

THE LITURGICAL DUTIES OF THE PRESIDING MINISTER

Adopted by the Commission on Worship, October 2002. This statement was prepared by the Department of Liturgics.

The purpose of this statement

The use of assistants in worship, both ordained and lay, has increased over recent years and is something that we encourage. This statement attempts to clarify the role of the presiding minister in relation to assistants, and to show how they can best be used. It builds on a number of previous Commission on Worship statements have touched on the liturgical role of the minister. They include: Statement 23: **The use of assistant ministries in the liturgy**; Statement 26: **Guidelines for the involvement of vicars in the leading of worship**; Statement 27: **The role of lay reader in regular corporate worship**; and Statement 33: **The distribution of the sacrament of the altar**.

1 Definition of roles

The pastor who leads the service may be assisted by other pastors or by lay people. Their roles can be defined as follows:

- The **presiding minister** is an ordained pastor who presides at the altar and takes the leading role in the service. He is normally the pastor of the congregation. When a congregation has two or more pastors, the pastor that leads in the celebration of holy communion is the presiding minister.
- **Assisting ministers** are ordained pastors who do not preside at the altar but who assist the presiding minister.
- **Lay assistants** are unordained people who assist the presiding minister in certain parts of the service. These may include vicars, readers, servers at communion, cantors and singers, choir members, musicians, ushers, and cross-bearers.

The presiding minister and his assistants are called to serve the congregation in a corporate way, and should be seen to do so.

2 Christ the true presiding minister

The action in the divine service (in its most complete form, the service with holy communion) is principally from God the Father to us through Christ. Christ feeds and leads his people through his word and sacraments. The pastors of the church minister to God's people with these means of grace. Pastors speak God's word, and they are the hands by which he baptises and feeds his people with Christ's body and blood. Yet the true presiding minister is Christ. The pastor stands in Christ's place and represents him to the people. Through the means of grace, Christ comes to his people and brings them into the presence of the Father to worship him there together with the angels and all the company of heaven.

3 The pastor of the congregation

The chief liturgical duties of the pastor of a congregation are to baptise, to absolve the sins of the penitent in the name of Christ, to preach God's word, to preside at the celebration of the Lord's supper, and to place God's blessing on his people. He is responsible for publicly exercising the office of the keys and for ensuring that everything in the service is in accord with the holy Scriptures and the confessions of the church.

4 Where more than one pastor officiates

Where two or more pastors officiate in a worship service, their respective roles are usually divided according to certain established liturgical principles outlined in points 7 and 8 below. These principles show how ministerial functions can be shared in a way that is liturgically consistent.

In large congregations with a senior pastor and an associate or assistant pastor, the same guidelines apply. If the associate or assistant pastor presides at the altar, then he is the presiding minister and the senior pastor is the assisting minister. A pastor's liturgical title is determined by his liturgical role rather than by his office or rank.

5 Laypeople as assistants

However, where laypeople act as assistants, the roles are divided differently than in the case of pastors because unordained people are not authorised to administer the means of grace and therefore do not lead those parts of the service which specifically involve the public exercise of the office of the keys. That means lay people do not take the following parts:

- Confession and absolution
- The eucharistic prayer (prayer of consecration)
- The words of institution

6 Congregations with one pastor

In a small congregation with only one pastor, that pastor will normally be the presiding minister. If the president of the church or the district president is present, he may be invited to preside at the altar as well as to preach. In that case he is the presiding minister for that service and the pastor of the congregation is the assisting minister.

7. Roles of the presiding minister

In summary, the presiding minister leads the congregation in those parts of the service where he exercises the office of the keys and represents Christ to the people, such as the greeting and prayer of the day, the reading of the holy gospel, presiding at the Lord's supper, and pronouncing the blessing. He may also baptise and preach.

The presiding minister oversees the entire celebration of the Lord's supper, including the preparation and disposal of the elements, the announcement or registration before communion (if that is the practice), and the admission to and exclusion from the Lord's table. However, at his discretion he may delegate any one of these tasks to an assisting minister.

The presiding minister normally takes the following parts (although those in brackets may be taken by an assisting minister):

- (Invocation)
- Confession and absolution
- (Greeting and prayer of the day)
- Gospel reading
- (Sermon)
- (Intercessions)
- Preface with thanksgiving
- Lord's Prayer (if said as a eucharistic prayer)
- Eucharistic prayer (if used)
- Words of institution
- Peace
- Distribution of bread in communion (see Statement 23.3)
- Dismissal
- Greeting
- Prayer after communion

- Blessing

8 Roles of assisting ministers

An ordained assisting minister takes those parts of the liturgy assigned to him by the presiding minister. Normally these may include:

- Introit or psalm (if not led by choir or cantor)
- Lord, have mercy (if not led by cantor or sung in full by the congregation)
- Glory to God in the highest (if not sung by a cantor)
- First and second readings (these may also be read by a layperson)
- Sermon (at the invitation of the presiding minister)
- Receiving the offering
- Intercessions (normally the presiding minister begins and ends the prayer of the church. Intercessions may also be offered by lay assistants)
- Assisting with the distribution of communion
- Thanksgiving verses (after communion)
- Let us bless the Lord

9 Roles of lay assistants

Some of the roles of lay assistants have already been mentioned. Traditionally, the most important have been:

- Acting as cantor or musician
- Reading the Scriptures
- Assisting with the intercessions
- Assisting with the distribution of communion.

10 The president at synod

At a synodical convention of the LCA, the president of the church or one of the vice-presidents will be the presiding minister, rather than the chaplain of convention. Likewise, at a district convention, the president of that district or one of the vice-presidents will be the presiding minister. This emphasises that the main responsibility of the president is not administrative but liturgical. He exercises his role as a president most clearly when he presides at the Lord's supper, rather than when he chairs a session of convention.

11. The presidents at pastors' conference

The president or one of the vice-presidents normally presides at pastors' conferences or pastors' retreats. This practice emphasises that the main responsibility of the president is pastoral and liturgical. He leads his fellow pastors by ministering to them with the word and serving them at the Lord's table.