

## DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS AND THEOLOGICAL OPINIONS (DSTO)

### VOLUME 1 E. THE SACRAMENTS

## Concerning the sacrament of the altar

*Prepared by the Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations. Adopted by the General Synod, 1981 Convention. This statement replaces the following statements which appeared in the first edition:*

*THE DISTRIBUTION IN THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR (E5);  
COMMUNION OF NON-CHURCH MEMBERS (E5);  
COMMUNION OF LCA MEMBERS LIVING IN NON-LUTHERAN SITUATIONS (E5);  
AUTHORIZATION, RESPONSIBILITY AND PREPARATION FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER (E6).*

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### PREPARATION FOR THE RECEPTION OF THE SACRAMENT

1. Preparation, in the sense of the instruction that precedes admission to the Lord's Supper in a Lutheran congregation, is determined by pastor and congregation, and then carried out by the pastor. In most cases, it is associated in the LCA with the practice of Confirmation. In all cases it requires on the part of the one to be admitted to the Sacrament a basic understanding and appreciation of the nature and benefits of the Sacrament, an acceptance of one's place as a communicant in the fellowship of believers, and the ability, appropriate to the level of maturity and the recognition of the need, to examine oneself.
2. Since the Lord's Supper can be received with blessing and profit only by those who know that they are sinners, and in contrition and repentance acknowledge themselves as such before God, personal preparation should be urged upon all communicants. Such preparation, our Confessions teach us, does not make members 'worthy' to receive the gifts offered in the Sacrament. Rather, 'that person is well prepared and worthy who believes these words, "given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins"'. Helpful forms of preparation are available, and include self-examination, on the basis of Luther's *How Plain People Are To Be Taught to Confess*, meditating on appropriate passages of Holy Scripture, and prayer.

## AUTHORIZATION OF AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE CELEBRATION

3. The nature of the Lord's Supper is such that its administration takes place in the public worship services of the congregation. Here the pastor, as the called and ordained servant of the Word and Sacraments, is responsible for the administration of the Sacrament, including such matters as who may and who may not attend, and for announcement and registration procedures.
4. Authorization for any other celebrations of the Sacrament in the congregational context, for example, at a family celebration, a wedding, a congregational camp, is the responsibility of the pastor in consultation with the congregation or its appointed representatives (elders, church council).
5. The celebration of the Sacrament at services outside the context of the congregation, as for example the Seminary, colleges, youth assemblies and camps, is subject to the following:
  - a. Authorization for the celebration shall be given either for a limited or an unlimited period by the President of the Church in consultation with the appropriate Board or Council, or where only one District is concerned, by the President of that District in consultation with the appropriate District Committee.
  - b. Responsibility for the administration of the Sacrament in these situations will always rest with a pastor of the Church who shall be appointed for this particular purpose. He shall preside over the entire celebration, even when other pastors are present, and assume responsibility for all matters associated with that particular celebration, including such matters as who may or may not attend, and for announcement and registration procedures.

## CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT IN EMERGENCY AND SPECIAL SITUATIONS

6. In cases of emergency, that is, in instances where over a long period a pastor is not available for the administration of the Sacrament of the Altar, a congregation may find it necessary to celebrate the Sacrament through an authorised elder. In this situation the elder by virtue of his call from the congregation performs this function as their pastor. Mutual consideration and good order demand that the District President approve the authorisation. However, in an age of rapid transport we can hardly conceive of such an emergency arising.
7. The distinction must be made, however, between the emergency congregational situation envisaged in 6 above and the question of licensing laymen to celebrate the Sacrament in their own homes. In this connection the following should be noted:
  - a. Although the Lutheran Confessions, following a pseudo-Augustinian tradition of medieval canon law, allow a layman in a life-and-death situation to be the pastor of another in respect to Baptism and the Absolution, they do not extend this privilege to the administration of the Lord's Supper in the home. See Treatise 67, BC, p.331.
  - b. Luther, in answer to this question on several occasions replied in the negative. A layman, he says, has no call to perform this function, and the family situation must be distinguished from the congregational situation. See WA Br. 7:338-339, 365-366; WA TR. 5,621. No. 6361.

- c. While the Lutheran Confessions, in their witness to the Scriptures, rightly emphasize what a wonderful treasure the Sacrament of the Altar is and urge that it be celebrated frequently in the Church, they do not teach, as the Scriptures do not teach, that it is essential for salvation.
- d. Inability to celebrate and to attend the celebration of the Sacrament must always be carefully distinguished from neglect and despising of the Sacrament.
- e. It is particularly necessary in our day and age to reject the teaching and practice of the so-called electronic church (Rex Humbard and others) that Christianity is a private matter and that one may commune oneself and one's family in one's own home.

In the light of the above, the LCA holds that in situations where Scriptural and confessional requirements cannot be met, members of the LCA should not commune in other Churches; nor should they be authorized to celebrate the Sacrament of the Altar in their own homes.

- 8. It may not always be easy to distinguish 'emergency congregational situation' (6 above) from 'home situation' (7 above), especially if several Lutheran families are living in a non-Lutheran situation. On the one hand, it is quite clear the LCA members in this situation may not participate in Holy Communion services of other denominations and at the same time retain their membership in the LCA (see 'Theses on Joint Prayer and Worship'). On the other hand, does their coming together for worship constitute a congregation? While the principles enunciated in 6 and 7 above also apply to this situation, it is essential that members in determining their situation and their rights do so not arbitrarily and secretly, but as indicated in 6 above, that is, with the approval of the authorized officers of the Church (President or District President), so that all things may be done 'decently and in order'.

## COMMUNION ON NON-CHURCH MEMBERS

- 9. While the LCA upholds the principle that communion at its altars is administered to Lutheran communicants only, pastors of the LCA may in certain circumstances commune persons who have the intention of joining the Lutheran Church but who have not yet become members of this Church. A worthy and proper eating and drinking at the Lord's Table does not depend on the formal completion of a certain course of studies and formal acceptance into membership by an established congregational rule, but on faith and confession of what the true Lord's Supper is.

It is presupposed in this opinion

- a. that the persons are baptised;
- b. that they understand and confess the Lutheran teaching concerning the Lord's Supper;
- c. that they do not receive the Sacrament in other denominations;
- d. that the congregation or its representative know who the persons communing with them are, and why.

## THE DISTRIBUTION IN THE SACRAMENT

- 10. In cases of necessity the pastor of a larger congregation may appoint an elder or responsible layman, with the consent of the congregation and after due instruction, to assist in the distribution of the Sacrament of the Altar.
- 11. The pastor may utilise the services of a vicar to assist him in the distribution of the Sacrament of the Altar.