

## THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR

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### The purpose of this statement

The purpose of this statement is to clarify the roles of those involved with the distribution of the sacrament of the altar. 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 have led to the use of lay assistants as servers for the distribution of the sacrament. This could lead to uncertainty about the nature and extent of the pastor's responsibility for the administration of the sacrament and to confusion about the role and function of his lay assistants. We therefore aim to affirm the use of lay assistants in the distribution of the sacrament and to suggest how this could be done without compromising the office of the public ministry.

### 1 The use of terms in this statement

- a. By the **administration** of the sacrament we understand three things:
  - the admission of people to the sacrament after due instruction and examination
  - the entire enactment of the sacrament in the assembled congregation, which includes the taking of bread and wine, their consecration with thanksgiving and the words of institution, their distribution, their reception, their consumption, and their use for the proclamation of Christ's death (see FC SD VII, 84)
  - the pastoral care of the people who have received the sacrament.
- b. By **presiding** we understand the liturgical function of a called pastor to exercise the office of the keys publicly in the service with holy communion. This includes both 'the power of order' (*potestas ordinis*) and 'the power of jurisdiction' (*potestas jurisdictionis*; see Apol XXVIII, 12,13,14; Treatise 60,61).
- c. By **distribution** we understand the presentation of the consecrated bread and wine to the communicants with their appropriate formulae.
- d. By the **office of the keys** we understand the divine 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).
  - He commissioned the apostles and their successors in the apostolic ministry to perform this task on his behalf. Only a called and ordained pastor may therefore administer the sacrament in the Lutheran church (AC XIV).
  - The responsibility for the public exercise of the keys is conferred on a pastor at his ordination by Christ through the church (see Theses of Agreement [TA] VI:8; *Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions* [DSTO], E6).
  - By his call he has been authorised to administer the sacrament and determine admission to the sacrament in a particular congregation (DSTO, D10).
- b. **Presiding.** The pastor exercises the office of the keys publicly by presiding over the entire celebration of the sacrament.
  - Since the presiding pastor represents Christ and acts on his behalf (Apol VII and VIII, 28,47), he is responsible to Christ, the chief liturgist and presider (Heb 8:1,2,6).
  - The presiding pastor is responsible for admission to the Lord's table and exclusion from it (Matt 18:18; John 20:19–23; AC XXVIII,21,22; Apol VIII,13, 14).
  - The presiding pastor is also responsible for the entire administration of the sacrament. This includes the procedures for announcement, 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, E6 para 3(b) ).
- c. **Distribution.** Christ's command to enact the sacrament in Luke 22:19,20 and 1 Cor 11:23–25 includes the distribution of the bread and wine.
  - The presiding pastor is responsible for the correct distribution of the bread and wine to those who may receive them in his congregation.
  - Under his authority and supervision assistants may help him in the distribution of the sacrament.
  - In assisting with the distribution of the sacrament, laypeople must not exercise, or appear to 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 servers.
- b. The office of the public ministry may be affirmed by using other pastors who are members of the congregation, or who are visitors, as servers at holy communion (SC IX, 3; LC I, 158–163).

- c. When servers assist the presiding minister, we recommend the following, so that everything is done in proper order and without doctrinal or practical confusion (1 Cor 14:40, AC XV, 1–4):
- Elders who assist the pastor in the spiritual care of the congregation can, upon appointment by the congregation, normally assist the pastor as servers (DSTO, D7; E5).
  - If the congregation does not have elders, other people who have been appointed by the congregation for involvement in pastoral care may assist the pastor as servers at holy communion (TA VI, para 9).
  - The pastor who is the presiding minister ensures that all servers at holy communion understand the nature of the sacrament and are adequately instructed in the proper procedure for its distribution (DSTO, E5).
  - The presiding minister may publicly hand over the consecrated elements to the server(s) before their distribution. This shows ritually that he is pastorally responsible for the distribution of the sacrament. The servers then do not appear to exercise the office of the keys, but rather assist him in distributing the sacrament.
  - Since the presiding minister is responsible for admission to the sacrament or exclusion from it, he normally distributes the bread, and the server distributes 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.
  - 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.
  - 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.
  - 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 formulae 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 formulae which repeat Christ's words of institution.
- b. Two important ritual functions are served by the formulae for distribution, which are performative utterances.
- The commands 'Take and eat' and 'Take and drink' grant **admission** to the sacrament.
  - 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 their recipients.
- c. Since the formulae for **admission** presuppose the office of the keys, they are best used by the presiding minister. Thus the ritual function of the formulae 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 that the presiding minister use the **combined formulae for admission and bestowal**.
- If he distributes the sacrament by himself without any server, he may use the combined formulae throughout the distribution.
  - If he distributes the sacrament together with a server, he may use the combined formulae before each table, or as a general invitation to all communicants before continuous communion. Thereafter he may revert to the formulae for bestowal.
  - Whichever formulae 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.
- e. We recommend that servers use one of the following **formulae 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.
- f. We recommend that the presiding minister and servers may address the communicants with their Christian names.

## KEY TO REFERENCES

### The Lutheran Confessions

AC =	Augsburg Confession	Roman capital, eg II = Article; Numeral, eg 6 = page section
Apol =	Apology to the Augsburg Confession	Roman capital, eg II = Article; Numeral, eg 6 = page section
FC SD =	Formulae of Concord Solid Declaration	Roman capital, eg II = Article; Numeral, eg 6 = page section
LC =	The Large Catechism	Roman capital, eg II = Part II; Numeral, eg 6 = page section
SC =	The Small Catechism	Roman capital, eg II = Part II; Numeral, eg 6 = page section
Treatise =	the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope	Numeral, eg 6 = page section

### TA = Theses of Agreement

### DSTO = Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions

- D7 What Constitutes a Call?  
D10 Elders in the Lutheran Church of Australia  
E5 The Distribution in the Sacrament of the Altar  
E6 Authorisation, Responsibility and Preparation for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper.