



NORTH AMERICAN LUTHERAN CHURCH

An Affirmation of Women in Ordained Ministry The North American Lutheran Church

The year 2020 marks the fiftieth anniversary of women in the ordained ministry in North American Lutheranism.

In 1970, both the American Lutheran Church (ALC) and the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) voted to admit women to the pastoral office. That same year, both denominations ordained the first women to the Office of Ministry. After the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada (ELCC) and the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC) ordained their first woman candidates, more than two-thirds of North American Lutheranism had opened the ordained ministry to both men and women. Thus, when the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCiC) was formed in 1986 and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) was formed in 1988, each church body accepted the ordination of women without controversy.

The North American Lutheran Church was officially organized in 2010. By this time, the ordination of women had become a normal and accepted practice in the church. Therefore, the NALC Constitution contains a rather succinct but declarative reference: “Ordination and reception of ordained ministers shall be a function of the NALC. The NALC shall ordain both men and women to the office of Word and Sacrament” (4.01).

Prior to the beginning of the process that led to women’s ordination, both the ALC and the LCA produced theological studies of the issue. Theses first written by the Luther Seminary faculty in 1968, which are summarized below, give insight into the basis on which the church made this decision:

- 1. Scripture does not directly address the question of the ordination of women. Consequently, it neither speaks decisively for or against it.*
- 2. The ordination of women does raise important and, at times, difficult questions. Yet there is no decisive argument from either Scripture or the Confessions against the ordination of women.*
- 3. Without a decisive biblical or confessional objection, the ordination of women remains possible. Practical objections cannot settle the issue for Lutherans.*
- 4. Consequently, the objection that ordaining women may have negative effects on ecumenical relations is lessened in force. Furthermore, the ordination of women is not the central dividing issue in ecumenical conversations.*

The Reports and Actions of the ALC General Convention in 1964 serve as a helpful reminder on biblical teaching: “Since the ministry office is not precisely defined in the New Testament, and since the duties of early officers were varied and interchangeable, and since the needs of the church down through the centuries are subject to variation, we are left to Luther’s conclusion, namely, that God has left the details of the ministerial office to the discretion of the church, to be developed according to the needs and according to the leading of the Holy Spirit.”

Likewise, the Lutheran Confessions were not concerned with this question. Ordination in the Reformation period was only available to men; thus, Article V of the Augsburg Confession gives no explicit prohibition against women’s ordination. The Office of Ministry, “which provides the Gospel and sacrament as instituted by God, is necessary as the means through which God gives the Holy Spirit and works faith, when and where he pleases in those who hear the Gospel.” Article V focuses on the function of the minister and so does not speak about gender requirements for those who are called to proclaim God’s Word.

In conclusion, we affirm the pastoral ministry of women as is stated in our NALC constitution; we commend our ordained women as faithful servants of Christ; and we believe that they are an enrichment for our church’s ministry and mission. We ask our members to give thanks to God for the faithful witness of women in ordained ministry in the last generation — and to pray for the next generation.

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