

**Guidelines for Professional Church Worker Evaluations**  
**(from the Circuit Visitor's Manual of the LCMS)**  
**PLEASE CONTACT THE DISTRICT OFFICE TO OBTAIN TWO METHODS OF**  
**EVALUATION – 605/361-1514**

When full-time church workers hear the term “evaluation” at use in their world, they may become a bit anxious. They may be unable to think of evaluation taking place in any other context than that of a test. The Church, however, does not consider full-time church work to be a job. Rather, it is a vocation, a calling from God. Evaluations taking place under the grace of God are not the same as those performed by the world.

If district presidents desire to be involved in the evaluation of church workers, or to encourage the congregations of their Districts to participate in evaluations, a different attitude, as well as a new matrix, based on the Word of God, must be employed.

It would be well to remember that the Scripture contains many references to the accountability of those who serve the Church. God, in His mercy, preserves His Church by calling for careful evaluations of doctrine, practice and behavior of those who occupy the Office.

*The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity, keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil. (1 Tim 3:1-7)*

These words are not spoken in a vacuum. They are given in the context of the Church. Evaluations are carried out not for the sake of condemnation, but in love, for the sake of the pure proclamation of the Gospel.

**I. The nature of evaluations.**

A. Evaluations done to tear the worker down. (Destructive) All workers are fearful that evaluations are done for the purpose of tearing them down, of making them feel and/or become less valuable to their calling congregations. Evaluations in the Church should never take place within this context.

B. Evaluations done to build the worker up. (Constructive) District presidents will take care to frame the process of evaluation in terms of a desire to build the workers up so that they may be better enabled to proclaim the Gospel. We have plenty of general encouragements in the Scripture to build one another up. “Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.”<sup>1</sup> 1 Thess. 5:11. “Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” Gal. 6:2. This attitude should hold sway all the more for those who are in the Office of the Word or one of the auxiliary offices. The LCMS should be committed to fielding the most qualified, and well-trained proclaimers possible. Evaluations can be used as means of attaining this objective.

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture Quotes from- *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001.

The sainted Dr. Clarence Spiegel, who served for many years as a professor at Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield, Illinois offered his students some beneficial advice as to how to handle criticism positively. Dr. Spiegel's advice when criticized is to do the following:

1. Ask yourself, "Is it true?" If not, thank God.
2. Ask yourself, "Is it true?" If it is, thank God that it has been brought to your attention so that you can do something constructive about it.
3. Do not respond in kind.

## II. The history of evaluation.

A. Scripture. There are a number of texts that suggest that some sort of evaluation of the person filling the Pastoral Office should take place. Chief among them are I Timothy 3:1-7, and Titus 1:5-9. Both of these texts say that the Pastor should be "above reproach," and then list a number of criteria by which that quality might be judged. In both cases it seems that the evaluator would be the supervisor, Timothy or Titus. Titus is specifically told to appoint other elders and it would appear that Paul is giving him a tool to make that evaluation. Some might try to argue that the evaluation was for entering into the office. What is true for entering the office is also true for remaining in the office.

Another interesting series of texts begins with I Corinthians 4:1 where Paul says that the congregation should think of him as a servant and steward. He implies an evaluation when he concludes that stewards must be found faithful. If someone should argue that only God should evaluate the steward it would be helpful to look at II Cor. 4:5 where Paul says that he is a servant of the congregation. Likewise, both Eph. 3:2 and Col. 1:25 say that the stewardship was given to Paul by God, for the congregation. Since Lutherans are not enthusiasts we do not believe that God evaluates Pastors and Teachers immediately. The common injunction to Christians to watch out for false doctrine makes it clear that the people of God are a means that God uses to evaluate the Church worker on Biblical grounds.

B. Visitation articles. In his Preface to the "Instructions for the Visitors of Parish Pastors in Electoral Saxony" Luther begins by noting, "Both the Old and the New Testaments give sufficient evidence of what a divinely wholesome thing it would be if pastors and Christian congregations might be visited by understanding and competent persons."<sup>2</sup> (AE, 40:269) Thus he defends the practice of ecclesiastical supervision and the evaluations used in the process. In fact, he seems to lay blame for the decline of the Church upon the lack of such supervision.

*In brief this is what befell so worthy an office and nothing remained of it except the burdening and banning of people because of money, debts, and temporal goods and the making of a divine order out of the bellowing of antiphons and versicles in churches. No attention is paid to how one teaches, believes, love, how one lives a Christian life, how to care for the poor, how one comforts the weak, or punishes the unruly, and whatever else belongs to such an office. (AE, 40: 270)*

In the instructions proper, Melancthon writes, regarding the Office of Superintendent:

*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. The preachers are to exemplify a good life so that the people take no offense but better their own lives. They are not to teach or preach anything that is contrary to the Word of God or that contributes to rebellion against the government.*

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<sup>2</sup> All Visitation Quotes from- Luther, Martin: Pelikan, Jaroslav Jan (Hrsg.); Oswald, Hilton C. (Hrsg.); Lehmann, Helmut T. (Hrsg.): *Luther's Works, Vol. 40: Church and Ministry II*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999, c1958 (Luther's Works 40).

*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. (AE, 40:313)*

Please note that both doctrine and life are to be evaluated. In addition, Melancthon is at pains to make sure that the Pastor is treated fairly.

Martin Chemnitz, in his role as superintendent also insisted in a strict order of visitation which included a form of theological questioning. His questions can be found in the book, Ministry, Word and Sacraments- an Enchiridion.

C. Constitution of LCMS. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod officially continues the tradition of supervision and evaluation through the office of District President as noted in Article XII of the Constitution.

*The district presidents shall, moreover, especially exercise supervision over the doctrine, life, and administration of office of the ordained and commissioned ministers of their district and acquaint themselves with the religious conditions of the congregations of their district. To this end, they shall visit and, according as they deem it necessary, hold investigations in the congregations. Their assistants in this work are the circuit counselors, who therefore shall regularly make their reports to the district president.*

### **III. The purpose of evaluations.**

Building upon a rich history of Scripture and tradition, as well as the requirements of the Constitution of the Synod it is incumbent upon district presidents to participate in the evaluation of church workers under their care. In addition, it would be wise to involve congregations to participate in the evaluation process because the members of the congregations are the closest observers of the workers. As district presidents take up this task they would do well to keep three purposes in mind.

A. For the sake of the Gospel Evaluations of church workers should take place for the sake of the Gospel. There are two aspects to consider here. First, the evaluation should look to see that the Good News of Jesus Christ is being spoken, and spoken clearly by the church worker. This would involve both the proper understanding of the Word as well as the manner in which it is preached and taught. Secondly, the evaluation should include whether the Gospel is being clearly heard. This would include any kind of reproach apparent in the worker's life that would act as an obstacle to the hearing of the Gospel.

B. For the sake of the Calling Body Evaluations of church workers should take place for the sake of the calling body. The calling body has outlined the parameters of the call in the call documents. The evaluation should look at whether the proper assurance is being given to the calling body that the requirements of the call are being fulfilled. That being said, evaluations for the sake of the calling body would also include whether the calling body takes the proclamation of the Gospel in its midst seriously, and whether it takes the support of the worker seriously.

C. For the sake of the Worker Evaluations of church workers should take place for the sake of the worker. Because we are sinners we all need to be reminded of our God-given responsibilities. Church workers may be reminded through evaluations that they are accountable to God. The Scripture gives very clear instructions as to the doctrinal and practical responsibilities of church workers. Evaluations can be performed so that the use of God-given gifts is examined in a positive way. A positive examination will maximize accountability to God.

Since we reject enthusiasm we remember that God issues His call to service by the means of a calling body. An honest assessment of this means, would suggest that the Worker is also accountable to the calling body. District presidents are often handicapped because it is difficult to know, from a

distance, precisely what is being taught or how the Worker is living. The involvement in the evaluation, through various available methods, of the calling body is a good thing. It is also good for the Worker to be reminded that he does not work in a vacuum. He works among, with, and for his people, his sheep, as an under shepherd of the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4), Jesus Christ.

Those workers who take their accountability to God and calling body seriously, will desire to use every means to improve their work. Evaluations are for the sake of the worker because they are means to help them improve. No sinner has grounds to defend the status quo. There is always room for improvement. District presidents should do everything possible to approach evaluations with this goal in mind.

#### **IV. The authority of evaluations.**

There are, of course, elements of danger in any evaluation process. The twin heads of subjectivity can combine to destroy any good that may come of it. On the one hand the evaluator may rely heavily on his own emotional responses to the worker. On the other hand he may use an entirely subjective authority as the standard of evaluation. This document is intended to combat both dangers.

A. The Scripture The Scripture must be the foundation for the evaluation of any church worker. It is the sole authority for both doctrine and life. Any evaluation that ignores the Word of God can be of no value to the Church.

B. Confessions The Confessions of the Lutheran Church are a true exposition of the Scripture and a correct exhibition of the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. As such they will support the Scripture in any evaluation process. It is essential that Lutheran church workers teach Lutheran doctrine.

C. The call documents No individual church worker can go into all the world to proclaim the Gospel. That is one reason God invented local Church bodies. The parameters of the universal call to proclaim the Gospel are narrowed to an attainable, measurable, and accountable goal by the call document. If that is true, the call documents should be used for the purposes of evaluating church workers. The call documents signify the agreement between the worker and the calling body as to what work is to be done.

It may be valuable to note here that "Word and Sacraments" are the means God gives to His Church by which He conveys His grace. "Word and Sacraments" are not a job description. They are tools God graciously allows church workers to use to proclaim the Gospel. Call documents set forth the parameters in which Word and Sacraments are to be used.

D. The goals established by the worker and the calling body Some calling bodies become even more detailed with respect to where and how they expect their workers to accomplish their task. Sometimes annual goals are even set. A word of caution is in order here. The further away from Scripture the evaluator gets the more likely he is to treat the worker unfairly. Care should be taken to see that such goals do not contradict the Word of God.

#### **V. Encouraging Professional Church Workers to participate in evaluations.**

A. District Presidents teach their Workers If evaluation is ever to be an effective tool district presidents must find a way to teach that evaluations are not the enemy of the Gospel. The natural fear of evaluations, coupled with the distrust of the office of the district president is a huge obstacle. It can be overcome with patient teaching, and by eschewing worldly ways. If district presidents would like to use evaluations effectively they would do well to heed Paul's words in II Corinthians 4:2, "*But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's Word,*

*but by open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God."*

**B. District presidents assist calling bodies** From time to time calling bodies may ask the district president for assistance in evaluation of workers. This is a good opportunity for the district president to teach the calling body the proper context of evaluations. In this way he will strive to protect the worker from exposure to worldly attitudes that deny the divinity of the call. At no time should the district president initiate evaluations with calling bodies without the consent of the worker.

## **VI. District presidents conducting evaluations.**

At this point the LCMS has three formal opportunities for the district president to be involved in the evaluation of workers under his care.

**A. Triennial visitations** Either the president or his representative is to visit with the congregations and workers once every three years. Formally or informally what is to take place during these visitations is evaluation. The district president is to listen to preaching and teaching both for form and content. Private discussions will provide opportunity to teach in areas that require attention.

**B. Pastor's Information Form** A more formal, and permanent recording method of evaluation is provided through the use of the PIF. Presidents should acknowledge this as a form of evaluation and be aware of the dangers it entails as well as the opportunity for good. If it is to be used properly the worker should be made aware of areas where the district president thinks he should do some extra work. The best practice in regard to these evaluations is to ask the elders of the congregation for input.

## **VII. Other Tools of Evaluation.**

The district president will encourage the practice of evaluation for the church workers under his care. There are various methods for this practice that may not involve the district president directly but may strive for the same goal of improvement of the worker. Congregations participating evaluations of church workers should be encouraged to share the results with the district president.

### **A. Evaluators.**

*1. Congregation at large.* Some pastors and congregations may agree to survey the entire congregation regarding the work of the pastor. This practice has advantages and disadvantages. On the positive side, a broader base of information may be developed. On the negative side, the extremes of those who like or dislike the Pastor will be included in the sample. Allowing open comments from every member can prove more hurtful than beneficial.

*2. Elders.* Elders are an excellent source of information. They are supposed to work most closely with the Pastor. They should also know the congregation well. The danger with this group is that the female opinion will be missed.

*3. Selected leaders.* The advantage here is that women can be included in the survey group. The opinions can be sought from a wider group of respondents.

*4. Circuit Visitor.* The district president may also call his circuit visitor into service for the purpose of evaluations. The visitor will be able to observe how the worker functions on the broader scale among his peers. However, the real possibility of jealousy and rivalry must be considered when asking the visitor to help with evaluations.

B. Methods

1. *Surveys.* Most people are familiar with the range of scale rating type of survey. This provides the least amount of room for confusion. Furthermore, the results are easy to compute and compare from year to year.

a. *Personal Opinion.* Surveys that ask evaluators for personal opinion ratings are most common. (For example, How do you rate your Pastor's preaching on a scale of 1-5?) While these results are valuable, they tend to be based on emotions and are thus volatile.

b. *Observed Behaviors.* Surveys that ask evaluators to report observed behaviors may produce more reliable results. (For example, How often does the Gospel predominate in the pastor's sermons, on a scale of Always-Never?)

2. *Open comments.* Allowing evaluators to comment on open questions creates more room for understanding the complexity of a pastor's service. (For example, How effective is your pastor's preaching?) However, this practice also allows room for very hurtful words, and it is difficult to compute general results. This method ought to be used with caution.

C. Examples of evaluation tools The district president may choose various evaluation tools found online, such as 360, the tools found at LCMS.org, or the models found on the COP Portal. The district president will want to do some teaching regarding the entire process of evaluation before he offers such tools to congregations.

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