

## DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS AND THEOLOGICAL OPINIONS (DSTO)

### VOLUME 2 E. THE SACRAMENTS

# The distribution of the sacrament of the altar

*Prepared by the Department of Liturgics and adopted by the Commission on Worship, 16 February 1995. This version adopted in May 1998.*

*Edited August 2001.*

---

## THE PURPOSE OF THIS STATEMENT

This statement aims to clarify the roles of the people involved with the distribution of the sacrament of the altar. We want to affirm the use of lay assistants in the distribution of the sacrament, and we want to suggest how this can be done without compromising the office of the public ministry.

The use of lay assistants as servers for the distribution of the sacrament is a recent development in the church. Factors which have contributed to this development include: the frequency of communion; the desire for lay leadership in worship; the demand for shorter services; and a shortage of pastors in the office of the public ministry.

The practice of using lay assistants as servers could lead to uncertainty about the nature and extent of the pastor's responsibility for the administration of the sacrament. It could also lead to confusion about the role and functioning of lay assistants. Hence this attempt to clarify roles.

## 1. THE USE OF TERMS

- a. By the *administration* of the sacrament we understand three things:
  - 1) The admission of people to the sacrament after due instruction and examination.
  - 2) The entire celebration of the sacrament in the church service. This includes the taking of bread and wine; their consecration with thanksgiving and the words of institution; their distribution; their reception and consumption by the communicants; and their use for the proclamation of Christ's death (see FC SD VII, 84).
  - 3) The pastoral care of the people who have received the sacrament.

- b. By *presiding* we mean the called pastor's action in exercising the office of the keys publicly in the service with holy communion. This includes both 'the power of order', that is, the authority to minister with word and sacrament, and 'the power of jurisdiction', that is, the authority to retain and forgive sins in Jesus' name (see Apol XXVIII, 12,13,12; Treatise 60,61).
- c. By *distribution* we mean the giving of the consecrated bread and wine to the communicants, with the appropriate words.
- d. By the *office of the keys* we mean the Lord's commission to preach the gospel, to forgive and retain sins, and to administer the sacraments (AC XXVIII,5).

## 2. THEOLOGICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS

- a. **Administration:** Christ's command determines the administration of the sacrament (Luke 22:19–20; 1 Cor 11:23–25).
  - 1) Christ commissioned the apostles and their successors in the apostolic ministry to perform this task on his behalf. Therefore only a called and ordained pastor may administer the sacrament in the Lutheran church (AC XIV).
  - 2) Christ through the church confers on a pastor at ordination the responsibility for the public exercise of the keys (see TA VI:8; DSTO I, E6).
  - 3) The call of the church authorises the pastor to administer the sacrament and determine who in a particular congregation is admitted to the sacrament (DSTO I, D16 – D17).
- b. **Presiding:** The pastor exercises the office of the keys publicly by presiding over the entire celebration of the sacrament.
  - 1) The presiding pastor represents Christ and acts on his behalf (Apol VII and VIII, 28,47). Therefore the pastor is responsible to Christ, the chief liturgist and presider (Heb 8:1–2,6).
  - 2) The presiding pastor is responsible for determining who is admitted to the Lord's table and who is not (Matt 18:18; John 20:19–23; AC XXVIII,21,22; Apol VIII,13, 14).
  - 3) The presiding pastor is responsible for the entire administration of the sacrament. This includes the procedure by which communicants announce their intention to receive the sacrament; the proclamation of the word; the preparation of the elements for consecration; the consecration of the elements; the distribution of the sacrament; the disposal of the elements; and the pastoral care of the communicants (DSTO I, E8 par 3(b)).
- c. **Distribution:** The enactment of the sacrament according to Christ's command (Luke 22:19–20 and 1 Cor 11:23–25) includes the distribution of the bread and wine.
  - 1) The presiding pastor is responsible for the correct distribution of the bread and wine to those who may receive them in his congregation.
  - 2) Under the pastor's authority and supervision assistants may help in the distribution of the sacrament.
  - 3) In assisting with the distribution of the sacrament, lay people do not exercise the office of the keys.

### 3. THE FUNCTION AND STATUS OF SERVERS AT HOLY COMMUNION

- a. The presiding minister has customarily distributed the sacrament by himself, or with the help of an elder or another pastor, who function as server(s).
- b. The office of the public ministry may be affirmed by using other pastors as servers at holy communion (SC IX, 3; LC I, 158-163). These pastors may be members of the congregation, or visitors.

When lay servers assist the presiding minister, we recommend the following practices, so that everything is done in proper order and without doctrinal or practical confusion (1 Cor 14:40; AC XV,1-4):

- 1) Elders or pastoral assistants can, upon appointment by the congregation, assist the pastor as servers (DSTO I, D11; E9). This is the usual practice in the church.
- 2) If the congregation does not have elders or pastoral assistants, other people who have been appointed by the congregation for involvement in pastoral care may assist the pastor as servers (TA VI, par 9).
- 3) The pastor who is the presiding minister should ensure that all servers at holy communion understand the nature of the sacrament and are adequately instructed in the proper procedure for its distribution (DSTO I, E9).
- 4) The presiding minister may publicly hand over the consecrated elements to the server(s) before the distribution.
  - This shows ritually that the pastor is responsible for the distribution of the sacrament.
  - The servers then do not appear to exercise the office of the keys, but rather assist the pastor in distributing the sacrament.
- 5) Since the presiding minister is responsible for admission to the sacrament or exclusion from it, he should normally distribute the bread, and the server should distribute the wine.
  - Even if servers know whom to exclude, they are not authorised to do so.
  - If servers do distribute the bread, the presiding minister must still take responsibility for the exclusion of a person from the Lord's table.
- 6) If the presiding minister does not commune himself but receives the sacrament from a server, he may hand over the elements to the server before he himself receives it from the server, to indicate that the server does not exercise the office of the keys.
- 7) The presiding minister and servers may commune, as is the custom, either during or after the singing of the Lamb of God, or at the beginning or the end of the distribution.
- 8) At the conclusion of the distribution, the servers publicly hand back the consecrated elements to the presiding minister.

#### 4. THE RITUAL FUNCTION AND USE OF THE FORMULAS FOR DISTRIBUTION

- a. In keeping with Christ's command (Luke 22:19–20; 1 Cor 11:23–25), the consecrated elements have always been distributed with set sentences (formulas) which repeat Christ's words of institution.
- b. The formulas for distribution are performative utterances, that is, they do what they say. They serve two important ritual functions:
  - 1) The commands 'Take and eat' and 'Take and drink' grant admission to the sacrament.
  - 2) The words of bestowal 'This is the body of Christ, given for you', and 'This is the blood of Christ, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins', announce the giver and proclaim the nature of his gifts to the recipients.
- c. Since the words used for admitting communicants ('Take and eat...drink') presuppose the office of the keys, they are best used by the presiding minister. Thus the ritual function of the words is directly related to those who are ritually authorised to use them for the admission of people to the Lord's table.
- d. We therefore recommend the following directions or instructions for the distribution:
  - 1) That the presiding minister use the combined formulas for admission and bestowal (that is, 'Take and eat; this is the body...' and so forth).
    - If he distributes the sacrament by himself without any server, he may use the combined words throughout the distribution.
    - If he distributes the sacrament together with a server, he may use them before each table, or as a general invitation to all communicants before continuous communion. Thereafter he may revert to the words for bestowal.
    - Whichever formulas for bestowal are used, he may say them in full to each person to emphasise that Christ's body and blood are given to and for each person.
  - 2) That servers use one of the following formulas for bestowal spoken in full to each person.
    - The normal wording is 'This is the body of Christ, given for you' and 'This is the blood of Christ, shed for you (for the forgiveness of sins)'.
    - The words 'The body of Christ, given for you' and 'The blood of Christ, shed for you' may also be used.
  - 3) The presiding minister and servers may address the communicants by their Christian names.

## KEY TO REFERENCES

### The Lutheran Confessions

AC = Augsburg Confession

Roman capital = Article;  
Numeral = page section

*For example: AC II,6 = Augsburg Confession Article II, page section 6.*

Apol = Apology to the Augsburg Confession

Roman capital = Article;  
Numeral = page section

FC SD = Formulae of Concord Solid Declaration

Roman capital = Article;  
Numeral = page section

LC = The Large Catechism

Roman capital = Part;  
Numeral = page section

SC = The Small Catechism

Roman capital = Part;  
Numeral = page section

Treatise = the Treatise on the Power & Primacy of the Pope Numeral = page section

### TA = Theses of Agreement

#### **DSTO I = Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions, volume I**

*What constitutes a call?* D16 – D17

*Elders in the Lutheran Church of Australia* D11 – D12

*Concerning the sacrament of the altar* E7 – E9