

## Theological Aspects of Church Sustainability

The Lutheran World Federation Sustainability Program Contribution to  
Latin America and the Caribbean.

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### Introduction

As every organization in society churches also reflect about own sustainability and implement actions with the purpose of maintaining it. Likewise Latin America and the Caribbean Lutheran Churches members of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), since their foundation, as result of immigration or missionary initiatives attempt to make feasible their sustainable projection in time. However, since some years, the churches reflect and act motivated by the discussion around their own “sustainability”. This is a new word for something known. But there is something more to it, it is a new word to which are attached expectations of new ecclesiastic practises that give rise to hope for church renovation and giving dynamism to its mission.

Since 2005, as an initiative of the secretary for Latin America and the Caribbean at that time, Rev. Martin Junge, churches sustainability as joint reflection became a permanent theme with its space in ecclesiastic leadership conferences in the region. Then, after initial talks in the 2005 Conference in Bogotá, Colombia, the theme emerged in the reflection agenda of the 2006 Conference in Coronado, Costa Rica. The inclusion of this theme is full of care and is considered important to clarify that: “...the intention is not to propose models of valid paradigms for the whole region, but to offer input to start the discussion at the conference”<sup>1</sup>. These initial “input” were introduced by Rev. PhD. Nestor Friedrich that in his speech proposed a conception of ecclesiastic sustainability derived from the adequate convergence of missionary building up the church (“oikodoméo”) and the efficient and responsible administration of its resources (“oikonomia”)<sup>2</sup>. Friedrich suggests, then, investment to qualify the end-activities of the church (evangelization, communion, diaconia and liturgy) and investment in the means-activities of the church (sound administration, planning, efficient communication and the setting of priorities). After the speech, followed a discussion in which the conference participants pointed to some priority issues to be included in a working agenda: reflection on ecclesiastic models, reflection on the leadership formation models, reflection on the possibilities of use planning tools in the ecclesiastic scope and about sharing financial resources of the Lutheran international communion.

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<sup>1</sup> Leadership Conference Memoirs 2006. April, 24-28, 2006, Coronado, Costa Rica. Genève: Lutheran World Federation, 2006. P. 19.

<sup>2</sup> “Oikodoméo” means “to build the house”, whilst “oikonomia” means “to administrate the house”. About “oikodoméo” see the passages: Rm 14.19; 15.2; 1 Co 3.9; 14.3,5,26; 2 Co 12.19; Eph 2.21; 4.12,16. About “oikonomia” see: Lk 12.4; 16.2; 1 Co 4.1; 9.17; 12.4; Tim 1.7; 1 Pe 4.10.

The working agenda proposed in this occasion reflects exactly the challenging situation faced by Lutheranism in Latin America and the Caribbean at the beginning of this third millennium. Rev. Martin Junge systematized<sup>3</sup> these challenges: difficulties faced by immigration churches in the attempt to contextualize their ecclesiastic and missionary model; in general is also noticed the absence of native models to deal with situations of poverty and social exclusion; added to these, the insecurity and frustration increases with the emerging of successful ecclesiastic models within the Pentecostal evangelicals. Besides the model challenges there is the challenge of the ecclesiastic project itself, perceived in the tension between the option for a model that preserves what is left from the ecclesiastic tradition and models that want to experience the integral mission and have difficulties to integrate ecclesiastic and social aspects. Added to what has been said, the challenges of financial and human resources. As for the financial resources is noticed an impoverishment in the social church base, the lack of a Christian stewardship practice or culture, great changes in the international ecumenical cooperation with the growing reduction of resources to support Lutheran Churches in the region. As for the human resources, it is noticed a flagrant pastor centred model and the difficulty to activate the general priesthood, plus, a mistaken approach in theological formation resulted in difficulties concerning the confessional identity of church members. In this last challenge there are two aspects that feedback each other in a vicious circle: the concentration of capacity of theological-confessional articulation in the hands of few people and the push of easier theologies offered by the neighbouring religious market. Last, Junge mentions the challenge of models of management and participation and points to problems like centralization and concentration of politic-ecclesiastic power and consequently of financial resources which result in a disconnection between the central church headquarters and the community bases. In sum, he points the absence of broad consensus concerning theological identity and the ecclesiastic models and its management.

The 2006 Conference delegate to a facilitators group,<sup>4</sup> the systematization of a working proposal for ecclesiastical sustainability and to suggest strategies for its practical realization. Coherent with current discussion this group defined the main objective of the Sustainability Program with the purpose of “motivating and encouraging reflection and actions towards the projection of sustainability of Lutheran Churches members of LWF in Latin America.”<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, were established the program three main themes: a) thinking and building up a church; b) participative and strategic planning and; c) development of human and economic resources. Additionally, the group suggested implementing the program with the creation of a reference group composed by representatives of all churches who will receive formation on ecclesiastic sustainability following the three main themes.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Leadership Conference, 2008. Churches Member of Lutheran World Federation in Latin America. March, 31 to April, 4, 2008. Zamorano/Honduras. Memoir . p. 125.

<sup>4</sup> Facilitators group members: Rev. Adita Torres (Peru), Rev. Ilo Utech (Nicaragua ), Rev. Paulo Butzke (Brasil), plus the Latin America secretary, Rev. Martin Junge. After their first meeting in November, 2007 in Managua , two more facilitators joined the group: Diac. Maria Elena Parras (Argentina) and the architect Gustavo Driau (Argentina ).

<sup>5</sup> “With confidence in the future”. Defining horizons for the projection of sustainability of churches members of the LWF in Latin America. Lutheran World Federation and LWF Member Churches in Latin America Joint Program for the period of 2007 – 2010, conceptual document for discussion. P.4.

During this time of configuration of the Sustainability Program two documents became the basis for the reference group and their churches reflection and motivation. The first, elaborated by this author, called: “Casting the nets in deep waters – perspectives for IECLB (Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession in Brazil) future”, a theological paper delivered in the speech format at the XXV IECLB’s Council I October 2006. The text presented three priority challenges for IECLB: the challenge of ecclesiastic sustainability, the challenge of quantitative and qualitative growth and the challenge of identity (and of continuous Christian education). The second text produced by Rev. Martin Junge, titled “With confidence in the future - Defining horizons for the projection of sustainability of churches members of the LWF in Latin America”<sup>7</sup>. This is the conceptual text for discussion on sustainability and strategic outlining of LWF program. Both texts are important for the understanding and development of the Sustainability Program.

The intention of the present article is not to just to repeat the statements from the cited documents. The intention is to deepen the discussion on the three main themes proposed by the Sustainability Program and also some complementary emphasis that became important, (especially: spirituality and gender justice issues). Thus, this discussion will be opening new perspectives, illuminating and motivating further reflection and offering new support and impetus to formation in ecclesiastic sustainability.

## Sustainability – is it pertinent for Churches?

### A bit of History

Historically the concept of sustainability emerged from private enterprise and referred to investments made in the production area and recovery of them done through profit from sales of products. Also in non-profit civil society organizations, sector to which the churches fit often was observed the same concept directed only to financial survival. However, current world complexity turned this conception obsolete inasmuch insufficient.

Since the eighties of last century it is observed an adaptation of the concept of sustainability to an increasing world and society complexity pushed especially by environmental issues. Ribert Allen introduced the concept of “sustainable development” in his book “How to Save the World”<sup>8</sup>, an abstract of a book published by ONGs: IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature), WWF and by the United Nations Environmental Program. The term sustainability was then

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<sup>6</sup> See the documents about the representatives meetings at the Sustainability Program blog: <http://sustentabilidad.wordpress.com/>

<sup>7</sup> Both texts are available at: <http://sustentabilidad.wordpress.com/category/caja-de-herramientas/biblia-y-teologia/>

<sup>8</sup> Robert Allen. How to Save the World. Strategy for World Conservation. Toronto: Prentice-Hall, 1980. 144 p.

widely discussed after the publication of : “Our common future”, the 1987 Brundtland Report from the Environment and Development World Commission<sup>9</sup> that defined sustainable development as meeting the present needs without jeopardizing the possibilities of future generations of meeting their own needs. This definition inspired several social organizations to adopt responsible management<sup>10</sup> capable of provide a sustainable projection for the future.

## A Biblical Vision

From the point of view of Christian Faith, we understand the world as a complex and interdependent system capable of offering the necessary resources to maintain life of all living creatures. However, destruction and disconnection of supporting networks of this system ended in the concentration of wealth in the hands of few and scarcity and exclusion for many; worse, such process degraded and offended nature in a way that is increasingly deprived of guaranteeing survival in this planet. The definition of sustainability given above can only be fulfilled with the reconnection of networks of promotion and generation of life and respect for the fact that this world is an integral system. This “holistic” vision (from “holos” – entire, complete) of the world correspond to the biblical worldview that sees the world as “oikos”, “house” of God in which all elements are integrated, are interdependent and receive life from His Spirit.

In Biblical terms, sustainability in every sense depends on the relationship with the Creator: “How many are your works, Lord! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. (...) All creatures look to you to give them their food at the proper time. When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things. When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust. When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground. Psalms 104: 24, 27-30 (NIV).

The theologian Fulbert Steffensky expressed his holistic view from Christian Spirituality:

“To dominate the world, to retire from fraternal relationships with all elements of nature is to deny God as the fundament that unite everything – this has consequences for our possibilities of keep living in this world.<sup>11</sup> Nobody lives for oneself and nobody dies for oneself. In each life flows a stream that supports and interconnects everything. (...) To seek the connection means to search for meaning. There is meaning only in relation to others...We may live in relationships or we are constantly threatened by death. (...) Faith in God teaches first: All life is interconnected.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Available at: [http://conspect.nl/pdf/Our\\_Common\\_Future-Brundtland\\_Report\\_1987.pdf](http://conspect.nl/pdf/Our_Common_Future-Brundtland_Report_1987.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> See the suggested parameters for institutional development of Civil Society organizations by Domingos Armani and his transference for church reality. In: Memoir and synthesis of the meeting in El Salvador. Ayagual, November, 23-25, 2002, p. 17-20. Available at: <http://sustentabilidad.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/memoria-y-sc3adntesis-ayagualo-final.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Fulbert Steffensky. Wo der Glaube wohnen kann. Stuttgart: Radius, 2008. p. 15.

Therefore, Faith means overcoming the lack of harmony, the disconnections, the conflicts and breakdowns caused by sin, biblical understood as the breakdown of relationships. Faith is based on reconciliation and restoration conquered by Christ in His salvation work. The Church then becomes the space in which restoration and reconciliation is experienced and lived. It is a signal of a reconciled world and thus, sustainable. The call to return to the creator: this is the Gospel that creates the Church and gives back hope to the world. Through the Church the Gospel generates a space for gracious experience of life given by God. The Church is the Living God's acting instrument. The Gospel reminds us that God not only wants to keep and support this world as His home – He also wants to conduct it to plenitude. Thus the restoration to its original state as God said: "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good." (Genesis 1:31- NIV). The biblical image of this fullness is "the Kingdom of God" in which "inhabit justice", the new city of God, the New Jerusalem, in which all will be reconciled and renewed. At last, the house of God in which will be celebrated the feast supper of the consummated Kingdom of God. The Church is part of that God's house; it has an important task- to collaborate in its good administration (oikonomia), and to be solidary defender of life of all its inhabitants. Through Church's action emerge spaces of life, of reconciliation, of healing, of restoration and development. Least but not the last, the Church through its solidary witness encourages solidary actions aiming the sustainability of God's good creation<sup>13</sup>.

## The Church as a Social Organization

Modern society is characterized by complexity and differentiation. The process of transition from a pre-modern to a modern society, in the occident, changed radically the religion and the churches position. In the pre-modern society, medieval, religion assured unity to society, which central functions were under the Church influence. Kings saw themselves as instituted by God and were legitimated by the Church. People's daily life was oriented by the religious symbols and by the liturgy calendar. Culture was the expression of faith and religiosity. With the process of modernization the described unity became apart. Politics, economy, science and culture became autonomous systems managed by their own referential, therefore, out of religion and church control. Each one of these spheres of modern society also stipulated for itself an area of competence: politics are worried with power and its exercise, economy is responsible for subsistence and regulates monetary circulation, science is involved with knowledge and religion answers questions about the sense of life. For churches, this process of differentiation of modern society – that is also a process of secularization – can generate a feeling of loss of relevance. Since, in matters of faith and ecclesiastic interests the churches were used to influence and determine all spheres of life in society.

In the modern state, churches became intermediate social organizations – placed between the simple social systems and society as a whole. Through the social organizations modern society reduced its complexity and creates differentiated social functions.

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<sup>12</sup> Idem, p. 33-34.

<sup>13</sup> Actions in favour of human sustainability and solidarity are described in the inspiring and challenging book by Gínia César Bomtempo (org.). "On Earth as in Heaven: socio-environmental in the local church". Viçosa: Ultimato, 2011. p. 150.

Churches as organizations in the sphere of religion, then, are responsible for the elaboration of answers to values and sense of human life issues. A characteristic of any social organization is the formalisation of its structure and the specification of its objectives according to its identity; thus, it becomes capable of interacting with its surroundings and offers collaboration and extracts the resources for its own survival. It is important here, to make the difference between two types of organizations: the ones geared to material profit (profit- organizations) and the ones that do not have profit as an objective of its existence (non-profit-organizations). Churches belong to this second group directed to the realization of ideas and convictions.

### Systemic Approach

In the last decades, the system theories have greatly contributed to the understanding of social organizations. Therefore they can help to understand the church as a social organization. Systemic thinking developed in the dialogue between biology, physics, human and social sciences. The sociological perspective<sup>14</sup> of system theory offers a new paradigm for understanding of social phenomena such as groups and institutions- therefore, communities and churches- as well as society as a whole. Since we consider systemic thinking fundamental to understand the church in the current world we offer below a brief introduction<sup>15</sup>.

Systems are organized relationships between elements. These mutual relationships between elements within the system are stronger than any other relationships outside it. Emerge then, a limit between the system and its surroundings. Systems have the capacity to reduce social complexity and to offer orientation and meaning in a world of multiple options, at times opposed and contradictory. Equally, they reduce contingency, that is, the human tendency to act in a unstable and unexpected way, thus, offering an stable and ruled environment of coexistence.

By means of reduction of complexity and contingency, increase the harmonization of interests, the selection of themes and regulation of interactions. The result is the emerging of an organized space for effective communication and organized action with the goal to reach some defined objectives. The system coherence guarantees unit to its elements enforced by symbols, rituals and own rules- in other words – by the constitution of meaning.

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<sup>14</sup> Specially developed by Niklas Luhmann (Niklas Luhmann. Soziale Systeme. Grundrisseiner Allgemeinen Theorie. 4.ed. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1991. 674 p.). In this brief exposition we refer to Niklas Luhmann and Helmuth Willke's work. (Helmuth Willke. Systemtheorie I: Grundlagen. 7. ed. Stuttgart: Lucius & Lucius, 2006. 272 p.).

<sup>15</sup> Suggested reading: Gustavo Driau "To think with a sustainability approach" -

<http://sustentabilidad.files.wordpress.com/2010/08/pensar-con-enfoque-de-sustentabilidad.doc>

A limit emerges between whatever is meaningful and what is not, becoming the border line between the inner part of a system and whatever is outside it. Therefore, limits of meaning are constitutive to social systems. To obtain sustainability it is essential that a system have the capacity to keep stable the limit with the external environment and at the same time the capacity to continuously reconstruct the inner coherence. Systemic thinking called this process of permanent reconstruction: autopoiesis, which is an intrinsic capacity of self-recreation. Identity belongs to system coherence derived from answering two fundamental questions: "Who are we?" and "What for are we here?" Assertive answers to these questions reinforce identity and delimit the boundaries with the outside world. It is important to emphasize that as a system becomes stable and clearly defines its own identity it increases the possibilities of positively interacting with the outside world, and this in turn increases the system chances to consolidate and to grow. This interaction points to the importance of the relationship between the system and the outside world. In truth, any system is born and develops by means of resources from the outside world. The system theory refers to "relevant environment" to describe the resources that feed the system: people, ideas, time, money, and other material resources. Systems are sustainable as long as they can extract from the surroundings the necessary resources for maintenance and development. "A system is stable when it manages to adapt to its surroundings. It is very stable when it manages to improve its capacity of adaptation. The highest level of stability is reached when a system is capable of influencing its surroundings in a way that is served by it."<sup>16</sup>

### Systemic Reactions

A system is far more than the sum of its elements. It develops "emerging qualities" that are not necessarily qualities of its constitutive elements. This "emerging quality" develops out of the connection between elements. In systemic thinking there is no sense in analysing each element isolated. It is far more important to find out the relations and connection emerging between elements. Since relations between elements are not linear, it is not possible to predict exactly the system reactions to any given modifications. Reactions of cause and effect will hardly be observed. In general reactions are circular and not immediate. Within the systems there are several forms of feedback. "Negative feedback" occurs when the increase of a factor results in decreasing of other factor. Thus, the increasing of number of pastors in a church may result in decreasing of motivation for lay workers. On the other hand, the decreasing of number of pastors may motivate lay people to engage in community life. "Positive feedback" occurs when the increasing of a factor results in the increasing of other factors as well. In community life in general, an increasing in visiting homes results in a greater participation in community life, especially increasing attendance to church services. Likewise, a greater investment in formation of collaborators results in a

<sup>16</sup> Herbert Lindner. Kirche am Ort. Eine Gemeindeftheorie. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1994. p.61.

greater motivation and a better quality of ecclesiastic service. The ideal communicative relations in a system are called “synergy”. When there is synergy, connections, bonds and communication between all elements are harmonic, supporting each other and resulting in a system positive development. This is the ideal state for sustainability.

### Leadership in Systemic Approach

Systemic thinking will certainly renew the leadership approach. Linear actions based on hierarchies or external interventions do not produce the expected results. In systemic thinking leadership is geared to holistic development and seeks to develop decentralized self-managed capacities. Leadership is the place where a holistic reflection takes place and where results are made available to the system again. Systemic leadership perceives where development is stuck or interrupted; it is concerned to assure that resources reach the right place; it establishes connections to facilitate communication, which is circular and based on relationships. Such leadership keeps focus for all members in the organization’s task and the objectives- since it understands the organization as a tool to reach common objectives. The way by which leadership intervene in the system is marked by care, gentleness, always aware of the impact that may affect the whole. It seeks then to use the own system analytical and creative capacities. It overcomes then the focus on the scarcity and concentrates on the resources encouraging their activation and development. It is convinced that changes and transformation aiming to the system development do not occur in a linear way, it saves energy avoiding conflicts and do not invest in hierarchical and authoritarian structures. Instead, it seeks to develop: systemic models and structures capable of self-regulation and self-management, a conception of leadership that serves and facilitate the development of the system as a whole, since these are the basis for its sustainability. An important way to exercise leadership is to propose and facilitate participative strategic planning (PSP)<sup>17</sup>. From Systemic perspective this planning will invest in the system capacities and trust in the possibility to create networks with other systems with common objectives. Planning will recognize current needs, map and connect capacities and resources with the aim of creating synergy. Therefore, central questions are: Which are our capacities? Where can we find other capacities? How can we establish a network of relationships to meet the needs and generate a durable sustainability?

### Ecclesiastic Sustainability – a product of the Holy Spirit’s action or human planning?

In the first meeting of Sustainability Program Reference Representatives, in November, 2007, in Managua, as reflection about the possibilities of institutional development and

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<sup>17</sup> The sustainability Program will provide support for participative strategic planning in the church. Visit: <http://sustentabilidad.wordpress.com/category/caja-de-herramientas/planificacion-estrategica-participativa/>



the use of organizational management tools to be applied in dealing with church sustainability, emerged within the representatives a fundamental concern: “How to reflect the dimension of the Spirit?”<sup>18</sup> In this question is expressed the fear of dismissing divine action and in its place start trusting in human methods, plans and strategies in the process of building up the church. It is a just concern that needs a theological reflection. It is not a new issue. In all areas of Practical Theology all over again we come across the questioning about the relation between: God’s action and human effort, the Spirit and strategic planning, the gift of grace and methodology. In the area of pastoral counselling, for instance, there was a discussion about using psychology findings and methods; in homiletics there was a discussion about using rhetoric and communication theory knowledge and methods in preaching. Now, in the sphere of church building up and development, there are questions about the possibilities of using knowledge and methods from organization management, strategic planning, marketing, and system theories. To elucidate this problem theologically I refer to two theological conceptions: the theonomic reciprocity and the relation between the visible church and the invisible church.

### Theonomic Reciprocity

It is a conception developed by the theologian Rudolf Bohren in its important work about preaching titled “Predigtlehre”<sup>19</sup>. In the relation between Spirit and method, Bohren decides first to trust fully in the Spirit: “to preach I need above all the Holy Spirit.”<sup>20</sup> This is true about the preparation as well as the delivering of preaching. Thus, he declares: “the Spirit reveals Himself as the origin, the power and the objective of preaching”<sup>21</sup>. Paradoxically, the primacy of the Spirit confers a new emphasis in what is human and what we can accomplish. In other words, the pneumatological point of view allows dignifying the point of view anthropological – with its art, technic and methods. How is it possible to claim at the same time, the primacy of what is theological and what is human? In this matter Bohren points to the structural differences between Christology and pneumatology: God act differently in incarnation (Christ) and in Pentecost (Spirit). Christology affirms that Christ gives us salvation through His sacrifice in the cross – this without our participation. It is a substitution act detached from us. Pneumatology in turn, affirms that the Spirit that dwells in us wants to act with our participation. The Spirit is a spirit of synergy that acts in reciprocity, correlation and correspondence. Nevertheless, such reciprocity is a “theonomic reciprocity”<sup>22</sup>. It is theonomic because God is the subject and not the result of our efforts. It can only be asked in prayer, can be waited in hope and can be received with thanksgiving. It comes from God’s initiative that embraces us, encourages us, activate us and invite us to be his collaborators.

<sup>18</sup> With confidence in the future. Abstract of the first meeting of Sustainability Program Reference Representatives – Lutheran Worlds Federation. Managua, November, 5-9, 2007. P.3.

<sup>19</sup> Rudolf Bohren. *Predigtlehre*. 5.ed. München:Chr.Kaiser, 1986. 592 p.

<sup>20</sup> *Op.cit.*, p. 66.

<sup>21</sup> *Idem*, p. 74.

<sup>22</sup> *Idem*, p. 76.

This reciprocity can only be affirmed in the sphere of pneumatology. To claim it in the sphere of Christology would be blunt heresy. This way, the divine miracle and human technic, the Spirit and planning can walk together as partners, since the Spirit dignifies our work and effort. It is fundamental that this reciprocity must be kept under theological primacy. If methods, technics, and human planning claim autonomy, they will become “useless servants” (Mathew 25:30). In the same manner, our objectives should subordinate to God’s will and our activities must be kept depending on God’s blessing. In the Biblical image: “Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain.” (Psalm 127:1). In practice this means: in all planning and acting is necessary to keep a praying and trusting in God attitude. It has to do with a spiritual dealing with methods, what is far more than a simple transposition of them to the church situation.

### Relation between the Visible Church and the Invisible Church

In Esmalcalda articles, Luther defined the church as “the saint believers and the lambs that listen to the good shepherd” – an ecclesiological definition by which “even a seven-year-old child knows what is the church”<sup>23</sup>. For Luther the Church comprises a group of people that meet together to listen the Gospel, to pray, to receive forgiveness, to celebrate the sacraments, to comfort and to counsel each other. Luther is based in Mathews 18:20: “For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them”. We perceive then, that Lutheran Ecclesiology coincides with that of the Gospels: two, three or more people gather in the name of Christ, invoke His name, listen to His word, and share the bread and wine. This event can be organized and planned. That means: in this encounter Christ himself is present. Faith perceives that people are comforted, restored in this human encounter – because the Resurrected is present with His power. This is exactly what cannot be panned or organized. This can only be asked and wait in faith – if it happens; it is a divine gift, only perceptible with the eyes of faith. They are two sides of the same church – on one side we see the human encounter that can be planned and organized; on the other side we see the spiritual reality, a present a divine gift. One is visible and depends a lot from our effort and work. The scarce human and material resources force us to plan and administrate in a professional and effective way. Yet, the invisible side, that Luther considers the true Church, is an event and reality created by the Spirit of God through His word and sacraments, they are not available to be influenced and exist from divine plenitude. Whilst the visible side take us to work and organize; the invisible side take us to prayer and adoration. Spirituality and management – certainly different, but in building up the Church must constitute a synergetic alliance. Theological primacy must be kept – to protect what makes the Church to be Church – Christ’s call through the Gospel that by the power of the Spirit creates faith and communion – it is possible to “organize what

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<sup>23</sup> Book of Concordia, p. 338

is organizable”<sup>24</sup>. In this way a good management can be compared to “prepare the way” (Mathew 3:3) for the miracles of faith and Church.<sup>25</sup>

## Church Models

Whoever asks or searches for church models has necessarily to enquire about the ecclesiological biblical-confessional criteria. It is not a matter of extracting an ecclesiological model from the New Testament witnessing to be implemented in present churches, precisely because Biblical research reveals plurality in structures and forms of ministry and community organization in the New Testament. Then the question that fuels our discussion is: Granted plurality in the New Testament, are there fundamental ecclesiological criteria with significance for the current ecclesiastic organization? Biblical research verified that the church as communion of people, that is, as a social organization, since the beginning did not manage to subsist without a minimum of institutional forms and structures. We perceive that faith to be lived authentically needs ecclesiastic communion, the social organization of faith. Below, we present the historical development of these initial institutional forms and structures, identifying the criteria that guided its establishment.

### Jesus and His circle of Followers

Jesus neither founded the church nor instituted ministers. But with the call to discipleship, the constitution of a communion of disciples and the order to serve, Jesus gave input that determined the future organizational church development. Jesus called to repentance in face of the Kingdom of God and invited all his listeners to a new communion with God (Mark 1:15). However, the call to integral discipleship was made only to some followers. To them Jesus demanded to forsake their professions (Mark 1:18; 2:14), their families (Mathew 8:19-22), their properties and possessions (Mark 10:17-22), in order to participate in Jesus’ the pilgrim’s life (Mathew 8:20). The disciples were connected with Jesus in a service communion in a time of eschatological irruption and their main task was to call Israel to repentance offering salvation through word and action (Mark 6:1-13). Jesus’ relationship with his disciples correspond to what is observed in prophetic-charismatic movements that already in the Old Testament were important (I Kings 19:19-21) and in Jesus’ time experience revival.

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<sup>24</sup> Herbert Lindner. Kirche am Ort. Ein Entwicklungsprogramm für Ortsgemeinden. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2000. p. 32-33.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Herbst. Spiritualität, Gemeindeaufbau und Marketing. In: Herbst, Michael (org.). Spirituelle Aufbrüche: Perspektiven Evangelischer Glaubenspraxis. Festschrift Für Manfred Seitz Zum 75. Geburtstag. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 2003. p.191.

Around the disciples there were a great number of followers who keep their daily lives. Certainly they accompanied Jesus sporadically and submitted to His teaching, besides they gave support to Jesus with their possessions and dwellings (Mark 14:3; Luke 10:38f; John 11:1f). The limit between the “twelve” and other followers was not clear cut. Each one had the freedom to define his or her degree of commitment, emphasizing the Kingdom of God as a space of freedom. The number “twelve” had a symbolic character pointing to the integrity of God’s people and the twelve tribes, that in Jesus’ time were scattered – and which reestablishment was a messianic promise. Therefore, the Twelve represent Jesus’ claim over all people from Israel, and became a symbol the fact that His acts there was an eschatological restoration. According to tradition, Jesus related closer to three disciples: Peter and the brothers James and John (Mark 5:37; 9:2; 10:35). However, this relationship did not result in power hierarchy over other disciples. On the contrary, before James and John’s explicit request for power and authority over the rest of the group, Jesus exposed His standard for relationships within His community: mutual service. Jesus understood His own ministry as being in constant service (Mark 10:45; Luke 22:27), the only possible attitude in God’s kingdom. Since Jesus demanded from His disciples the same attitude, He placed them in a contradictory position with all human society power structures: “Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:43-45). Derived from this standard non-hierarchical and non-authoritarian, Jesus’ church is forbidden to be structured with a power hierarchy. All offices and functions, even when carrying authority, are diaconal<sup>26</sup>, are service, and must be carried out in this spirit. Women active presence (Mark 15:40; Luke 8:1-3, etc.) in the circle of Jesus’ followers demonstrate the new reality in God’s kingdom and detachment from Jewish religious standards and its gender restrictions. They kept active during Jesus’ ministry, including His crucifixion and death. Moved by diaconal care, they do not sunk in sorrow and mourning- they became witnesses of resurrection, opening to the whole community the Pascal perspective, fundamental to the community continuity.

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<sup>26</sup> In the New Testament the term “diakonia” (that means *to serve*, especially *to serve* the tables), is the technical term for *ministry*, that can be defined as: “a leadership office or function carried out in the name of an institution, attached to powers established by right and socially recognized”. It is significant that for community functions in the New Testament neither used the terms from Greek administration nor the current religious terms. “Diakonéo” is different from these terms because it means: “personal service to another person delivered with love”. (KI TTEL, Gerhard. Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament. V.II. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1990. p. 81).

## The Jerusalem Community

The Holy Friday disaster seemed to put to an end Jesus' work and dismantled the group of disciples. However, several apparitions of the resurrected One (1 Corinthians 15:5; Mathew 28:16-20; Luke 24:36-49; John 20:19-23), made possible the community of Jesus' followers and their reorganization in Jerusalem. The coming of the Holy Ghost over the community at Pentecost (Acts 2) was understood as the fulfilment of prophecies about Israel restoration (Isaiah 59:21; Ezekiel 36:26f; Joel 2:28f).

Early Christian primitive community was marked by: the apparitions of the resurrected One, descending of the Holy Spirit, conversion and baptism of many. Acts 2 only states that: "they persevered in the apostles doctrine, in the communion and breaking of bread and prayers", "they had everything in common", they met in the temple and in their houses. The expectation of imminent Christ's return nurtured community life. As this immediate expectation was not fulfilled they had the need to better organize community life. The group of twelve, reconstituted by the choosing Mathias (Acts 1:26), was the core around whom the Jerusalem community was structured. The central figure among the twelve was Peter. He had been Jesus' close friend, he and a group of women were the first witnesses of the resurrected One (1 Corinthians 15:5). He represents the community publicly before the people (Acts 2:14f; 3:1-10; 5:15), before the Jewish authorities (Acts 3:11-26; 4:8-22), and lead the community in organization matters (Acts 5:1-11). His authority was not institutional yet, it was charismatic, derived from the pre-Pascal history. From the twelve emerge the group of "apostles" (the "sent" ones). They were the twelve plus James (1 Corinthians 15:7; Galatians 1:19) Jesus' brother, Barnabas (1 Corinthians 9:6; Galatians 2:9), the apostle Andronicus and the apostle Junia (Romans 16:7), maybe some others not expressly mentioned. The legitimacy of this restricted group was based in the vocation and sending by the resurrected Lord (1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:7-8). As first hand witnesses of the salvific happenings, the "apostles doctrine" (Acts 2:42) became the standard for Christian teaching and message for all times. While the twelve were restricted to Jerusalem, the apostles felt sent to outside the limits of the holy city and even outside the limits of Judaism (Acts 9:32-43; 10). With missionary creativity, the community leadership became a trio named "the columns". They were: James, the Lord's brother, Peter and John. After "The apostles Council" (48 A.D.) only James lead the community with the help of a Presbytery (Acts 15:2, 4, 22-23; 21:18). An institution with current Jewish origin adopted by the primitive community, the Presbytery was made of approved Christians, elected by the community to keep the tradition and to take care of administrative matters. It is intriguing the election of a presbytery among the Greek group, part of the primitive community, with diaconal functions (Acts 6:1-6). Besides the "service/diaconia of the word" was instituted the "service/diaconia of tables" with the task of caring for the well-being of the needy.

The installation in the new service happened through ordination with laying on of hands and prayer. In addition to these institutional elements there was an element typically charismatic in Palestine communities' life: the prophet<sup>27</sup>. Mentioned only on the fringes (Acts 11:27; 21:10), its function was only to predict the eschatological future and to preach the apostolic message. They were itinerant preachers (Mathew 10) that visited the Christian communities dispersed by the first church persecution; the most important was the one of Antioch.

### The Antioch Community

Together with Jerusalem, Antioch is placed in church history as the second centre for Christian faith. Here the young Christian church takes a qualitative leap in its development. Jesus' followers were called Christians for the first time in history and seen as a group apart from Judaism. This condition emerged from the increasing integration to the new community of non-Jewish people – "gentiles" who were baptized without previous circumcision. The theological basis for such practise was the understanding that Christ was the end of law and was not necessary anymore to become a proselyte-Jewish through circumcision in order to become a member of God's people, the Church. The practical consequence of this new theological view was the first missionary journey carried out by Paul and Barnabas and supported by the Antioch community (Acts 13:14). The missionary activity resulted in the emerging of communities that did not have a Jewish core anymore. They were mainly gentile-Christian communities (Acts 13:48f; 14:27). The preparations for the first missionary journey show a bit of the Antioch community. The church leadership was formed by small group of prophets and teachers (Acts 13). It is not clear if they were at the same time prophets and teachers or if they were two different groups. Barnabas, for example, was a prophet and a teacher at the same time, maybe this was the case. Important enough is to know that in Antioch the tradition of itinerant preachers and prophets gave birth to Paul's great missionary project. Barnabas and Paul are devoted, ordained with laying on of hands and prayer and sent in a church service.

### The Apostle Paul and his communities

Paul did not implant a fixed ecclesiastical structure in the communities he founded. The fact that he needs to deal with community issues in his letters suggest some improvisation in church organization. Nevertheless, Paul left leaders in these communities.

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<sup>27</sup> Tradition based in the source Q, a collection of Jesus' sayings more ancient than the gospels recently discovered by biblical research.

He uses several titles to describe them: “Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you” (1 Thessalonians 5:12), “We have different gifts, ...prophesying,...serving...encourage,...giving,...to lead...to show mercy,...(Romans 12:6-8); “And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues” (1 Corinthians 12:28), “to submit to such people and to everyone who joins in the work and labours at it” (1 Corinthians 16:16), “Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all God’s holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons” (Philippians 1:1). Even though Paul had not elaborated a theory for ministries, we can extract principles for church governing that are pertinent in our time.

- First is the reaffirming of Christ’s model that serves as standard. He demands from leaders: “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1); “In your relationships with one another, have the same mind-set as Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5).
- Second is redirecting service and gifts to build community. Personal capacities and leadership positions exist to serve the communion of the body of Christ. They were not given for personal exaltation and they must not foster competition between members. Especially in Corinth Paul had to struggle against the influence of itinerant preachers and prophets who had in mind only and individualistic spirituality and not the building up of community.
- Third is affirming that each Christian participates of building up community process with his or her personal gift. Gifts are given to the community in view of its needs. They are concrete manifestations of God’s grace (“caris”) give to the whole community. No particular charisma embraces all grace from the Spirit. It needs other charismas to complement it. Every capacity, activity – even secular - become charisma when put to service to build the body of Christ.

It is interesting that the list of gifts (charismas) from 1 Corinthians 12:28 includes fixed functions, not spontaneous, connected to defined people: “apostles... prophets... teachers” are permanent functions while: “miracles... gift of healing, helping, governing and variety of tongues” are spontaneous charismas. We observe that for Paul ministries were delegated to staff of an institution but to people with a specific charisma. In addition, we see that besides the spontaneous service some people have to be always on call to serve the community in a trustworthy manner taking up a permanent ministry. Full Christian community development depends on the balance between permanent and spontaneous service. In his letters Paul includes as permanent ministries: apostles, prophets, bishops and deacons. The first three are ministries geared to preaching the Word and the last two dedicated to presiding and service. Within the ministries related to preaching the Word apostleship is restricted to the group sent by the resurrected. This ministry was extinguished after death of the twelve apostles. Prophecy refers to the capacity of witnessing the gospel in a way that the community is touched existentially. He or she interprets the signs of times and the Word of God updating it to the hearers. Teachers, in turn, are responsible to teach the

Community (Galatians 6:6; Romans 12:7). They are responsible for keeping the apostolic tradition. More than prophecy the ministry of teaching needs continuity and perseverance. In addition to the charisma other pre-requisites are necessary: teachers need to know how to read and write, to know the manuscripts, the oral tradition with Jesus' sayings and the rules of interpretation for the Old Testament. It requires then time of preparation and qualification for the function. Ministry related to leadership and service is essentially connected to the local community. The term *episcopo* (bishop) derives from secular Greek used to name the function of public administrator. Maybe it had to do with the institutionalization of charisma of "governance" ("kybernésis" - 1 Corinthians 12:28). They are responsible for coordinating the church service and the different "houses" ("oikías"). When Paul mention bishops in plural he conveys the idea that they are a group of coordinators of different "houses", and together they are responsible for the directing the local community. While the term "deacon" is a creation of Christian community originated in the "service to the tables" (Luke 22:27; Acts 6:2) during the Lord's Supper and after it as the needy were waited on. Ephesians' author, probably a Paul's disciple representing the church second generation, lists besides "apostles and prophets", "evangelists, pastors and teachers". Apostleship and prophecy are the ministries that founded the church (Ephesians 2:20; 3:5). As the author refers to them he looks to the past, to the church beginning. As he refers to the other ministries he confirms the second generation. Pastors preside the community and perform therefore episcopal functions (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 2:25; 5:2). They are directly connected to the teachers. The community direction takes place through the announcement and teaching of the apostolic gospel. Evangelists probably are itinerant preachers and missionaries (Acts 21:8). All ministries are considered a divine institution: "So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers,..." (Ephesians 4:11). But Christ did not only give ministries, previously gave charisma to the community. The ministries function is: "...to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up..." (Ephesians 4:12). Community build up happens then, through cooperation between permanent ministries and spontaneous charisma given to the community.

### Pastoral Letters

Letters to Timothy and to Titus reflect church reality in its third generation, during the last years of the first century. The Pastoral Letters reflect the struggle against heresies and are interested in systematizing church and ministries development, they give a comprehensive ministries description. Three ministries are mentioned: *episcopos* (bishops), deacons and presbyters. There is an effort to conciliate two leadership structures: the Pauline (bishops and deacons) and the Christian-Jewish (presbytery). The presbyter office was representative define by age, experience, social position, not related to a specific charisma. The episcopal office was defined by the capacities and



Gifts for a specific function, as the case of Paul. Pastoral Letters favour episcopate and suggest that besides the presbyters to have a bishop that runs the community professionally (1 Timothy 3:11). The correlation of both ministries is a Pauline tradition (Philippians 1:1). Both are professional ministries that demanded training (1 Timothy 3:1, 8) and probably received a salary. Pastoral Letters give great importance to ordination for ministry. The core of ordination is the laying on of hands by the presbytery (1 Timothy 4:14) and by the apostle (2 Timothy 1:6). Thus, ordination is connected to both: the community and the apostolic tradition. By the laying on of hands, God grants the gift, the charisma needed to perform that ministry: "Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you." (1 Timothy 4:14, 2 Timothy 1:6). The granting of charisma gives the ordained person the assurance that the resurrected, in fact wants to use his or her capacities and gifts to build up the community, granting him or her power and authority. Analysis of Pastoral Letters shows that the need to protect the apostolic doctrine resulted in a concentration of ordained ministries in detriment of community charismas. The only charisma dealt with is the ministry charisma. The difficult task of keeping the apostolic gospel identity for future generations narrowed community life. Another letter from this time, the first Peter's letter considers greater community participation: "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms." (Peter 4:10). Through his or her gifts every Christian participates of real priesthood and assists in building up the spiritual house, the church (1 Peter 2). Probably, community life at that time was richer than what Pastoral Letters let us know.

## Post New Testament Development

The Didache (100d.c) lets perceive the process of substitution of original ministries, apostolic and charismatic, due mainly to its gradual disappearance. Bishops and deacons gained greater theological importance. In Ignacio's letters (110), monarchic bishop of Antioch, the bishops and deacons with presbyters' hierarchical structure harmonization process is consolidated. Clement of Rome introduced the idea of episcopal succession. The core of ordination is not anymore the commitment to the apostolic doctrine, and becomes concerned with the external order of ordination. In the middle of the second century, both concepts are interconnected in the institution of monarchic bishop in apostolic succession. Another important detail to be observed in the development of following centuries is the tendency to see the ministries in their connection with the Lord's Supper.

The minister's major duty becomes the Eucharistic celebration. Ordination in turn granted the power for realization of Eucharistic sacrifice. After the establishment of monarchic episcopate in local communities the same centralizing process happens regionally. Ecclesiastic provinces are created under the direction of an archbishop. Then the centralization process is repeated within the provinces and is transformed in episcopal dioceses lead by bishops that are under an archbishop with headquarters in the more representative community or city. Little by little, it takes place a geographical separation (theological as well) between the east and west churches. Ecclesiastic policies correspond to the state policies (power, corruption, manipulation, violence, etc.) and very often the church serves the state interests. Rich and noble people start to dominate the communities and the church. New Testament exhortations (1 Corinthians 1:26-29; James 2:6) are forgotten and neglected. Power and wealth are reinterpreted in a positive way and consolidated in a definite way during the Constantine era started in the IV century. With time only Rome and Byzantium disputed primacy and power over Christianity. Starting with Leo I (440-461) the idea of papacy predominance and Rome dominium developed in the west. Based on Mathew 16:18, about Peter's priviledges<sup>28</sup>, considered the first community bishop having received from Jesus the keys and the power (Mathew 16:19), the power to rule (John 21:15), the power to teach (Luke 22:32), corresponding to the educational and legal sacramental acting (múnus), of the roman church. Salvific activities are in charge of the hierarchy - Bishop, Presbyter and Deacon – that represent Christ and are over and before the believers. The church apostolicity and the historical connection with Christ are warranted by the conception of succession of episcopal ordinations. The culmination of these powers is concentrated in the Pope.

### Lutheran Ecclesiology

The classical formulation of what is the church for the Lutheran Reformation is stated in the article VII of the Augsburg Confession (1530):

“Also they teach that one holy Church is to continue forever. The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered. And to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike. As Paul says: One faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, etc.”.

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<sup>28</sup> Before the fact that based on historical research, Peter probably never was Rome's bishop, the Roman Catholic conception has difficulties to demonstrate its theological plausibility, instead, demonstrated its political plausibility.

The church is not a hierarchical institution legally overruling believers – the believers themselves are the church as they meet in the same faith around the preaching of the Gospel and in the evangelical exercise of the divine sacraments. Church is the synonym of Christian community gather together by Christ Himself. It is a such simple definition that for Luther, “For, thank God, [to-day] a child seven years old knows what the Church is, namely, the holy believers and lambs who hear the voice of their Shepherd.” (Smalcald Articles, Art. XII). It is important to notice that the Good Shepherd’s voice and presence is mediated: through the pure Gospel preaching and the administration of correspondent sacraments. Are the means of grace, means of salvation in which Christ Himself is present. In the context of these ecclesiological definitions, faith is to listen to the preaching as Christ’s voice; faith is to receive the sacraments as his action for us and in us. This faith unites us to other brothers and sisters, transforming us by grace in His church. Even if God uses people as His instruments in preaching and ministering the sacraments, He remains Lord and sovereign in building up His kingdom and His people. He leads and rules the church through the dynamics of the Word of God: “The Holy Spirit Himself uses it as an instrument and anoints as sanctifies with it the church... Wherever then you may hear such word and see that is preached, believed, confessed and obeyed, there is no doubt that there you have a true holy catholic church, a holy Christian people, no matter how small their numbers may be...the word of God cannot exist without God’s people; on the other hand, God’s people cannot exist without the word of God.”<sup>29</sup>

#### General Priesthood and the Especial Ministry

Years 1519-1520 were marked by the increasing conflict with Pope and with the Roman Church, ending with Luther’s excommunication in December, 1520. In most writings from that time, Luther strongly criticises roman ecclesiology. In the writing “The Christian Nobility in the German Nation” Luther accuses “Romanists” of building three walls around themselves “with which they protect themselves in a way that nobody can reform them” (SW II, 281)<sup>30</sup>. The walls refer to division of Christianity into spiritual sphere and temporal sphere, the Pope’s exclusivity to interpret the Scriptures and to call a council. To these roman walls, columns of their ecclesiology, Luther opposed his conception of General Priesthood. For Him, “It has been devised that the Pope, bishops, priests, and monks are called the spiritual estate; princes, lords, artificers, and peasants, are the temporal estate. This is an artful lie and hypocritical device, but let no one be made afraid by it, and that for this reason: that all Christians are truly of the spiritual estate, and there is no difference among them, save of office alone”. (SW II, 282).

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<sup>29</sup> LUTERO, Martin. Church Council (1539). Selected Works VII, p. 409-410.

<sup>30</sup> LUTERO, Martin. The Christian Nobility in the German Nation (1520). Selected Works II, p. 281.

To belong to the “spiritual state” means to be a priest ordained by the baptism: “Thus we are all consecrated as, priests by baptism, as St. Peter says: ‘you are a royal priesthood, a holy nation’” (1 Peter 2: 9) (SW II, 282). Luther goes further and says: “For whatever issues from baptism may boast that it has been consecrated priest, bishop, and pope, although it does not beseem everyone to exercise these offices.” (SW II, 283). Therefore, it does not exist any spiritual dignity beyond that granted by baptism. The postulate of the General Priesthood does not eliminate the need of special ministry. Opposing Roman conception, however, ordination to ministry do not grant any special metaphysic quality to the minister such as, for example, to consecrate the Lord’s Supper elements, performing the mess sacrifice – the centre of order sacrament. Truly the ones ordained for special ministry: “are not different or have more dignity than other Christians but for the fact that they must minister the word of God and the sacraments- this is their occupation and office” (SW II, 284). In the writing: “The Christian Nobility in the German Nation” Luther refers to the special ministry as a divine institution saying: “I want to speak about the priest state that was instituted by God and must lead a community with preaching and ministering the sacraments, to live within the community in a temporal home”. At the same time, this minister must be called by the community and could have a shared ministry: “each city elects from the community a keen and educated Christian, give him the priest’s office and supports him with community funds, giving him all freedom to marry or not. He would have a team several priests and deacons...to help him to lead the people and the community with preaching and the sacraments” (SW II, 312). The conception of General Priesthood is not exhausted with the criticism anti-roman. Actually, for Luther the General Priesthood was a vision of a new church which internal structure is not the hierarchy but the mutual priesthood of believers. Besides the direct access to God, this priesthood is characterized by the power to be able to intercede in favour of brothers and sisters and for the world. Luther sums up these two priesthood dimensions as he writes: “A Treatise on Christian Liberty”: “A Christian man is the most free lord of all, and subject to none; a Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to everyone” (SW II,437). The church in this sense can be understood as the body of Christ, as communion sanctorum! Communion for Luther is an event of sharing and exchange: I give to Christ my sins and receive from Him justice; I give to my brothers and sisters my property and receive from them their need. Christ’s priestly dedication, as He fully takes our form in His incarnation and cross must take place also among the members of His body. Christ’s priestly dedication in our favour liberates us and commits us to priestly action in favour of the needy from our community and society. However, the priestly intervention in favour of brothers and sisters and in favour of the

world, is far more than a prayer of intercession. Christian priesthood, like Christ's priesthood, is self-denial, is self-emptying, and is to become a servant. Love that move Christian priesthood is the same love that moved Christ to incarnation and the cross. Luther lists several functions or practical ways to experience the General Priesthood: the exercise of a secular profession as service to our neighbour, spiritual parenthood and family fundamental catechesis, stewardship of material assets, Christian witness in word and deeds, baptism, fraternal counselling, intercession and spiritual-theological discernment. This dynamic understanding of ecclesiastic leadership must have had practical consequences in the establishment of coherent and fitting structures in tune with current theological understanding. Fear of Reformation left wing, Anabaptist and Pentecostal influence over communities kept initial Lutheranism more conservative than necessary. As years went by Melancthon's<sup>31</sup> theology took over. The conception of ecclesiastic direction through the Word of God was again connected to the ordained ministry, preventing the community of their spiritual-theological rights and significantly weakening the church spiritual dynamics. It is the current Lutheran Church task to rescue the Luther's ecclesiological vision and to carry it out with theological responsibility in its diverse social and culture contexts.

## Development of Human and Economic Resources

### Resources as gifts from Creation

Every organization needs resources in order to survive and to develop in sustainable way. This is also true for the church. Theologically it is aware that to be a good steward is a responsibility granted by the Creator himself. In the creation narratives man and woman received the mandate to well take care of God's garden (Genesis 2:15). They received permission to live on the garden's fruits. Trust in the Creator and His care for survival of his creatures was and important theme in Jesus' teaching (Mathew 6:25-34). In accumulation of wealth in selfish greed He saw evident signs of sin, that is, a rupture in the trust relationship with the creator (Mark 10:17-31). Thus the disciple's poverty (Mathew 10) was a symbolic preaching. An evangelical way to deal with material resources is shown in the Eucharist. "Here salvation and creation history are connected. The Lord's Supper elements motivate gratitude and praise to the Creator; they are blessed and broken in order to give life."<sup>32</sup> It is understood that Church connected Eucharist to Diakonia, liturgically and practically.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Melancthon divided the church in teachers and hearers. The fundamental differences between Luther's and Melancthon's ecclesiology: for Luther the church is define based on communion and for Melancthon is defined based on right teaching. For Luther ministry is based on General Priesthood and internal differences are established by personal charismas and their function; for Melancthon ministry is the office of teacher opposed to community.

<sup>32</sup> Herbert Lindner. Kirche am Ort. p. 245

## Financial Resources

Resources are scarce therefore they need to be administrated in responsible way. The ecological crisis taught us that the resources are not only scarce but limited and finite. The Church needs to learn from management disciplines: how to accomplish efficiently the greater number of tasks possible related to church mission, using as little resources as possible. The New Testament gives us useful criteria to use financial resources in the church. Biblical research<sup>34</sup> shows that “diaconia” was the fundamental criterion to use financial resources in the communities. Together with “diaconia” and never disconnected from it was also the need to support “martyria”, the witness of the Gospel carried out by itinerant preachers- and the need to support “koinonia”, a communion that demanded from communities to support those that were called to preach Christ, that is, permanent ministries that demanded full time dedication. Pauline communities had huge expenses with “diaconia” and with mission – especially with sea travel and support for apostles and missionaries. Resources were given on voluntary basis and were proportional to material possessions. Economic resources were not only spent on local community demands. Especial collects from the local communities were destined to other communities scattered in the known world at that time. This collects did not have only the social motivation, but mainly a spiritual motivation and expressed communion in Christ. (Romans 15:26; 1 Corinthians 6:1-2).

## Human Resources

### Systemic Vision Aspects

Individuals are the elements of social systems. They are the “inner core”<sup>35</sup>. In the relationship between the system and each person occurs an event of exchange and barter: the system subsists from the resources made available by its members- time, energy, ideas and material goods. A person in turn benefits from specific services offered by the system. The system, in addition, reduces the disturbing world complexity and contingency offering coherence and security.

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<sup>33</sup> Sissi Georg. *Diaconia and Christian Worship Service*. São Leopoldo: EST, 2003.

<sup>34</sup> I am based on research done by Ulrich Luz. *Die Kirche und Ihr Geld im Neuen Testament*. In: Lienemann, Wolfgang. *Die Finanzen der Kirche*. München: chr.Kaiser, 1996.p.525-554.

<sup>35</sup> Wilke, op.cit., p. 59

It gives guidance and meaning. Therefore, sustainable systems are existentially relevant for their members offering possibilities of accomplishment, meeting their needs and expectations. Members have the perception of receiving more than what they give in terms of time and money. The capacity of a system to meet its members' (or potential members) wishes, interests and needs result in advantages that compete with competitor systems and significantly increases the possibilities of growth and sustainability. When a system meets the expectations (subjective and objective) of its members with quality, efficiency and reliability, it gains fidelity and commitment from members, which in turn results in sustainability. Through volunteer work from members the church has energy and resources available. If these members are motivated, trained and followed properly, they will contribute significantly for ecclesiastic development and sustainability. These human resources are independent from internal or external financial resources. Thus, one of priority strategies for building ecclesiastic sustainability is to captivate new collaborators and volunteers. This cannot be an occasional process but an intentional process corresponding to action that invite to faith, that welcome to communion of the body of Christ, and to encourage gifts and charismas with delegation of services and responsibilities. In the organic network of these fundamental actions of ecclesiastic life, the continuous activation of General Priesthood becomes possible. The result will be a dynamic community life; otherwise, ecclesiastic sustainability remains mere fiction.

## Transversal Themes

During the Representatives Encounters from 2007 to 2010, emerged "transversal themes" or "complimentary emphasis" were raised from the participative process intended for the Sustainability Program. Two main themes are featured: gender justice and spirituality, which we are going to deal with below. Other important themes were raised such as: the theme of formation at all ecclesiastic levels members in general, collaborators at different community sectors, ecclesiastic leadership, ordained ministries and their importance concerning identity and training in all dimensions of Gospel witnessing.

## Sustainability and Gender Issues

In the first Representatives Encounter in Managua in November, 2007, it was established the "gender approach" that became a guiding value for the Sustainability Program. Since then, this theme gained an increasing importance and became one of the program's transversal themes. We understand gender as a way culturally constructed that establishes different expectations for men and women in each

society or social system, disclosed by the roles attributed to each sex. While sex is biological information, gender is cultural fact. Women are made invisible through western history as result of a male domination. Religious and cultural symbols reinforce this domination – given that normative concepts to interpret in a valid way cultural and religious symbols within social systems were in the hands of men. We can see the same process in church history as well. The concentration of power in an ecclesiastic hierarchy exclusively masculine<sup>36</sup>, the cancellation of strength of community charismas, the adaptation of vices from secular politics, the power of rich and noble were followed by the gradual removal of women from ministry office and leadership in communities and church. Androcentric hierarchy and corruption were the main features of a church distant from its origin and with increasing difficulty to fulfil its evangelical mission. Current discussion over gender justice may help the church to deconstruct oppressive and asymmetric relationship models. Criteria and concepts for a reconstruction of just gender relations within the church can be extracted from the New Testament witness. In this sense biblical-historical research shows that:

Women were part of the circle of Christ's followers, not the group of "twelve"; many "supported Him with their own means." (Luke 8:3). They remained by the cross of Christ- when men had fled away. Jerusalem community met at Maria's house, John Mark's mother (Acts 12:12; Colossians 4:10). Lidia hosted the first community in Europe (Acts 16). Women were active in theology and liturgy with a ministry recognized by the community (1 Corinthians 11:5). Women were also active in diaconal ministry (Romans 16:1). Women were in leadership in communities, including as presbyters (Titus 2:3). Exhortation from 1 Corinthians 14:33-35- according to which women should remain silent in church, not only do not correspond to normal community life in the New Testament, it is also a Jewish excuse opposed by Galatians 3:25-28 that states that in Christ's church there is no more distinction of race, gender or social position: "Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian. So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." In Pauline theology context this is definitely the criteria extending the equal relation to races and social position<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> In the Canonical Right Code, Can. 1024 we read: "Only a baptized male receive rightfully validated the sacred ordination"

<sup>37</sup> 1 Timothy 2:9-15 retakes Jewish arguments (that theologically should already be out-dated), to lower women's influence in community leadership, keeping them within family power relations dominated by men. Post New Testament developments consolidate women invisibility and the exclusion of lay people from leadership activities.



Criteria taken from the New Testament concerning church structure and the relationship between its members do not allow for any relation of domination, exclusion or oppression. The non-authoritarian and non-hierarchical imperative established by Jesus – “Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant...” (Mark 10:43) – is also valid for gender relations. The same happens when Paul formulates the ecclesiological consequences of universality of salvation conquered by Christ: gender justice prevails, since “we are all one in Christ” (Galatians 3:28b). For sustainable development of the body of Christ it is not possible to leave out any member. All gifts and charismas from all women and men, from each woman and from each man that trusts in Christ is inserted in the communion of His body, they are useful and necessary. Thus, “women’s gifts and abilities are essential for a sustainable future of our churches, not only to implement project thought by men. In addition to cooperate with gifts and knowledge already acquired, women also need to be challenged to empower themselves through theoretical and technical knowledge and must have support and conditions to accomplish it.”<sup>38</sup>

### Sustainability and Spirituality

Another theme that became fundamentally important in the Sustainability Program was spirituality. It was not strictly programmed. The group of Facilitator as they plan the Encounter sought to make room for “devotional” moments of joint celebration. However, they were careful enough to avoid that these moments did not happen in a rush or disorganized or concentrated in a speech only cognitive or a monologue. Inspiration came from the liturgy-spiritual tradition of “Liturgy of the hours”, having a morning prayer and an evening prayer. It is typical from this tradition that celebration, prayers, songs, and meditation raise from an atmosphere of silence. There was plenty of time for everyone to seat, to breathe, to keep silent and to find oneself. This inner pacification took us to a deeper inner silence, embracing body and respiration, with the aim to become available to the Word of God, sensitive to His inspiration. The approaching to the biblical text was slow, gradual, and hopeful. It was central to this process of auscultating the Word the use of the method of meditation that Luther suggested to his friend Peter the Barber written in 1535, titled “A Simple Way to Pray”<sup>39</sup>. Luther suggests inner pacification and preparation, plus the “net of four strings” derived from four questions: a) what do I learn? (Doctrine), b) what do I have to thank for? (Praise), c) what do I have to confess? (Confession), d) what do I want to ask for? (Prayer).

<sup>38</sup> BLASI, Marcia. Problematizing and interweaving the approach to sustainability with gender perspective and young women experiences and youth. Memoir and synthesis of El Salvador Encounter. Ayagualo, November 23-25, 2010. P. 6-7. Available at: <http://sustentabilidad.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/memoria-y-sc3adntesis-ayagualo-final.pdf>

<sup>39</sup> LUTHER, Martin. A simple way to pray, for a good friend (1535). In: Selected Works, Vol. V, p.132-148.

Martin Junge wrote about these spirituality moments: “The strength of reading, praying and singing together had a strong influence in all reflections and guided to themes and debates that without that community devotional experience could never have reached such prominence and importance. It was a common understanding of all participants of the Second Encounter that only through this close relation between spirituality, reflection and methodological tools would be possible to deal properly with the challenge of a sustainable projection of churches task in the region.”<sup>40</sup>

The Sustainability Program experienced that theological competence cannot be detached from spiritual competence, a fact that often in academic theology. For Luther academic theology and spiritual theology are complementary. In writing from 1539, titled: “A right way to study theology”<sup>41</sup>, Luther introduces his theological method based on spirituality. He established three rules: Oratio (Prayer), Meditatio (Meditation) and Tentatio (Probation). For Luther, a theologian is anyone whose existential, social, ecclesiastic condition is interpreted by the Scripture. How does this happen? It happens when, from an attitude of prayer, I start to meditate the Scripture and experience that it illuminates and interprets my life context- always understood by Luther as a context of probation. In the Sustainability Program we experienced that “ecclesiastic contexts of probation” are equally illuminated by Scripture that reveals us the will of God for this moment, and gives us dreams and visions of future that are not our own projections but, the result of a process of spiritual discernment.

### Instead of a Conclusion

Jesus Christ’s Church is sustained by a wealth that it cannot produce. What it needs receives as a present, graciously and daily. It is in the same condition as God’s people in the desert- that everyday received from God’s hand for their daily food. It was useless to keep manna. It was necessary to exercise faith and hope in divine resources daily. The same way the church needs to re-learn to trust in God’s faithfulness that fulfil His promises. If we want to build living communities that are missionary and sustainable, we need above all, to convert our views. To concentrate in scarcity and ecclesiastic deficits not only describe reality- it also creates reality, a negative reality. We are in the same condition as Peter as he walked over the waters:

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<sup>40</sup> With confidence in the future. Second Representatives Encounter Synthesis. Lutheran World Federation – Sustainability Program. Santiago de Chile. March, 4-6, 2008. P.7.

<sup>41</sup> WA 50, 657-661

As long as he kept his eyes on Jesus and His promises he could walk over the water; as he paid attention on the troubled sea and the storm, he stated to sink. Therefore, worrying about the future of our churches will not take us anywhere. It will only produce negativism and paralysis in some, and unrestrained activism and impatience in others. Reflection about ecclesiastic sustainability should take us to trust Christ's promise – that He will build His community (Mathew 16:18). Excessive worry can also be an expression of mistrust in relation to God's care, as a good Father that knows about our needs before we ask for them (Mathew 6:24f). It is vital to remember: it is not the continuity or the future of the ecclesiastic institution that we have to seek but the kingdom of God. If this is our intention then all we need will be given to us (Mathew 6:33). Well, if we live on divine wealth and resources, then, before any action we are force to pray asking the Father: How do you want to use us in your kingdom? Which are your priorities and vision for action for your church? It is central to Reformation theology the certainty that the church is born and grows from the Word of God. For Luther it is the fulfilment of God's promise from Isaiah 55:11: "so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." God is the subject of all creation and recreation processes within the Christian community. And He wants the help of his children. He wants to act in reciprocity. This fact is the dismissal of ideas of human omnipotence that result in pathological activism, but is also the dismissal of negligence and diletantism. Before all these challenges imposed by sustainability to the church of Christ, it is suitable to let the sound of our Lord's word in our hearts: "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom." (Luke 12:32).