contravention with CA XIV.

Furthermore, it is contrary to the confessions and Lutheran tradition to rest this authority to call
280 in the hands of a Bishop. At Smalcald in 1537, the reformers agreed that the authority to call and ordain belongs to churches and not to bishops. Bishops preside at ordinations only as an agent of the church and not by any power or authority of their person or office.¹⁸

In either of these cases, our practice as Canadian Lutherans is significantly divergent from our Lutheran heritage and the confessions. Significant changes to our policy and procedures would be
285 needed to resolve these inconsistencies.

If however the call to ministry rests with congregations, then our practice is more closely aligned with our theology and heritage. In this vein, the authority to preach or administer the sacraments is conferred by the congregation in its invitation to a person to provide pulpit or altar supply. While the Bishop or synod can recommend or provide a list of approved supply candidates, it is the invitation
290 of the congregation that transmits a Call even if only for a single event or a single day. Using this paradigm, retired ministers and ordained pastors who are currently not serving the church in a full-time or permanent capacity can minister to the church without violating CA XIV.

Discussion of the Proposed Policy

From the preceding discussion, we can see that the issues of structuring interim ministry and
295 non-stipendiary calls are separate and independent. While an interim ministry is transitory, it is not necessarily non-stipendiary. Conversely, non-stipendiary ministry covers a wide spectrum of ministry opportunities including pulpit supply and ministry in non-parish settings. In fact, the “Guidelines

¹⁸ “Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope” in Tappert, T, *Book of Concord. op. cit.* paragraphs 63-69.

Related to Non-Stipendiary Ministry” (Guidelines) does not use the word “interim” once within its body.

300 The Guidelines also propose a more restrictive definition of non-stipendiary ministry than that used in this brief.¹⁹ It defines non-stipendiary ministry as “service as an ordained/lay diaconal minister without regard to compensation for such service. It may be either service for no stipend (or for reimbursed expenses only) or for a token stipend that is not commensurate with the normal salary guidelines for rostered ministry.”

305 The Guidelines further restrict this opportunity so that ministers so called must serve a monthly average of at least 10 hours per week (or 25% of a 40 hour work week).

This definition has a number of problems. The concept of obliging pastors to volunteer for at least 25% of their time for no salary or at most a “token stipend” not only contradicts Scripture²⁰ and is morally questionable, but may also be in direct violation of labour standards legislation for most jurisdictions in Canada. The idea that we will only allow such a call if the minister has a wealthy spouse, parent, endowment, pension, or some other source of “adequate alternative income and health insurance” does not really assuage the ethical questions unanswered by the Guidelines. As well, the concept that some pastors can be paid less than a subsistence income will certainly be attractive to some parishes who will feel it is no longer in their interests to move to a permanent call relationship with a pastor at the current synodical salary guidelines. The Guidelines may also put
315 downward pressure on the living wages of other pastors.

Of course, these questions can be avoided by adopting Synodical policies that all pastors should be paid a fair wage or rate for their services of proclaiming the Word and administering the

¹⁹ For this reason, “non-stipendiary call” is used as per the definition provided in the glossary, while “non-stipendiary ministry” is used as defined in the Guidelines.

²⁰ Lk 10:7; 1 Tim 5:17-18

sacraments. Regardless of who is the employing agency, if a pastor is paid a reasonable wage, then
320 the ministry is not a “non-stipendiary ministry” as defined in the Guidelines.

According to the Guidelines, “Final action to extend such a letter of call” for a minister proposed for such a class of ministry “is contingent upon the approval of the Conference of Bishops.”²¹ “The Conference of Bishops acts upon request for calls to non-stipendiary ministry by majority vote. It reports its decision to the Synod Council seeking such approval.”²²

325 The concept that such a ministry must be approved by a group of individuals with no accountability to the congregations to which the pastor will minister and no constitutional mandate to be a decision making body is more problematic.²³ The idea that a “Conference of Bishops” will

²¹ Guidelines, *op. cit.* II.A.

²² *ibid*, III.A.

²³ While the term “Conference of Bishops” is never defined in the constitution of the Church, Article IX, Section 11 does state: “The bishops of the synods and the bishop of this church shall meet at least once a year for spiritual renewal and the discussion of programs, plans and problems affecting the synods and this church. Except where otherwise provided in this constitution and its administrative bylaws, *the function of such a meeting shall be consultative and advisory.*” (emphasis added)

The Administrative Bylaws of the Church define the role of the “Conference of Bishops” thusly:

“The Conference of Bishops shall:

- attend to the spiritual and collegial nurture of its members;
- reflect and provide vision on issues that affect the life of the church;
- develop and share objectives and strategies concerning pastoral leadership;
- recommend policy and practice to the National Church Council;
- advise National Church Council on referred matters; and
- strive to achieve consistent practice across the synods” (Part X, Section 3).

Again, the role of this group as per the bylaws is to be exclusively consultative with no decision-making role.

have the power to approve such a candidate is contrary to the Lutheran confessions and common sense.

330 An example might help illustrate this point. If a congregation recommends a person to the bishop for some specific ministry, that bishop can honour or reject that recommendation. In either case, the bishop could ultimately be accountable for his or her decision at the next synodical convention.

Now, let us apply the terms of the Guidelines to the scenario. In this case, the recommendation
335 will go to a “conference” of six bishops; two-thirds of which will never have to account for their vote or decision to the very congregations making the recommendations in the first place.²⁴

As discussed previously, it has been the Lutheran practice and understanding that bishops do not have the power to authorize calls or ordain; they simply act as agents and representatives of the church to which they are accountable. The Guidelines usurp this authority of the church.

340 **Conclusion**

The need for interim ministry has long been recognized within the church. While a synodical policy to oversee the provision for this ministry is needed, this policy is not necessarily impacted by the national Church’s Guidelines. In fact, if it is the synod’s policy that interim ministers should be fairly compensated for their ministry, then the two documents are separate and distinct with the
345 Guidelines rendered moot. The question of compensation does not properly belong as part of the call in any case; it is more properly a side issue between the pastor and the employing agency.

²⁴ Of the six bishops in the conference, only the potential that the candidate’s own synodical bishop and the national bishop will be held accountable exists. The other four are not answerable to communities outside their jurisdictions. The Guidelines might as well say that the Pope must approve the candidacy before the person can be called to the ministry. On the off chance that it is not readily apparent why this is a bad idea, please see the “Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope,” previously cited.

What is needed is a definition of the mandate and purpose of interim ministry as well as the skills, qualities and knowledge specific to interim ministry as it differs from the core skills that all ministers are expected to demonstrate. This definition of the Body of Knowledge is required to help candidates evaluate their spiritual call to this area of specialization as well as help protect the interests and needs of congregation as they journey through these transitive experiences.

If we are also to be faithful to CA XIV that ministers must possess a regular call before engaging in ministry, then the question, “From where does the authority to call reside?” is more problematic. If calls come from the synod, then there is at present, no basis for which seminary students, laypersons, or pastors who are retired or “on leave from call” can provide pulpit supply without contravening CA XIV.

On the other hand, if the authority to call resides with the congregation, then congregations could still issue an invitation or a “call” to a minister to provide ministry of word and sacrament if even for a day. The Synod already assists them in this task by supplying them with a list of recommended or approved candidates who are competent and available for supply opportunities. A similar practice could be implemented for interim ministry.

The problems surrounding the national Church’s concept of “non-stipendiary ministry” only come into effect if the Guidelines are even invoked by paying pastors no or only a token wage. A more pressing question is how to bring the Church’s and the Synod’s practice and understanding of call and ordained ministry into harmony with CA XIV. This presupposes a decision or affirmation as to the source of authority with respect to issuing calls. One effect of this examination will be a clear understanding of the role and authority for calling interim pastors.