

Augsburg Lutheran Churches

STANDARDS FOR THOSE CALLED TO THE PUBLIC MINISTRY OF WORD AND SACRAMENT

Following the Apostle, the Augsburg Lutheran Churches embrace the following definition of the ministry of word and sacrament:

The ministry is “to preach ... the unsearchable riches of Christ, and make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 3:8b-10).

But what is this “plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God?” It is that “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself...For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:19-21). It is the word of the cross. By its very nature the ministry requires ministers. Since the ministry is “*to preach,*” there must be preachers; since “*God established the office of preaching,*” it *must* be exercised; since the Holy Spirit “works faith, where and when he pleases, in those who *hear* the Gospel” (and receive the sacraments), the gospel must be *spoken* (and the sacraments administered). The gospel is never a disembodied word. It is always incarnate. Someone must speak it!

In order to assist churches in calling qualified men and women for the public ministry, the Augsburg Lutheran Churches establishes Ministry Standards to which its clergy are held accountable (Augsburg Constitution, Article 3.04). In addition, these standards constitute the formal basis for the exercise of oversight and discipline to which our clergy are subject (Article 3.04.e). Whenever a certified person accepts a call, a service will be celebrated in which the pastor agrees to uphold the Ministry Standards of the Augsburg Lutheran Churches, and the church agrees to uphold the pastor in doing so.

The Augsburg Ministry Standards are based on the promises a candidate makes at this service. These public promises and obligations are what distinguish clergy from laity, and in a sense, are the commission for the office that a man or a woman undertakes in becoming the pastor of a church. Traditionally and historically, pastors have stood upon their ordination vows and the obligations those vows represent to withstand all kinds of oppression and persecution from both civil and ecclesiastical authorities.

I.

As you shall give account before the Lord in the great day of his appearing, and that this Congregation here present may know your mind and will in these things, I call upon you now to make answer before Almighty God:

Are you now ready to take upon you this Holy Ministry, and faithfully to serve therein?

: Yes, by the help of God.

The mission of the Augsburg Lutheran Churches is to bear witness to the good news that sinners are put right with God by faith alone in Jesus Christ (*Statement of Purpose*).
As stated in Article 3 of the Augsburg Constitution,

Augsburg Lutheran Churches affirms the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6; 5:10) . . . [Thus,] all members of our churches are priests and ministers called and ordained by God in Baptism to service and witness in their daily lives (Ephesians 4:4-6) . . . [From the midst of this holy priesthood of believers,] some are called by God to the *public* ministry of Word and Sacrament (1 Corinthians 12:27-30; Ephesians 4:11).

Augsburg Lutheran Churches affirms that God calls a particular man or woman to exercise the ministry of Word and Sacraments publicly through the external call of a church.

By answering, “Yes, by the help of God,” the candidate embraces the following standards with respect to the call to public ministry *of* Word and Sacrament:

- That my central function is to proclaim publicly, in both Word and Sacrament, the justifying word of the cross—the concrete, audible, down-to-earth, person-to-person, declaration of God’s electing word (i.e., the absolution);
- That my call to public ministry is neither a right nor an entitlement, but a divinely authorized duty and obligation publicly to speak the gospel on behalf of the Lord Jesus Christ; and
- That I am not self-chosen or self-appointed, but properly called by God through a church;

II.

Will you preach and teach the Word of God in accordance with the Confessions of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church, and will you administer the Holy Sacraments after the ordinance of Christ?

: Yes, by the help of God.

The mission of the Augsburg Lutheran Churches is to resist any corruption of the gospel that sinners are put right with God by faith alone in Jesus Christ (*Statement of Purpose*). In addition to speaking of the ministry *of* Word and Sacrament, therefore, one must also speak of the ministry *to* Word and Sacrament. Whereas the ministry *of* Word and Sacrament refers to the exercise of the ministry itself—the actual doing of the proclaiming deed in absolution, baptism, the Lord’s Supper, etc., ministry *to* Word and Sacrament refers to the task of tending, guarding, and keeping this ministry from being corrupted and falsified. The Holy Scriptures as source and norm, together with the ecumenical creeds as true expositions of the scriptural word, are the rule and measure by which true teaching is distinguished from error. Moreover, the heart and center of the Holy Scriptures, the ecumenical creeds, and the Lutheran confessional writings is the gospel that we are justified by grace alone, that is, by faith alone. This gospel is the sole criterion against which all teaching, practice, structure, and polity must be judged. With the confessors of the Reformation, the Augsburg Lutheran Churches require that its ministers teach nothing “that departs from the Scriptures or the catholic church” (CA Conclusion).

While all members of the priesthood of believers are to “test the spirits” (1 John 4:1-3), one who is called to preach and teach publicly on behalf of all has received a mandate and responsibility to tend and nurture the spiritual life of the community to which he or she serves as pastor.

By answering, “Yes, by the help of God,” the candidate embraces the following standards with respect to the call to public ministry *to* Word and Sacrament:

- That I will preach and teach the Word of God in its purity as recorded in the canonical scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and witnessed by the confessional writings of the evangelical-Lutheran church as the sole authoritative source and norm of proclamation, faith, and life;
- That I embrace the Gospel that we are justified by grace alone, that is, by faith alone through Christ alone as the heart and center of the Holy Scriptures, the ecumenical creeds and Lutheran confessional writings, and hold to it as the sole criterion against which all teaching, practice, structure and polity must be judged;
- That I will adhere to a sound biblical, evangelical, confessional, and pastoral hermeneutic, founded upon the proper distinction between law and gospel and the doctrine of the clarity of scripture;
- That I will tend and nurture the spiritual life of the church to which I have been called, with sound teaching and true witness to the Word, and faithful administration of the Sacraments; and
- That I will stand and confess without compromise when the truth of the Gospel and Christian teaching is at stake, without regard for temporal consequences (e.g., goods, honor, life, family, etc.).

III.

Will you be diligent in the study of Holy Scripture, instant in prayer, and faithful in the use of the Means of Grace?

: Yes, by the help of God.

The Augsburg Lutheran Churches affirm that the primary character and nature of the ministry is pastoral (cf. Mark -- Sheep without a Shepherd). With respect to those who are called to exercise the ministry publicly this question refers to the importance of the role of the pastor as channel and gate through which God's Spirit accomplishes his work of calling, gathering, enlightening, and sanctifying the saints of each church.

But the pastor can only give what he or she has first received. Thus, Luther's admonition to pastors with respect to the Catechism applies no less to the Holy Scripture, to prayer, and to the Means of Grace.

As for myself, let me say that I, too, am a doctor and a preacher... Yet I do as a child who is being taught the Catechism. Every morning, and when ever else I have time, I read and recite word for word the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Psalms, etc. I must still read and study the Catechism daily, yet I cannot master it as I wish, but must remain a child and pupil of the Catechism, and I do it gladly.

Even if [your] knowledge of the Catechism were perfect (though that is impossible in this life), yet it is highly profitable and fruitful daily to read it and make it the subject of meditation and conversation. In such reading, conversation, and meditation the Holy Spirit is present and bestows ever new and greater light and fervor, so that day by day we relish and appreciate the Catechism more greatly. This is according to Christ's promise in Matthew 18:20, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (LC, Preface §§7-9)

By answering, "Yes, by the help of God," the candidate embraces the following standards with respect to the pastoral nature of the public ministry:

- That I will demonstrate faithfulness in discharging the duties of my office including visitation, pastoral care, and teaching;
- That I will as a shepherd of Christ's flock embrace my obligation to be an intercessor before God on behalf of those to whom I have been called as pastor, understanding that this prayer undergirds and upholds our partnership in the Gospel;
- That I will maintain the seal of the confessional and never betray the confidences of those who entrust me with their spiritual care;
- That I will seek by daily study of the Holy Scripture to hear the Word of God as his life-giving address to me, both in law and Gospel, so that I will be able to proclaim that same word to others; and
- That I will make regular use of the Means of Grace, i.e., the proclamation of the Gospel, Baptism, the Lord's Supper, the Office of the Keys, and the mutual conversation and consolation of the Saints.

IV.

Will you adorn the doctrine of our Savior by a godly life and conversation?

: Yes, by the help of God.

The Augsburg Lutheran Churches understand the vital importance that no impediment or stumbling block be set between the hearer and the proclamation of the Gospel (cf. 1 Timothy 4:15; Matthew 5:16). While, to be sure, all Christians have this obligation, those called to the duties and responsibilities of public ministry are held by Scripture to stricter accountability (cf. James 3:1). The minister will, above all, seek to avoid offensive behavior* (cf. Titus 1:6-8) that would cause our brother or sister to stumble (cf. Matthew 18:6 etc.).

By answering, "Yes, by the help of God," the candidate embraces the following standards with respect to the personal ethics of the public ministry:

- That I will remain faithful in marriage** and sexually chaste in all my relationships;
- That I will avoid any abuse of the power of the office of the ministry for coercive or self-serving purposes;
- That I will shun divisiveness and never meddle in the affairs of churches to which I am no longer called;
- That I will guard against anything that would place a stumbling block to anyone's hearing and trusting in the Gospel as God's gracious and life-giving word;

* *Offensive behaviors may include but are not limited to:*

Sexual—unseemly appearance, adultery or fornication
 Substance abuse; addictions
 Money—e.g., financial irresponsibility, or dishonesty
 Spiritual abuse—pattern of angry, violent, or manipulative behavior
 Appearance—unbecoming personal hygiene and grooming, habits, or lifestyle
 Pattern of obsessive or compulsive behaviors

** The Augsburg Lutheran Churches define marriage as the life-long covenant of faithfulness between one man and one woman.

- That I will avoid even the appearance of impropriety that may cause offense to the weak in faith; and
- That I will maintain my physical, mental and emotional health in order to remain fit to perform the responsibilities of public ministry.

V.

Before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing, I (N.N.) do promise, with his grace and help, to fulfill these sacred obligations. Amen.

By making this declaration, the candidate embraces the following standards with respect to integrity and accountability in the public ministry:

- That I have been open, honest, and forthright with those who examined my qualifications during the certification and call processes;
- That I suffer these obligations and accountabilities to be placed upon me freely and without reservation; and
- That in this ministry to which I have been called, I am always, instantly, and finally accountable to the Word of God for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Almighty God, who hath chosen you to be his Ministers, enable you to fulfill by his help what you have begun by his favor. Amen.

Merciful God, heavenly Father, you have said to us through the mouth of your dear Son our Lord Jesus Christ: "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." Upon this your divine command, we pray heartily that you would grant your Holy Spirit richly to this minister of your Word, to us, and to all those who are called to serve your Word so that the company of us who publish the good tidings may be great, and that we may stand faithful and firm against the devil, the world, and the flesh, to the end that your name may be hallowed, your kingdom grow, and your will be done. We also pray that you would hinder and defeat the detestable abominations of your enemies who blaspheme your name, oppose your kingdom, and rage against your will. Graciously hear this our prayer, since you have so commanded, taught, and promised, even as we believe and trust through your dear Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen.