

The Cloud

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Christian Citizenship: Living Our Faith in the Public Square

By Rev Dr James Gimbel (St. John's, Kimball)

As Lutherans, we are encouraged by both Holy Scripture and our rich Lutheran heritage to take seriously our vocation as citizens. God has placed us in families, congregations, workplaces, communities, and nations, and He calls us to serve Him faithfully in each of these settings. Jesus reminds His people that they are to be the **"salt of the earth"** and the **"light of the world"** (Matt 5:13-16), bringing His truth, love, and wisdom into a world that is often marked by confusion and division.

We are blessed to live in a democratic society that allows citizens to participate in the governing process. At the same time, Christians recognize that God remains the King of Kings and Lord of Lords,

working through every form of earthly government for the preservation of order and justice. Scripture teaches us to pray for those in authority and for all who serve their neighbors through public office and civic responsibility. Whether we agree with them or not, governing officials serve in vocations through which God continues His work in the world.

As election season is upon us, Christians have an opportunity to reflect upon six important responsibilities of faithful citizenship.

1. VIEW: Examine Our Worldview

The first responsibility is to consider the lens through which we view the world. Christians seek to be guided by God's Word rather than by shifting cultural trends or political slogans. This means carefully reflecting on biblical principles related to the sanctity of human life, justice and fairness, ethical conduct, strong education, care for the vulnerable, the common good, the protection of religious liberty, and other matters. When our worldview is shaped by Scripture, we are better equipped to live faithfully and make wise decisions as citizens. We pray for God to raise up leaders who do the same.

2. INVESTIGATE: Learn Before We Decide

Responsible citizenship requires effort. Before casting a ballot, Christians should take the time to investigate the issues facing our communities and nation. Likewise, it is important to learn where candidates stand on a wide range of matters rather than focusing on a single issue alone. Democracy functions best when citizens are informed, thoughtful, and engaged. Careful investigation helps us move beyond party loyalties, slogans, and headlines to understand the deeper values and priorities that shape public policy.

3. VOICE: Speak with Wisdom and Integrity

Christians are not called to silence. Part of living faithfully in society may include using our voices to discuss important issues and encourage thoughtful civic engagement. In a culture where voter apathy is common, Christians can help foster respectful conversation and encourage others to become informed participants in public life. As we speak, however, we strive to reflect Christ by showing humility, kindness, and respect, even when discussing matters about which people strongly disagree.

4. VOTE: Participate Faithfully

After prayerfully evaluating issues and candidates, Christians have the privilege and responsibility of voting. Casting a ballot is one way we exercise stewardship of the freedoms God has granted us. No candidate or political party is perfect, but Christians can seek to support those whose leadership and policies best promote justice, stability, and conditions that allow individuals, families, and communities to flourish.

5. INVOLVEMENT: Continue Beyond Election Day

Faithful citizenship does not end once the ballots are counted. The Apostle Paul urges Christians to pray "**for kings and all who are in high positions**" (1 Tim 2:1-2). This command applies whether those leaders share our views or not. Prayer is often the first act of Christian involvement, but it frequently leads to other opportunities for service. Our commitment to Christian citizenship should lead us to

remain informed, engaged, and supportive of efforts that benefit our communities and neighbors throughout the year, not just during election season.

6. VOCATION: Serve Christ in Every Calling

Finally, Lutherans understand that God works through the vocations He gives His people. The word *vocation* comes from the Latin *vocare*, meaning "to call." God has called each of us to serve Him with the gifts and abilities He has entrusted to us. Whether in our families, workplaces, congregations, or communities, we are called to be His hands and feet in service to others. When we serve others in God's name, we "wear the masks of God" doing His work. Civic engagement is simply one more way in which Christians can faithfully steward God's gifts and live out their calling.

By this point in the campaign season, many of us may feel weary from the endless emails, text messages, advertisements, flyers, and political conversations that seem to surround us. Yet Christian citizenship is about far more than political campaigns. It is about faithfully serving God and our neighbor in every sphere of life. As citizens of both our earthly nation and Christ's eternal kingdom, we seek to live responsibly, pray fervently, and serve generously.

May God bless our nation, our communities, and our congregation as we strive to live as faithful Christian citizens, trusting in His guidance and giving glory to Him in all that we do.

It Takes a Pew to Raise Our Church Family – or – From Vice Grips to Grace, Appreciating Kids in Church

By Mr Marc Dunker (Member at Redeemer, St. Cloud)

Blessings to you! I've been thinking about my last article in which I explained a little bit about my dad – Ivan – and his theory of "59 minutes and 60 seconds" per week of worship. If you have not read the story, check out the September 2026 edition of this same wonderful newsletter!¹

To the point. My dad, Ivan Dunker, was a fairly good dad and yes, he had a good sense of humor. However, a sense of humor that even the esteemed Pastor Bruce Timm would probably label "a bit dry."² Remember, I loved my dad...it is a humorous tribute to him to share these stories with you.

When I was a kid – along with black and white TV and cars with radial tuned suspension but no airbags, we also had discipline, and it was probably discipline that differs quite a bit from today's. So, when the Dunker Troupe showed up on that random Sunday at St. Pius X Catholic Church, there was an expectation. My mother and father used the "divide and conquer" means of controlling us kids. We sat in descending order. Paul, Dad, Marc (me), Mother, Monica, and Jill. That way, all ears, neck skin, and hair were within reach of at least one parent's vice-grip-like hands!

What I mean is, we were expected to sit statue still, face forward, no gross sounds, and remain awake, for the entire 59 minutes and 60 seconds of church. My mother did not want any ugly looks from the

¹ What do you want, Marc? - editor

² Must be drier than the Mojave Desert if Pastor Timm is saying that. - editor

other moms. Or worse, from Grandma Ruby! I guess she had enough to be embarrassed about. But why is that a thing? What are our expectations of young children in church? And more importantly, how did Jesus feel about us (as kids) being there?

If you look around your sanctuary on any given Sunday, you will likely see—and hear—the beautiful signs of a growing church family. You will hear the rustle of coloring pages, the occasional dropped hymnal, the soft whispers of a curious toddler asking questions, and yes, even the occasional cry.

To the parents bringing those young children to church: Thank you for having the courage, stamina, and faithfulness to bring your little ones to the Divine Service.

We know that getting a family out the door on Sunday morning can feel like you are running a marathon before 9:00 AM. We know the anxiety of wondering if your child is being "too loud" or if the people in the pew ahead of you are annoyed. Please hear this clearly: Your children belong here. Jesus Himself said, **"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God" (Lk 18:16).**

When children are in the Divine Service, they are not just waiting until they are old enough to understand; they are actively receiving God's gifts. They are learning the rhythms of the liturgy, hearing the Word of God, and witnessing their parents confess the faith. The sounds of children in our church are the sounds of a living, breathing body of Christ.

To the rest of our congregation: God has given us a wonderful opportunity to love these families well.

As the body of Christ, we are called to bear one another's burdens. For a young mom or dad with children, just sitting through a service can be exhausting. We can wrap these families in Lutheran grace and hospitality through simple, meaningful actions:

- If your church doesn't offer activity bags, or children's bulletins, consider this a volunteer opportunity and offer to create them.
- Offer a warm smile, not a glare. A reassuring nod or a friendly smile can instantly lower a stressed parent's shoulders. Let them know you are glad they are sitting near you.
- Offer an extra set of hands. If you see a parent juggling a diaper bag, a hymnal, and a toddler, look for ways to help. Offer to hold the hymnal, pick up a dropped toy, or help color a picture.
- Be a "church aunt/uncle/grandparent." If you are sitting nearby and feel comfortable, offer to let a restless toddler sit with you for a few minutes to look at the stained-glass windows or follow along in the Lutheran Service Book.
- Give them grace. Remember that a child crying or making noise is not a disruption to the service; it is a sign that the next generation of the church is present.

Martin Luther once wrote extensively about the holiness of the everyday vocations of mothers and fathers. Nurturing children in the faith is holy work, but it was never meant to be done in isolation. It takes a pew...in fact it takes the whole congregation to raise a child.

Let's make our churches sanctuaries where parents feel deeply supported and children feel entirely welcome. Remember that **"Children are a gift from the Lord, offspring a reward from Him" (Ps127:3)**. Thank you for showing Christ's love and patience to the youngest members of our congregation!

Domineering Abuse Within the Church and the Office of the Ministry

By Rev Dr Timothy Rehwaldt (Pastor emeritus of St. John's, Popple Creek)

Introduction

Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther (1811–1887), first president of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, developed one of the most influential Lutheran doctrines of church and ministry. His seminal work *Kirche und Amt (Church and Ministry)* (1852) articulates a balanced understanding of ecclesial authority designed to prevent *domineering abuse*, whether by pastors or congregations. For Walther, *domineering abuse* is not merely an ethical failure but a theological distortion. It arises whenever either party claims authority not granted by Christ. This article examines Walther's teaching on *domineering abuse* in the Church, showing how the doctrine of the Keys, the divine institution of the Office of the Ministry, and the relationship between pastor and congregation form a safeguard against such abuse.

I. The Keys and the Church: Authority of the Congregation

Walther puts forward the thesis that the Keys belong to the Church, that is, to the believers themselves. In Thesis IV on the Church, he writes that "It is to this true Church of believers and saints that Christ gave the Keys of the kingdom of heaven, and it is the proper and only possessor and bearer of the spiritual, divine, and heavenly gifts, rights, authority, offices".¹ This foundational claim prevents pastors from asserting inherent superiority or autonomous authority. Because the congregation possesses Christ's authority directly, the pastor's authority is always derivative and ministerial.

Walther's insistence that the congregation holds the Keys is not democratic theory but a Christological conviction. The Church, as the body of believers, is the bearer of Christ's mandate. Thus, any attempt by clergy to dominate the congregation, whether by imposing human regulations as divine law or by claiming special spiritual prerogatives, is a violation of Christ's design. Walther explicitly rejects clericalism in Thesis IX: "To the preaching office there is due respect as well as unconditional obedience when the preacher uses God's Word. Yet the preacher has no dominion in the church. Therefore, he has no right to introduce new laws or arbitrarily to establish adiaphora or ceremonies in the church."²

II. The Divine Institution of the Ministry: Authority of the Pastor

Walther's rejection of clerical tyranny does not lead him to congregationalism. In Thesis II on the Office of the Ministry, he insists that "The preaching office or the pastoral office is not a human institution, but an office that God Himself established."³ Because Christ instituted the office, the congregation cannot treat pastors as mere employees or functionaries. The pastor is called by the congregation, but the office itself is divine.

This prevents the opposite form of *domineering abuse*. Thesis II is a warning against congregational domination, where congregations override Holy Scripture by majority vote, dismiss pastors arbitrarily,

or assume pastoral functions without a divine call. No such authority is granted to the congregation by Christ. Such behavior treats Christ's office as subject to human manipulation. For Walther, domineering by the laity is just as dangerous as domineering by the clergy, because both distort the divine order.

III. Mutual Dependence: Walther's Safeguard Against Domineering

Walther's doctrinal perspective established a symmetrical relationship:

1. The congregation possesses the Keys directly.
2. The congregation calls a pastor to exercise those Keys publicly.
3. The pastor's authority is real; he acts "in an office that God Himself established".⁴
4. The congregation's authority is bound; it cannot contradict Scripture or abolish Christ's office.

This dependence is designed to prevent *domineering abuse* on either side. The pastor cannot dominate because he possesses no authority apart from the Word and the Church's call. The congregation cannot dominate because it cannot redefine or nullify the office Christ instituted.

The Altenburg Debate (1841), which shaped Walther's thinking, illustrates this balance. Walther argued that the congregation's authority is genuine but not absolute; it is always subject to Christ's Word. The pastor's authority is likewise genuine but not autonomous; it is always exercised in the name of Christ.⁵

IV. Practical Forms of Domineering

Concrete examples of domineering:

A. Clerical Domineering

- Claiming special authority from Ordination
- Treating the congregation as subjects rather than fellow believers
- Withholding or granting forgiveness apart from the Word (Matthew 18)

B. Congregational Domineering

- Treating pastors as employees/functionaries
- Overriding Holy Scripture by majority vote
- Assuming pastoral functions without a divine call

Both forms of *domineering abuse* arise when either side forgets that all authority in the church is ministerial; meaning that it is rooted in Christ's Word and exercised for the sake of the Gospel.

Conclusion

Walther's doctrine of church and ministry is fundamentally a doctrine against domineering abuse. By rooting all authority in Christ's institution and the Church's call, Walther prevents both pastoral and congregational tyranny. His doctrinal view is not a compromise between extremes but a theological

structure designed to preserve the Gospel's freedom and the Church's order. In Walther's view, domineering abuse occurs whenever pastors or congregations claim authority not given by Christ and his doctrinal position is designed to ensure that neither can do so.

Endnotes

1. C. F. W. Walther, *The Church and The Office of the Ministry – Kirche und Amt*, Translated by J. T. Mueller, revised, edited, and annotated by Matthew C. Harrison (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2012), 3.
2. Ibid., 6.
3. Ibid., 5.
4. Ibid., 5.
5. August R. Suelflow, *Servant of the Word: The Life and Ministry of C. F. W. Walther* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000), 63–78.

NEWS

**Rev Gerald Heinecke (Batesville, AR)
accepted the call to Concordia, Fairhaven
on October 25, 2026. Installation Date TBA.**

**Praise God for providing Concordia with a pastor! Check the
upcoming January issue for a biography on Pastor Heinecke.**



From Bible Study at St. Cloud State on October 13.

This year, we're studying 1 and 2 Corinthians.
We meet on Tuesday nights at 7pm in Atwood in the Mississippi Building.
Contact pastorjoshuareber@gmail.com for more details!