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Unity of Spirit—Bond of Peace

Essay #3—

**Governance of the Church:
Ways the Visible Church has been and is Governed
Or: *Who's the Boss Around Here?***

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We recognize Christ as the head of his Church, but he leaves the day-to-day governance of the visible church¹ in the hands of us humans—us sinful humans who get into power struggles and like to be in authority over others. National leaders know the temptation to lord it over their church, pastors over their congregation, lay leaders (congregational presidents and elders) over their pastor.

Questions we want to address in this essay are: What does the Bible say about the way the visible church is to be governed? How has the church been governed over the course of New Testament history? What forms of government are used in Lutheran churches today? Is there a correct way? Is there a best way? What are some practical issues related to governing the visible church?

I. What does the Bible say about how the visible church is to be governed?

The form of government in the Church is a monarchy. Christ “is Lord of lords and King of kings” (Revelation 17:14); Christ “is the head over every power and authority” (Colossians 2:10). Christ is the Church’s sole head and absolute ruler. And he “is the head of the body, the church” (Colossians 1:18). In spiritual matters, Christians are subject to no other authority than that of Christ. “You have only one Master and you are all brothers” (Matthew 23:8).

Christ rules his Church by his Word. “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27). “Everyone on the side of truth listens to me” (John 18:37). Christ’s Word is the sole authority in the Church, to which all clergy and laity must bow, from which nothing may be taken away, to which nothing may be added.² “No law of man and no vow can

¹ This essay follows the older custom of capitalizing Church when referring to the Holy Christian Church, the invisible body of all believers in Jesus Christ. The essay does not primarily speak about the invisible Church, but rather about church with a small c, the visible gathering of Christians on earth on the basis of their unity in confession.

² Revelation 22:18-19; John 8:31.

nullify a commandment of God.”³ “A custom introduced contrary to the commands of God is not to be approved.”⁴

Christ, the Church’s head, delegates leadership to men in his visible church. “Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you” (Hebrews 13:17). Through the Holy Spirit, Christ gives men responsibility for the spiritual well-being of his sheep. “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers” (Acts 20:28).

You will search the Scriptures in vain for any command establishing a particular form of government for the New Testament church. Instead the church has been granted freedom in such matters. “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery” (Galatians 5:1). Christians are not to become entangled with or enslaved under man-made ordinances. Christ has set us free. This allows flexibility in order “to win as many as possible” (1 Corinthians 9:19).

II. How has the church been governed over the course of New Testament history?

A. During the time of the apostles

The New Testament points to an active congregational involvement by all members. In his letter to the Romans, Paul lists by name 29 members who were working in the congregation in one capacity or another (Romans 16:1-15). In Corinth lay involvement was carried to the extreme, and Paul had to give instructions regarding propriety and order in the service. “God,” says Paul, “is not a God of disorder” (1 Corinthians 14:33). “Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way” (1 Corinthians 14:40). The words translated as “disorder” and “orderly” come from the same Greek root, a word having the idea of arranging in an orderly fashion.⁵ One form of this word, for example, was used of soldiers marching single file, one behind the other. Even in Corinth, however, Paul did not say: “Leave all preaching (i.e. prophesying) to the pastors” or “Let the leaders conduct the worship.”

Though congregations at the time of the apostles seem rather loosely structured, this does not mean that they were without order and organization. There were offices with specific responsibilities in carrying out the ministry of the Word of God. In addition, other forms of ministry were established to support the preaching of the Word. In Acts 6, men⁶ were chosen to handle the food distribution so the apostles could give their attention to prayer and the preaching

³ Augsburg Confession, Article XXIII:8 (Latin), *The Book of Concord*, translated and edited by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 52.

⁴ Augsburg Confession, Article XXII:9 (Latin), *The Book of Concord*, p. 50.

⁵ From the verb *τάσσω*. Liddell-Scott: *an arranging*: I. in military sense: 1. *a drawing up, the order or disposition of an army*, 2. *battle array, order of battle*, 3. *a single rank or line of soldiers*, 4. *a body of soldiers, a squadron*, 5. *a post or place in the line of battle*. II. generally, *an arrangement, order, regularity*.

⁶ They are not called deacons in Acts 6, although we customarily refer to them as deacons. This title appears in the epistles of Paul—1 Timothy 3:8-13, for example.

of the Word. 1 Timothy 5:17 tells us that some of the elders (πρεσβύτεροι) served in tasks other than preaching and teaching. We detect two levels of called workers: pastors and deacons.⁷

Paul and his representatives exerted bishop-like oversight of the young mission churches. As they returned from the first missionary journey, “Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church” (Acts 14:23). Paul tells Timothy: “Stay there in Ephesus so that you may command⁸ certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer.” (1 Timothy 1:3). Timothy is to “command” those who teach God’s people. This is doctrinal discipline. Titus also seems to have exerted bishop-like authority. Paul tells him, “The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed⁹ you” (Titus 1:5).

B. After the Apostolic Age

A natural development, which came already in the first century, was the selecting of an over-shepherd or bishop by the churches in a region. This led soon after the Apostolic Age to a three-tier government: bishop—pastor—deacon. One quote from the letters of Ignatius (written about A.D. 110, within a decade of the apostle John’s death) is sufficient to show that already at his time the bishop ruled over presbyter, deacon, and congregation.

Let all follow the bishop as Jesus Christ did the Father. Apart from the bishop let no one perform any of the functions that pertain to the church. Let that Eucharist be held valid which is offered by the bishop or by one to whom the bishop has committed this charge. Wherever the bishop appears, there let the people be; as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic church. It is not lawful to baptize or hold a community meal without the consent of the bishop. On the other hand, whatever has his approval is pleasing to God.¹⁰

Such over-bishops developed into hierarchical positions¹¹ and eventually evolved into two powerful bishops claiming authority over the whole church. One of them, the bishop of Rome, claimed to be the direct successor of Peter and possessor of the keys to heaven (the means of grace). The idea grew that those in the public ministry received their authority not from God through God’s people (the church), but from God through the pope and bishops. Bishops assigned and transferred priests and nuns according to their own best judgment.

From the end of the Apostolic Age all the way up to the Reformation, episcopacy was practically the only church polity known in east or west. The laymen seem to have been given virtually no say about their church.¹²

⁷ Swedish: *forsamlingsledare* = congregational leaders, and *forsamlingstjanare* = congregational helpers.

⁸ Greek παραγγέλλω = give orders, command, instruct, direct. Consider how the word is used in Acts 16:18: “Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, ‘In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!’ At that moment the spirit left her.” Also Acts 16:23: “The jailer was commanded to guard them carefully.”

⁹ Greek διατάσσω = order, direct, command. Consider Acts 18:2: “Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome,” and Acts 24:23: “He [governor Felix] ordered the centurion to keep Paul under guard.”

¹⁰ Ignatius of Antioch, “To the Smyrnaeans,” in *The Past Speaks for Itself*, Vol. 1, edited by Theodore J. Hartwig (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1986), p. 346.

¹¹ Five at first: Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Constantinople, and Rome.

¹² The lay members having virtually no say is still the norm in Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches.

C. Lutheran Reformation

Luther and the Lutheran Confessions show that the forms of government in the church are a matter of freedom. There was even openness to the continuation of the office of bishop if bishops would exercise their ministry in service of the gospel.

Parish ministers and churches are bound to be obedient to the bishops according to the saying of Christ in Luke 10:16, “He who hears you hears me.” On the other hand, if they teach, introduce, or institute anything contrary to the Gospel, we have God’s command not to be obedient in such cases, for Christ says in Matthew 7:15: “Beware of false prophets.”¹³

The Apology to the Augsburg Confession gives the bishop “the authority to excommunicate those who are guilty of public offenses or to absolve them if they are converted and ask for absolution.”¹⁴ The Augsburg Confession also grants bishops authority in adiaphora.

What are we to say, then, about Sunday and other similar church ordinances and ceremonies? To this our teachers reply that bishops or pastors may make regulations so that everything in the churches is done in good order.... It is proper for the Christian assembly to keep such ordinances for the sake of love and peace, to be obedient to the bishops and parish ministers in such matters....However, consciences should not be burdened by contending that such things are necessary for salvation or that it is a sin to omit them.¹⁵

Luther himself set up the office of superintendent with authority over the pastors in a region. He writes,

This pastor (*Pfarrherr*) shall be superintendent of all the other priests who have their parish or benefice in the region, whether they live in monasteries or foundations of nobles or of others. He shall make sure that in these parishes there is correct Christian teaching, that the Word of God and the holy gospel are truly and purely proclaimed, and that the holy sacraments according to the institution of Christ are provided to the blessing of the people....If one or more of the pastors or preachers is guilty of error in this or that respect, the superintendent shall call to himself those concerned and have them abstain from it, but also carefully instruct them wherein they are guilty and have erred either in commission or omission, either in doctrine or in life.¹⁶

¹³ Augsburg Confession, Article XXVIII:22-23, *The Book of Concord*, p. 84. Melancthon was even ready to accept the leadership of the pope. When signing the Smalcald Articles, he added this note: “However, concerning the pope I hold that, if he would allow the Gospel, we, too, may concede to him that superiority over the bishops which he possesses by human right, making this concession for the sake of peace and general unity among the Christians who are now under him and who may be in the future” (Smalcald Articles, *The Book of Concord*, pp. 316, 317).

¹⁴ Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XXVIII:13, *The Book of Concord*, p. 283.

¹⁵ Augsburg Confession, Article XXVIII:53-55, *The Book of Concord*, pp. 89,90.

¹⁶ *Luther’s Works*, American Edition, Vol. 40 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958), p. 313.

The Confessions don't say that bishops or superintendents have such authority by divine right. Rather a church agrees to give such supervisory roles and authority. Luther himself during his lifetime was looked upon with the highest respect and exerted considerable influence over the young church. On the other hand, he called upon the Lutheran princes—as the most influential laymen—to become active in the affairs of the church.

D. The Lutheran church after Luther

With the Peace of Augsburg (1555)¹⁷ came state churches which were ruled by the secular ruler and the ecclesiastical head. The Lutheran church in “Lutheran lands” continued the episcopal polity they inherited from the Roman Catholic Church. Bishops who came over from the Catholic Church did not give up their positions, but simply became Lutheran bishops. The superintendents who replaced the Catholic bishops carried out the duties of a bishop in many aspects.

An exception was found in places where the Lutheran church was not dominant and therefore did not become the state religion. In the Netherlands, congregations were organized apart from the secular authorities already in the 1560s and 1570s. These congregations governed themselves. This system of church government was brought to America by immigrants from the Netherlands in the 1600s. In America the congregational system became the norm because the congregations were far removed from the princes and bishops of Europe.¹⁸ Later this “American system” was exported. The Evangelical Lutheran Free Church, a CELC member, separated from the state church in the mid-1800s, and under the influence of C.F.W. Walther and the Missouri Synod became “the first Lutheran church which practiced the congregational structure (*Gemeindeprinzip*) in Germany.”¹⁹

III. What forms of government are used in Lutheran churches today?

As best I know, all the church bodies in the CELC have, in Christian freedom, chosen the “congregational” structure.²⁰ A typical constitution for a congregation in our circles includes statements such as:

The congregation, as represented by the voters' assembly, shall have the right of decision in all matters not otherwise decided by the Word of God.

¹⁷ The Peace of Augsburg did not grant freedom of religion. It allowed only two religions, Lutheran and Catholic, and stated that each ruler could determine which of those two his territory would be (*cuius regio, eius religio*).

¹⁸ “The Church Order of Amsterdam (1592) was brought to America by immigrants from the Netherlands in the 17th century. Jacob Fabricius (1680) then established the same order among the Swedish immigrants at the Delaware River (who came from a bishop church at home!). And Heinrich W. Muehlenberg spread the structure among the German speaking Lutheran congregations in the east (around 1750). This was the situation which Walther and his friends (Sihler, Crämer) found in Lutheran churches in the middle of the 19th century” (Gottfried Herrmann in a short essay entitled “Congregational Structure of the ELFK”).

¹⁹ Gottfried Herrmann, “Congregational Structure of the ELFK.”

²⁰ This writer has heard of one exception within our circles. One congregation has thought a bit “out of the box” and assigned most decisions to a Board of Directors or Governing Board. We cannot say this is wrong if this structure exists because the congregation has chosen to delegate decision-making authority to such a group.

The church council, any other elected committee or organization within the congregation, and any of its elected or appointed officers shall have no power or authority beyond that conferred upon them by the congregation.

This same basic structure is used also in our church bodies. The national assembly (convention, sobor, or whatever it is called), which is made up of the pastors and male representatives of the congregations, is the governing authority.

Leaders in the churches of the CELC are given various titles: president, bishop,²¹ chairman of the church board, national leader, and probably others. Yet all our churches operate basically the same. The voting body of the church elects a man to serve as the church body's leader. According to the good order laid down in our constitutions, we voluntarily delegate clearly defined responsibilities and authority to that elected leader. We recognize that his election is a divine call to serve in this office and so he is placed there by the Holy Spirit. He deserves our respect and cooperation as a representative of God for our good. We also recognize, however, that he serves at the will of the Christians who have called him by election to that position. This understanding is shown by the fact that the church's leader is elected for a fixed term and is subject to periodic review by means of an election which decides whether to call him for another term or not.

Our churches are not purely congregational in structure, however. We have elements of a "presbyterian" model (i.e. leadership by elders). Congregations put a lot of faith and authority in their church councils. These "presbyters" make quite a few of the decisions. We also employ elements of the "episcopal" model (i.e. governance by bishops). Pastors are under the doctrinal supervision of district presidents, eparchy heads, circuit pastors, or whatever name we call them.

Some Lutheran churches outside our fellowship have gone down other paths. The larger national/state churches in Europe continue to have an episcopal system. Often this is supported through a belief in apostolic succession, the teaching that the keys have been handled down through ordination from one generation to the next in an unbroken string going back to Peter himself. A conservative group within the national church of Sweden, for example, has searched far and wide to find an apostolically ordained bishop to ordain its pastors since the Church of Sweden's archbishop won't.

Some in the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod have gone to the opposite extreme. They emphasize the God-ordained status of the local congregation and its pastor, in effect making each congregation and pastor independent of any higher ecclesiastical authority.²² By contrast, we in the CELC recognize that a congregation delegates a certain amount of authority and responsibility to the larger (national) church and its leaders. Each congregation and each pastor

²¹ To illustrate how terms are used in different ways even in our circles, consider this: The ULC has one bishop, the elected leader of the church body; the WELS has 30 to 50 bishops depending on the year because the title *bishop* is used to refer to a pastor who oversees the work of a vicar/student pastor.

²² This writer feels that some in the LCMS now emphasize their doctrine of the ministry in order to fight off women pastors. This has become necessary because the Scriptural basis (women not in authority over men) was given up long ago.

are bound to respect and obey such called/elected leaders in matters which have been delegated to them.

A related issue is the question of mission boards in parent churches and their authority over their daughter churches (missions). Once again Scripture gives no direct instructions, but we do see in the New Testament Paul's continuing oversight and authority in the congregations he founded. Just as children need a guiding hand as they are growing up, so we recognize that young mission churches need guidance. But, just as we are working for the day our children can stand on their own two feet in the adult world, so the goal for every mission program is the day when oversight and authority over a mission can cease and the daughter church becomes a sister church. There can be struggles between parents and their children. This happens especially in the teen years when children often demand rights and freedoms which they are not yet capable of handling. Unfortunately at times we find similar tensions between the parent church and its children.

IV. Is there a correct way? Is there a best way?

The outward organization in a congregation is something which grows automatically out of the preaching of the word and may be different at different times and in different localities. The gospel will create whatever offices become necessary."²³

As this quote illustrates, Lutherans seem to be in agreement that it goes beyond Scripture to insist that one form of church government has divine approval as opposed to other forms.

So is there one correct way? The answer is: No, provided the chosen way serves the proclamation of the gospel, is orderly, and is agreed upon by the members of the visible church it is to govern.

Is there a best way?

In preparing this paper I read an essay which advocated switching to an episcopal system.²⁴ The author, a LCMS pastor, cites four main reasons:

- 1) The Lutheran Confessions do not demand episcopal polity, but they do assume it. The confessions express their "deep desire to maintain the church polity and various ranks of the ecclesiastical hierarchy."²⁵
- 2) The New Testament commands no particular form of church polity, but it does give legitimacy to the form that soon became the norm.
- 3) The Christian needs a place to learn obedience to a higher authority outside of himself, to knock down the self and conform the self to Christ.
- 4) More Christians accept episcopacy than any other form of church government. Therefore, it is a recognizably sacred arrangement to the world at large.

²³ Paul Pieper, "The Relation of the Pastor and the Church Council to One Another," available in the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary online essay file (www.wlsessays.net), p. 5.

²⁴ John Rutowicz, "An Argument for Lutheran Episcopacy," in *Reformation Today*, available online at: <http://web.mac.com/hunnius/ELDoNA/Papers.html>.

²⁵ Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XIV:1, *The Book of Concord*, p. 214.

While the above comments may offer some compelling arguments, I think most of us would say: “Yes, there is a best way. Our congregational system serves best.”

Yes, our congregational system makes it clear that the people have the authority in their congregation—and also the responsibility.

With us the laity is consigned to listening and doing nothing in the congregation, and the pastor wants to do everything alone. The result is that we often succumb under the work, and many things remain undone. This is to a large extent due to a wrong, monarchical, monopolistic view of the office, according to which the pastor concentrates all church offices, even the purely external ones, from preacher to janitor, in his own person.²⁶

We might disagree a bit with this harsh assessment by Professor August Pieper, but there’s truth in what he says. Some pastors take too much extraneous work upon themselves, work which could be done just as well and perhaps better by a member of the congregation. A pastor who is a wise manager knows that the goal is not to do the work of 10 people, but to teach 10 people to do the work. If a visible church is going to survive and grow, all the members are needed, and each has something to contribute. Remember how Paul shows this in his illustration of the body in 1 Corinthians 12.

Yes, our congregational system of government serves best for a second good reason. It makes it clear to those called to the public ministry that they are servants of the people, not lords over them. Jesus says: “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:25-28).

That being said, we must also see the other side of the coin. Scripture says: “Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. . . . Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden” (Hebrews 13:17). Those called to leadership positions are God’s representatives, called by God through his church. The congregation is to respect the authority of the pastors and other leaders in Scriptural matters. It should also listen to their leadership in other matters where they are in the best position to know the wise course of action.

Paul is speaking to both leaders and the people they lead when he writes: “Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you” (1 Thessalonians 5:12). Notice: He says that those in positions of leadership earn respect by their hard work for the Lord and his people.

Is there a best way? Yes, I think we will agree that the congregational structure of authority is the best way when it is carried out in a spirit of mutual respect and humble service. It will be

²⁶ August Pieper, “Are There Legal Regulations in the New Testament?” translated by Carl Lawrenz from the *Theologische Quartalschrift* (July 1916), available in the WLS online essay file, p. 10.

interesting in the discussion of this paper to see if cultural differences favor a different “best solution” in some of our member churches.

V. What are some of the practical issues related to governing the visible church?

Who issues the call?

The Lutheran Confessions state: “It is evident that the church retains the right of electing and ordaining ministers.”²⁷

Today pastoral calls are extended in a number of different ways. WELS and ELS congregations call from a list provided by the synod or district president; names can be added, but only with the district president’s or synod president’s approval. In the Lutheran Confessional Church of Sweden (LBK), congregations call freely from the clergy roster. The Bulgarian Lutheran Church’s Spiritual Council assigns workers to their calls. In a similar way, the Synodical Council of the Ukrainian Lutheran Church (ULC) assigns St. Sophia’s graduates to their first call—upon request of the congregation.

The authority to call can be delegated as in some of the cases just mentioned. Keeping the authority to call with the people who are going to be served is good, however, for both the pastor and the people:

For the pastor it serves as a reminder of whom he is to serve—Christ first and the people Christ has entrusted to his care second. He is not the puppet of the bishop or national leader, but the servant of the congregation.

For the congregation it underlines the fact that the pastor is called by them, not imposed on them from above. With their call goes the promise that they will respect his leadership, cooperate with him, and help to make his ministry a joy and success.

How long does a call last?

Scripture gives no instructions regarding the length of a person’s call, so we conclude that this too falls into the area of Christian freedom.

As best I can determine, there’s a consistent policy in CELC churches. Under ordinary circumstances we regard a pastoral call to be without a time limit. The worker should serve with the expectation that this will be his lifelong ministry. In American circles, while some pastors move frequently, others spend their entire ministry in one place. I followed a man who had been pastor in the congregation for 58 years. There are certain situations, however, where a call may be extended with a time limit. In my case, for example, both my call as friendly counselor to the LBK and my call as rector of St. Sophia Seminary were five-year calls.

²⁷ Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope 72, *The Book of Concord*, p. 332.

A warning is in place here. A congregation must not terminate a call for anything other than a most serious reason. The called worker is God's called worker, given his call by God through the congregation. God has put him in his office. God will equip and work through him for the good of the church.

Who decides how the money is spent?

Mission boards at first and then national leaders frequently control the money in a mission church's early days. But the well-being of the church and its ultimate growth into a self-sufficient church require that the people in the pew see the financial support of their congregation as their responsibility. This calls for serious attention to teaching what the Bible says about stewardship. In addition, the pastor or missionary needs to involve the congregation in the budgeting process and in setting the congregation's work program. A budget with clear goals—one that the congregation has approved and to which it has committed itself—gives a tool to measure progress. Regular reports inform and encourage the members.

Who is responsible for church discipline?

Matthew 18:15-18 shows the God-pleasing way to handle cases of church discipline. It says that the responsibility for carrying out church discipline has been given *to the church*. Jesus does not say "tell it to the pastor" or "report it to the bishop." The members of the various church forms (local congregation, mission society, national church, CELC) are responsible to see that everything in their midst is done in harmony with God's Word. False teaching must be addressed and, God willing, be brought back into harmony with the Bible. Sinful actions must be confronted and, God willing, the sinner led to repentance.

The Scriptures don't give any detailed rules regarding church discipline. They do, however, give us one example of a successful case of church discipline. In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul says that the man who has taken his father's wife needs to be dealt with. Notice that Paul expects the congregation to act, but in an oversight role he says he has already drawn his conclusion about how the case should be handled. Apparently the man responded in a God-pleasing way to his excommunication because in 2 Corinthians 2, Paul can write: "You ought to forgive and comfort him...I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him" (2 Corinthians 2:7-8).

In situations where church discipline is called for, those responsible should take care to ensure that it is done

- objectively,
- according to Scripture,
- in Christian love,
- with the intent of reclaiming the sinner or errorist, and
- to preserve unity and the faithful proclamation of God's Word.

It seems also that an appeals process should be in place to give assurance that the church body has acted properly and people have been treated fairly. Such a process provides one more opportunity to call a guilty person to repentance and so regain him for the fellowship. And if the appeal panel ratifies the church's action in excommunicating or removing from fellowship, the united voice of the church is speaking even more clearly to the conscience of the guilty one.

How do we involve lay members in the congregation's ministry?

Let me share one idea with you. Drastic cuts in the amount of support coming from American sponsors have caused the pastors in our ULC to become bi-vocational. This, of course, has reduced the amount of time and energy they can devote to their pastoral duties. In the hopes of keeping this from seriously harming the congregations, the Synodical Council inaugurated an ambitious curriculum of deacon education. The hope is to train a corps of well-qualified volunteers to assume tasks which the pastor no longer has time to do.

VI. Conclusion

We are enjoying the blessings of oneness here in our CELC convention. We are enjoying the unity in doctrine and practice which unites us. We recognize, however, that there are differences in how we carry out our ministries because of the political, social, and cultural differences in the far-flung places we serve. Such differences do not destroy our unity. Christian freedom allows diversity. Our Savior desires the same unity and acceptance of diversity within our own church bodies and within the congregation each of us serves.

Discussion Questions

1. Does your church govern itself in some way significantly different from the ways mentioned in this paper?
2. Are there things in your church or culture which would lead you to different conclusions than those drawn in this paper?
3. Regarding church discipline:
 - How are cases of church discipline handled in your church?
 - Is there a method to appeal an excommunication or removal from fellowship?
 - Is there any role for the CELC to play in mediating conflicts within member-churches?
4. Share some things your church has done to:
 - Teach stewardship.
 - Encourage your members in evangelism.
 - Involve your members in developing your church's work program.
 - Free pastors' time so they can concentrate on Word and sacraments.
5. List ways your church uses lay volunteers.
6. Agree or disagree: *We do harm to the respect people have for the public ministry when we say that the pastor and other called workers are "servants of the congregation."* Explain your answer.
7. Are there other issues related to church governance which you would like to discuss?