

HILLSIDE LUTHERAN BROTHERS CHURCH

PHILOSOPHY OF MINISTRY

A PROPOSAL TO FOCUS THE MINISTRY
RESOURCES OF HLBC TO ACHIEVE THE
INTENDED PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH

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NOVEMBER 2006

ABSTRACT

The Christian church is essentially the gathered people of God. It is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. It has been called the body of Christ, a holy nation, a royal priesthood, the temple of God, the family of God, and the new creation.

The work of the church is to listen to God speak and then to serve God by serving both believer and non-believer.

The activities of the church are: proclamation, teaching, prayer, soul care, service, and fellowship.

The values of the church are: the Bible as norm and power; the traditions of Lutheran theology and piety; and the centrality of the Word of the Cross of Christ—the Gospel.

Therefore HLBC will be a gospel-centered, teaching, deployed church working to develop leaders for the church, proclaiming the gospel to every creature, and developing church family groups.

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THE PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH

DEFINITION OF CHURCH

The English word “church” translates the Hebrew word *qahal* and the Greek word *ecclesia*. Those words both mean public assembly or gathering of people. *Qahal* was usually used in reference to religious assemblies, while *ecclesia* was a word used for secular assemblies. The *ecclesia* was composed of the citizens of an area who were called to assemble, often for the purpose of doing business that was common to them all.

When it becomes the *ecclesia* of God or of Christ, the meaning is that God has called together this people who belong to him. They become the *ecclesia* when they are summoned together. Another similar word is “congregation” which emphasizes more clearly the assembled nature of the concept.

While the church is most often local, there are times when the word is used to refer to more than one local congregation. For example, in Acts 9:31, Luke wrote, “So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.”

The English word “church” is derived from an old word which means “belonging to the Lord.” The NT church is the people of God, in certain locations and in every location. They are still the people of God when they are not gathered, but they are not usually called “church.”

When we say that we are “going to church” that correctly means that we are going to a gathering of God’s people. Technically, it does not mean that we are going to a building or that we are attending a program—although that is often the common use of the term.

CHARACTER OF CHURCH

Historically, the church has been identified as: one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. One is a reference to the unity of the church. People have usually interpreted this to refer to international, interdenominational movements. Maybe, but I would be happy for unity within any one congregation. Holy means that the church belongs to God, is set apart for service to God, and to reflect the character of God who is holy. Catholic means that there is only one church, really. To be Christian is to belong to Christ and Christ is the head of the church, which is his body. The church catholic is all believers of all times and places as God’s people in Christ. We don’t see this, but we believe that it exists. Apostolic has two meanings: the church is apostolic as it is faithful to the apostolic witness to Christ and is built on that foundation—the foundation of the apostles and the prophets; apostolic also means sent in the name of and with the authority of the sender. This means that the emphasis is not on the fact that someone is sent to the church, or that the church sends someone, but that the church itself is sent. So when the preacher preaches, he is not preaching so that people will go, he is preaching to those who have been sent. The church exists for the benefit of itself and for the benefit of non-members. The church is sent to itself and it is sent into the world.

METAPHORS FOR THE CHURCH

The church is the body of Christ. This picture emphasizes that relationship to Christ is vital and that relationship to Christ necessitates relationship with each other as parts of the same body. This metaphor helps us understand that we, the body of Christ, are the presence of Christ in the world after the ascension of Christ. It also reminds us that we will function with greatest coordination as we grow together and each part does its work (Ephesians 4:11-16).

The church is the people of God, a holy nation. I am tempted to use the idea of the Kingdom of God, but I fear that it has suffered from some abuse; yet Jesus teaches us to pray “Thy kingdom come” and we teach our children that this means to pray that Christ would come in his word and grace to us and to all people everywhere. That understanding of kingdom pictures the kingdom as the place where Jesus rules in benevolence and grace through his word. Wouldn’t we want to be part of that and wouldn’t we wish that for all people everywhere? Wouldn’t we love to have people say to us, “what a wonderful king to care for you so well!” We live as citizens of the holy nation in the middle of this civil nation and therefore as citizens of two nations.

The church is a holy and royal priesthood. A priesthood is a service organization; it isn’t so much that we are individually priests; it is more that we are members of a priesthood. It exists as separate (holy) from non-priests for the benefit of the non-priests. It speaks to people on God’s behalf and speaks to God on the behalf of people.

The church is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Among us, God is present on earth. We collectively are the place where God lives by His Spirit in our world. God is indeed present everywhere, but he is graciously present among us to bring salvation.

The church is the family of God. We live under the benevolent care of a wise and loving Father as family together with others who have been born into this family. As children, we carry on the DNA of our Father who is love.

The church is the new creation. God is making all things new and someday all of creation will be recreated and freed from the bondage imposed on it by human sinfulness. Whoever is in Christ is a new creation; the beginning of the end. The New Creation has begun in the believer and is the assurance that one day all of Creation will be made new.

SUMMARY

The purpose of the church is to continue the work of Christ in the world by the power of the Holy Spirit, to the Glory of God, after Jesus ascension in anticipation of his return.

THE WORK OF THE CHURCH

There are three major categories of work that the Church does: Listen to and Receive from God; Serve God by serving other believers; and serve God by serving unbelievers.

RECEIVING FROM GOD

God needs nothing; God is the Uncaused Cause. God is independent in the sense that he is not dependent on anything or anyone. This does not mean that God is uncaring and detached; merely that he is not dependent on anything for his survival, well-being, or blessing—it is rather God who gives life and blessing to us. God is not contingent; there are no “ifs” to his life.

But we are by nature worshipping creatures—we were created to worship and we will worship something. There will always be something which we fear, love, and trust more than any other thing (and it is usually us). So we praise, thank, and worship God by declaring his great works. The remarkable thing, is that in this act of worship—which seems like something that would raise the status and improve the well-being of the one being praised—we ourselves in the hearing of God’s great acts are renewed in life and blessing.

The first work of the church is to hear God’s word and receive from him life and salvation. The gifts of God are received as the church declares God’s word. So God gives through our delivering. The Sabbath Commandment is given for this purpose: “that we gladly hear and learn God’s word.”

SERVING GOD BY SERVING OTHER BELIEVERS

God needs nothing; we are dependent and needy. Because God so loved the world—including us—we love others—including other believers. When we see a brother in need, we serve God by addressing that need. We do this when we see another believer in need of instruction, correction, rebuke, training in righteousness, or a cup of cold water. Jesus said, “Inasmuch as you have done it to one of these brothers of mine, you have done it to me” (Matthew 25:37).

The “one another” exhortations of the NT become the ways in which we serve God as those who have been loved by God. When God’s love for us is demonstrated by our care for others, God is praised and imaged.

SERVING GOD BY SERVING UNBELIEVERS

As the people of God, we witness to the word and work of God when we speak those words to people verbally. We serve God when we affirm that the life we live is life given to us by God. We serve God when we witness by our actions and attitudes that God has shaped our lives by his grace in Christ: when we forgive as we have been forgiven, when we love as he first loved us.

We serve God when we speak of the things that God has done which we haven’t seen—but still believe. We serve God when we live in this present world as ambassadors of the world to come, when we live in the darkness as lights, when we live as salt in the middle of decay, when our life together as a congregation of grace and truth, is shaped by faith, hope, and love and the fruit of the Spirit.

THE ACTIVITY CATEGORIES OF THE CHURCH

Ortho is a company that makes lawn chemicals. The business of that company is to help your lawn grow the right things (and not grow the wrong things); *ortho* means right or correct. Timothy Weber says the work of the church is three “orthos:” orthodoxy (right teaching), orthopraxy (right practice), and orthopathy (right passions).

Each of the “orthos” is important to the activities of the church:

The church proclaims the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Gospel means “good news” and that good news is the proclamation of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as historical events which have meaning for us. By his life, death, and resurrection, he has secured salvation for us—and not for us only, but for the whole world. And yet, the world will not benefit from what Jesus has done if it does not hear and believe the good news. Another word for this is evangelizing. The “evangel” is the transliteration of the NT word that means good news. To evangelize, in biblical terminology, is to proclaim the evangel to people in a way that they can hear, so that they can believe.

The church is commissioned to teach. Jesus himself was known as a teacher. In some parts of the world, the word used for pastor means teacher. Where preaching emphasizes the proclamation of truth, teaching emphasizes the explanation of truth. Teaching also helps people put the truth into practice. The Word of God is the food of life. If pastoring means feeding the flock, teaching is a vital work of the shepherding office of the church.

The church is a people who pray. Jesus taught the disciples to pray and asked if, when he returned, would anyone still pray—clearly stating that to believe is almost the same as praying and that if people believed, they would pray. Paul consistently called the church to pray and set an example by praying regularly himself for the church.

The church does the work of caring for people through the classic soul care categories of healing, sustaining, reconciling, and guiding. Much of this work is done by the called pastoral staff of the church, but James says if you are sick, call the elders of the church. Much soul care is done as part of life together by people who know and love each other and bump into the problems of life as a part of life. We comfort others with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

The church is a service organization. Paul was engaged in service projects in time of famine. Jesus was busy going around doing good: healing, feeding, raising the dead. As the body of Christ in the world today, the church continues the service life of Christ who did not come to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. This service is done because we have been loved, we have been served by God, and because God has gifted and strengthened us for service so that when we serve, we serve out of the strength that God gives. The church is a fellowship community. We exist as part of the body of Christ and the one thing that brings us together is Christ. It is not because we are related biologically, nor because we are connected geographically, nor because we are each other's kind of people. We have fellowship or commonality in Christ. For Christ's sake, we are the church for each other; we are Christ for each other to care for and nurture one another in a life of faith in Christ.

THE CORE VALUES OF THE CHURCH

John wrote about Jesus saying that Jesus was full of grace and truth. As the body of Christ, being full of grace and truth as a congregation is important to us. We have a biblical and historic perspective that points us to our understanding of truth. We have a biblical-historical perspective that is grace centered. We have a biblical-historical perspective that focuses ministry in the local congregation.

THE BIBLE

We believe that the Bible is the Word of God and is the final authority for faith and practice in the church. We believe that in the Bible, God reveals himself and his work of salvation in Christ. In the Bible God reveals his will for all of humanity and for us as individual humans.

We also believe that the Bible is God's way of delivering salvation to us through the hearing of faith (Gal 3:3-5).

Therefore, we study and read and listen to the Bible because it not only gives us information that is essential to our life together, but also because it is the power by which God does his work in us as his people to justify, sanctify, and glorify.

HISTORICAL-TRADITIONAL INTERPRETIVE TRAJECTORY OF REFORMATION CHRISTIANITY

We have been shaped, whether we realize it or not, by the attitudes and opinions, and interpretations of those who have gone before us. Out of the Lutheran Reformation, we have been taught the importance of the fully completed and satisfactory work of Christ for us and for our salvation that is given by grace alone, received by faith alone. We also know that we have been shaped by people who believed that intellectual assent to theological formulas should be accompanied by a heart of trust and obedience. Christian living (orthopraxy) is and always has been, important to us.

We also have a tradition that emphasized the service of the whole people of God in ministry. The work that God has called us to do is a work for all of us and each of us to do. The work of the ordained ministry is a teaching-equipping ministry so that the whole body of Christ is growing and serving together.

We have a strong tradition of international mission that we have inherited from our history of Lutheran Pietism. We have very often devalued mission to the person next door in favor of mission to a person half way around the world. There are more Lutherans in Africa than there are in North America.

THE GOSPEL

We believe that the Gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. We believe that it is the hearing of the Gospel that creates, nurtures, and preserves faith. Salvation is a word that encompasses justification, sanctification, and glorification. We believe that it is the proclamation of the message of reconciliation that is the means God uses to accomplish reconciliation.

OUR VISION FOR THE CHURCH

WE WILL BE A GOSPEL CENTERED PEOPLE

Everybody has good advice; only the Christian church has good news. So in our musical, educational, youth, Bible study, and worship gatherings, we will focus on what God has done for us in Christ and promised to us in Christ. Our life together will be characterized by the fact that we are what we are in Christ because of what Christ has done in us and for us. Therefore, we will live as Gospel people, continuously reconciled to each other.

WE WILL BE A TEACHING CHURCH

All of the ministries of the church will operate under the clear guidance of the word of God. All the ministries of the church will be faithful to teaching the word of God in the context of the metanarrative of the Bible, the story of salvation. The context for the explanation of specific texts will be fallen human need and divine redemptive provision. As we put into practice the things we are learning from the word, we will continually be learning the will of God for humanity and for humans. Additionally, the major themes of the Bible as the story of God's coming to us to bring salvation will be applied to some degree to our work of bringing salvation to the people of our time and place. We will affirm that God is the source and center of truth (the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom) in a culture that is experience driven, pluralist, and relativist.

WE WILL BE A DEPLOYED CHURCH

The church will be more like a mission post than an established church. We will live at the edge rather than trying to preserve resources. We will live in the world rather than in the church. We will value ministry to those outside as much as we value ministry to the saints. The work of the church staff will be directed to those who are outside of the church and will be done off site as well as on site. The work of the church staff will also be to equip the saints for the ministry of the church. People will consider what it means to be the body of Christ and the holy nation where they live and work as well as being the body of Christ and the holy nation when they gather as church.

THE LEADERSHIP OF THE CHURCH

PASTORS

The pastor(s) of the church is/are men who have been called by God through the church to lead the church and speak for the church in its public gatherings. The Great Commission and the Great Commandment have been given to the whole church, but for the purposes of order, the church calls pastors to act on behalf of the church and to equip the church for its ministry. The pastor is not called to be the church. The work of the lead pastor is to lead the elder board in its shepherding and oversight work. The pastor will be the senior teacher of the church and the administration of the ministries of the church will ultimately be the responsibility of the pastor. The pastor will give care and direction to the ministry staff and answers to the board of elders. Associate pastors will work with the direction and support of the lead pastor to execute the vision and mission of the church in their respective areas of responsibility.

MINISTRY STAFF

The ministry staff of the church is the professional staff and volunteer ministry leaders in the respective ministries of the church such as music, Christian education, children's ministry, etc. These people will have been identified by the board of elders, trained in the teaching position of the congregation (the congregation's statement of faith), and affirmed by the congregation for their work. They will lead their respective ministry teams and report to the lead pastor.

ELDERS

The board of elders is the governing board of the church and the board to which the congregation entrusts the responsibility for the oversight of the ministries of the church and to which the congregation commits its care. The elders are responsible to shepherd the flock of God entrusted to it. They are to be developing the character qualities outlined in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. As teachers of the church, they will work in harmony with the constitution of the congregation and guide the church in pursuit of the vision and mission of the congregation in conformity with the constitution.

They report to the congregation.

CORE ACTIVITIES

These are the things which, if we do them well, will be most fruitful in the pursuit of our purpose.

LEADERSHIP TRAINING

It is obvious that in Jesus' ministry, the thing he focused on and spent most time doing, was training leaders. Leadership training will consist of three foci: the teaching position of the church as we understand God's self-revelation and will expressed in the Bible; personal growth in faith and leadership skills; and developing appropriate ministry skills.

GOSPEL FOCUSED WORSHIP GATHERINGS

The purpose of the weekly gathering of the church is to strengthen the saints. For many people this is the central activity of Christian life; it is the celebration of resurrection and the re-organization of reality. Since the last thing that anyone expects to hear in life is Gospel, we need to make sure that they hear it when they gather. In one sense, Jesus death and resurrection do not save anybody—it is the proclamation of Jesus' death and resurrection that saves (salvation in the broad sense that includes justification, sanctification, and glorification). We need to proclaim it; it needs to saturate our gathering.

SMALL GROUP COMMUNITY

Overcrowding, cocooning, mobility, technology, these all work toward depersonalizing our lives. We are, however, personal, relational beings. We need to make sure as much as possible that people are being engaged relationally as part of the congregation.

The probability of people who are unbelievers actually going out to look for a church is quite remote. As those who are sent into the world, it is incumbent on us to go looking for those who aren't part of the Christian Church and engage them in a relational community.

The pastoral care needs of people seem to be increasing, far exceeding the capacity and ability of a professional staff.

For these reasons (and maybe others as well) the ministry of the church will be decentralized and committed to small groups that will be organized as fellowship groups, but will have a specific mission focus so that the purposes of the church to hear and serve will be pursued in this manner.

THY KINGDOM COME
