

Who May Officiate at the Lord's Supper?

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The request for an essay on this question seems to be in line with a trend or concern which is showing up in various parts of our Synod. A few years ago, for example, the Pastor-Teacher Conference of the Michigan District heard an essay on the same general subject. I believe that the Conference of Presidents did likewise recently. Since your program committee suggested several matters which they would like to have mentioned in this present effort, matters which are not strictly within the limits of the question which is our theme, I shall take the liberty of ignoring the strict rules of logical subdivision and try instead to touch upon as many matters as possible which are in any way related to our topic. It is my hope that profitable discussion may be stimulated. The material will be grouped under three general headings:

- I. The reasons why our question is asked
- II. The general principles bearing upon the answer
- III. The answers which are indicated

I.

In general it would seem that there is no reason for asking who may officiate at the Lord's Supper. Countless communion services are held in our congregations each year, and by and large one would find that it is simply taken for granted that the called pastor of the congregation will officiate at the consecration and distribution. If the congregation has a dual pastorate, the pastors alternate at the consecration, cooperate in the distribution, and commune one another.

But there are exceptions. There are situations in which an ailment or physical infirmity makes it difficult, if not impossible, for a pastor to distribute the elements. What is to be done in such a situation?

Within the past two decades the use of vicars has become increasingly popular in our Synod. Now that a year of vicarage has been made an integral part of the Seminary curriculum, the arrangement as far as we can see is here to stay. Vicars commonly assist their supervising pastor in the distribution of the Lord's Supper and give it to him as well. Is this proper? In the general area of our Seminary there are congregations which regularly call upon students, beginning with those in their Junior year, either to serve as part-time vicars or on occasion especially to assist in the distribution of the Lord's Supper. Is this proper?

Dual pastorates and pastors who are assisted by a vicar or a student are by far in the minority in our midst. What about the pastor who officiates alone? When will he receive the Lord's Supper? The immediate answer is: at pastoral conferences, District conventions, or occasionally at Synod conventions. In some areas, to provide even more frequent opportunity for pastors to receive the Sacrament, special communion services are arranged for the pastors in the area. One of the considerations which have been advanced in admonishing pastors who have been infrequent in their attendance at conferences is that they ought not to pass up the opportunity to receive the Lord's Supper.

Does this settle the problem? For many, perhaps for most, it might. But what if a pastor has a desire for the Sacrament more frequently than at conference time? During the summer months the gap between conferences may be rather long. Or what if a pastor feels that he whose duty it is to set a good example for his people ought also to let his people see him receiving the Lord's Supper often? What then?

Is self-communion the answer? In Meusel's *Kirchliches Handlexikon* under the article *Sumtio* there is this comment: "Recently, especially in the 1850's, since receiving the Sacrament has again come to be appreciated more, the demand has been raised in the clergy that self-communion be permitted either as a general practice or at least under certain conditions. For it is evident that the prohibition of self-communion has made a

more frequent reception of the Sacrament impossible for the great majority of the clergy, and with it the possibility has been removed by one's own example to encourage the congregation."¹ What is to be our attitude here?

Or is a different solution possible? Would it be more in keeping with the idea of distributing and receiving if the congregation were to authorize a male teacher, if it has one in its midst, or one of its elders to distribute the Lord's Supper to the pastor?

Another question which has been raised is that of isolated Christians. We have examples aplenty of such in our young men in the military service who are often hundreds of miles removed from the nearest clergyman of our faith. No doubt there are also any number of civilians in a like situation. Shall they be told to bear being deprived of the opportunity to receive the Lord's Supper as a cross and to look forward all the more eagerly to the time when they will again be within reach of a pastor? Or shall we advise them to explore the possibility of finding one or more fellow believers and as an emergency measure to commune one another?

All of these questions and problems are more or less related to the question which is our theme: Who may officiate at the Lord's Supper?

We might make the matter simple by being satisfied with what is said in textbooks on pastoral theology. I shall quote only two. Prof. John Schaller in his *Pastorale Praxis* says: "Self-communion of the preacher is in itself not unallowable (the *Smalcald Articles* treat of self-communion to the exclusion of the congregation as happens in the papal mass!), but ought to be used only in an emergency (because of remoteness from brethren in the ministry) since the preacher cannot really speak comfort to himself. Furthermore there is no essential obstacle for a preacher to have an elder, for example, give him the sacrament, if the congregation understands why it is being done."² To this Prof. Aug. Pieper had us add: "And the pastor ought to make it his business that the congregation does understand."

The reference to the *Smalcald Articles* is to Part II, Article II, Of the Mass, 8,9: "But if any should advance the pretext that as an act of devotion he wishes to administer the Sacrament, or Communion, to himself, he is not in earnest [he would commit a great mistake and would not be speaking seriously and sincerely]. For if he wishes to commune in sincerity, the surest and best way for him is in the Sacrament administered according to Christ's institution. But that one administer Communion to himself is a human notion, uncertain, unnecessary, yea, even prohibited. And he does not know what he is doing, because without the Word of God he obeys a false human opinion and invention. So, too, it is not right [even though the matter were otherwise correct] for one to use the common Sacrament of [belonging to] the Church according to his own private devotion, and without God's Word and apart from the communion of the Church to trifle therewith."³

Dr. John H.C. Fritz has this to say in his *Pastoral Theology* under the heading *Administration of the Sacrament by a Layman*:

The majority of our Lutheran theologians, including Luther, are of the opinion that the Sacrament of the Altar should never be administered privately by a layman. Such an emergency as might arise in the case of baptism and absolution may not occur, and there is therefore no good reason to depart from God's own established order that the means of grace should be administered by the called ministers of Christ, I Cor. 4:1; Rom. 10:15; Heb. 5:4. Communion administered privately by a layman might be the cause of divisions in the Church.

It is an entirely different question whether a layman may at all administer the Sacrament. To deny this would mean that the validity of the Sacrament depended not only upon the consecration of the proper elements and their administration, but also upon a certain special qualification on the part of the administrator ("ordination"). The Roman Catholic Church so teaches. While we admit that the administration of the Sacrament by a layman is never *recta* and

¹ Carl Meusel, *Kirchliches Handlexikon* (Leipzig: Verlag von Justus Naumann, 1900), vol. VI, p. 489.

² J. Schaller, *Pastorale Praxis* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1913), p. 41.

³ *Concordia Triglotta* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1921), p. 465.

legitima, we do not deny that it may be *rata* and *de facto* and, in case of emergency, even *de iure*. If a layman in an exceptional case is permitted to baptize, why should he not also, in an exceptional case, be permitted to administer the Sacrament of the Altar? Such an exceptional case might arise when an orthodox pastor cannot be called, as when a Christian is at the point of death, at high sea, or when he had been taken captive by barbarians, and the like. Even under such exceptional circumstances, however, we would advise a Christian not to insist that the Sacrament be administered to him contrary to the regular established order.

May an entire congregation under exceptional circumstances call a layman (or a student of theology) to administer to them the Sacrament? We need not hesitate to answer this question affirmatively; for under such circumstances the layman, by virtue of his having been called to do so by the entire congregation, acts as the congregation's representative, even as a regularly called minister would do. In due respect, however, to God's own established order of the ministry and His precise mention of the necessary qualifications a layman should not be called to administer the Sacrament unless very exceptional circumstances justify it. For the same reason a student of theology who is serving as a supply had better not, as a rule, be asked even to assist at Communion.

Rather than to give Communion to himself (which he might legitimately do; of course only in the regular church service and not privately), the pastor should ask the congregation to request a layman (a member of the church council) to administer the Sacrament to him. Under ordinary circumstances this will not have to be done; for pastors, almost without exception, have ample opportunity to receive the Sacrament at the time when conferences and synods are held or by calling in a brother minister for that purpose.⁴

The only quotation of Luther's bearing upon our subject that I could find is in his Table Talks (my free translation):

Whether the head of a family in an emergency may administer the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper to his family?

To this Dr. M. Luther answered and said: By no means, No; for first of all there is no vocation nor call, as Joshua said, Num. 11:26: "My lord Moses, forbid them, etc." Deut. 4:6 and 6:6: "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart." Acts 2:16, 17 and Joel 3:1 [2:28 in the English]: "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, etc."

From this it follows that those who have not been called may not preach; so it is also proper that they may not administer the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper for the sake of avoiding offense. For many of them would thus despise the ministers and not desire their services if they could help themselves.⁵

But instead of being content with citing authorities, let us seek independent conviction by considering some pertinent principles.

II.

One of the weighty considerations which has led to our being concerned with the question which is the topic of this presentation is, as we have seen, the desirability of receiving the Sacrament regularly and often. This desire is certainly God-pleasing. The very fact that at a time when His mind and heart were filled with thoughts of His impending passion our Lord Jesus still took time to give His followers His Supper; the fact that

⁴ John H. C. Fritz, *Pastoral Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1932), pp. 145ff.

⁵ *Luthers Sämtliche Schriften* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1885–1910), XXII, 570, No. 11.

He indicated that it is His will that what He had begun should be repeated by adding: “This do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me” (I Cor. 11:25); and the fact that His Apostle says: “As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord’s death till he come” (I Cor. 11:26), all indicate that it is His will that we should celebrate and receive the Sacrament often. One of the works in which we shall endeavor to train our people to abound more and more will therefore be the frequent use of the Lord’s Supper. In II Timothy 2:6 we find the axiom: “The husbandman that laboreth must be first partaker of the fruits.” One facet of its application is summed up in the adage: “Practice what you preach.” The pastor who seeks to stimulate frequent attendance at the Lord’s Table will himself also desire and receive the Lord’s Supper frequently.

We shall also at all times be mindful of what Luther says concerning this matter in his introduction to the *Small Catechism*:

Lastly, since the tyranny of the Pope has been abolished, people are no longer willing to go to the Sacrament and despise it (as something useless and unnecessary). Here again urging is necessary, however, with this understanding: We are to force no one to believe, or to receive the Sacrament, nor fix any law, nor time, nor place for it, but are to preach in such a manner that of their own accord, without our law, they will urge themselves and, as it were, compel us pastors to administer the Sacrament. This is done by telling them: Whoever does not seek or desire the Sacrament at least some four times a year, it is to be feared that he despises the Sacrament and is no Christian, just as he is no Christian who does not believe or hear the Gospel; for Christ did not say, This omit, or, This despise, but, This do ye, as oft as ye drink it, etc. Verily, He wants it done, and not entirely neglected and despised. This do ye, He says.

Now, whoever does not highly value the Sacrament thereby shows that he has no sin, no flesh, no devil, no world, no death, no danger, no hell; that is, he does not believe any such things, although he is in them over head and ears and is doubly the devil’s own. On the other hand, he needs no grace, life, Paradise, heaven, Christ, God, nor anything good. For if he believed that he had so much that is evil, and needed so much that is good, he would not thus neglect the Sacrament, by which such evil is remedied and so much good is bestowed. Neither will it be necessary to force him to the Sacrament by any law, but he will come running and racing of his own accord, will force himself and urge you that you must give him the Sacrament.

Hence, you must not make any law in this matter, as the Pope does. Only set forth clearly the benefit and harm, the need and use, the danger and the blessing, connected with this Sacrament and the people will come of themselves without compulsion. But if they do not come, let them go and tell them that such belong to the devil as do not regard nor feel their great need and the gracious help of God. But if you do not urge this, or make a law or a bane of it, it is your fault if they despise the Sacrament. How could they be otherwise than slothful if you sleep and are silent? Therefore look to it, ye pastors and preachers. Our office is now become a different thing from what it was under the Pope; it is now become serious and salutary.⁶

While all of this is most certainly true, we still must be careful not to overstate our case. While it is true that the Lord’s Supper is necessary for the *bene esse* of Christian faith and life, it is not necessary for the *esse*. We live with this fact in the case of our children under confirmation age. In this respect the Lord’s Supper differs from Baptism. A Christian may still nourish his faith with the Word if the Lord has led him into a situation in which it is impossible for him to receive the Lord’s Supper. This very fact may be used to increase his yearning for the time when the Lord will again make it possible for him to receive what he has had to forego. As a parallel we might refer to the intense longing for the house of the Lord which was called forth in the heart of David when as a fugitive he did not dare to go to the sanctuary. Think of these words of the 42nd Psalm: “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for

⁶ *Concordia Triglotta*, pp. 537–539.

God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?” (vs. 1,2). And then the joy which he anticipates when his exile will have been ended, as it is expressed in the companion Psalm 43: “O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles. Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy: yea, upon the harp will I praise thee, O God, my God” (vs. 3, 4). This observation has been advanced to forestall merely sentimental arguments, no matter how sincerely they may be meant, to bolster an answer to the question which we are viewing, and to retain an objectivity which places into the balance only such considerations which have real weight.

To overstate our case could lead to undue grief on the part of the survivors of one who did not receive the Sacrament *in extremis*. It could also lead to an almost frantic pleading on the part of the family to please give the Lord’s Supper to a dear one who is unconscious or in a coma lest he die without having received the Sacrament. From what has been said it follows that a pastor in his commendable desire to receive the Lord’s Supper frequently may not brush aside all contrary considerations just in order to make it possible for himself to satisfy his desire for the Sacrament.

As far as I can determine, there is only one direct reference in the Word to the officiant at the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, and that is in the account of the original celebration, at which our Lord Himself officiated. For the rest we must be content with deductions.

We include the Lord’s Supper with its unique and intensely personal quality of assuring the sinner of forgiveness and salvation in the Keys. And the Keys, we believe, have been given to the believers, the royal priesthood, who in their totality are the church. What one has, all have. “All things are yours” (I Cor. 3:21b). The public use of the Keys, that is, in the name and as the representative of the church as it appears in a given grouping, is conferred by means of the call. Therefore those called are “stewards of the mysteries of God” (I Cor. 4:1), the mysteries of God being the means through which the Lord reveals and offers His saving grace. St. Paul, we know, was called immediately. The other man to whom he refers directly with his use of the first person plural was Apollos. As to how he was called we have no further information. We do well, however, to emphasize that the call confers the privilege of the public use of the Keys, or, to become more specific for our purpose, of administering the Lord’s Supper.

For those who were called into any form of the public ministry the Lord demands certain qualifications. Some are specific. In the case of a bishop “apt to teach” is one specific qualification, “one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity” another (I Tim. 3:2,4). In the case of deacons, too, a specific qualification is “ruling their children and their own houses well” (I Tim. 3:12). The general qualifications for all who are entrusted with any form of the public ministry or even a comparatively minor function in the life of the church are those of a sound Christian character. In the case of bishops or elders they are listed in I Timothy 3:2–7 and Titus 1:6–9: “A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, . . .; not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?); not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.” “If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, sober, not given to filthy lucre; but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.” For deacons the qualifications are listed in I Timothy 3:8–12: “Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife. . . .” In the case of the seven in the mother church at Jerusalem we have their qualifications in Acts 6:3: “Look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.” For the widows who seem to have had some public

function or status these were the qualifications: “Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man, well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints’ feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work” (I Tim. 5:9,10). So while all who served in any sort of public manner in the church had to have the general qualifications, not every form of service required the specific qualifications without which a man could not be considered for the more weighty offices.

There are several guiding principles which must prevail when any arrangements are made in the church. The Apostle says: “Let all things be done decently and in order” (I Cor. 14:40). Previously he had said: “God is not the author of confusion, but of peace” (v. 33). Order presupposes planning and preparation so that when any arrangement is put into effect there will be no confusion. An even broader principle is stated in I Corinthians 16:14: “Let all your things be done with charity.” This means that everyone must be considered: not only the pastor, not only the council, but also the people; not only the strong, but also the weak. In the case of the introduction of anything new or the elimination of something old, the reasons for the step must have been clearly explained and generally accepted. And that brings in a third principle: “Give none offense, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God” (I Cor. 10:32). Precipitate haste or unilateral action is bound to disturb some, especially those who cannot discriminate between adiaphora and essentials. If something is changed which the fathers have done, there may be fear that the old doctrine is being abandoned; if something is introduced which may resemble an arrangement in a heterodox body, some are likely to fear that the entire Lutheran character of the congregation is being surrendered.

We shall have to be careful, however, about confusing the popular and the Scriptural use of the term “offense.” In popular usage for me to say that I am offended may mean nothing more than that I don’t particularly like what is being done. But the *σκάνδαλον* or *πρόσκομμα* of Scripture implies more. If what I do causes a weak brother to go along although in his own conscience he still feels that what he is doing is wrong, I have caused him to suffer spiritual harm. “Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith; for whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Rom. 14:22,23). Or it may work the other way. If he fails to see that what is being introduced is proper and allowable according to Scripture and instead views it as a relaxation of strict adherence to Scriptural principles, he may be led to conclude that what are truly Scriptural principles may also be relaxed. If, for example, we were to introduce a change in the accustomed manner of restricting the officiating at the Lord’s Supper, he might conclude that it will now also be permissible to relax our principles concerning lodgery. Again, he has suffered spiritual harm.

What has been said does not mean that the status quo must be frozen, but it does indicate why the three principles outlined above must come in for full consideration.

Another consideration which bears upon the answer to our question is that there need not be complete uniformity in arrangements which do not involve doctrinal considerations. We recall the classic statement in the Augsburg Confession: “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. Eph. 4, 5.6.”⁷ It would not do to try to answer our question by saying, “If this or that arrangement were introduced in one congregation, it might cause neighboring congregations to wonder.” Or, “If a pastor were to introduce an arrangement which none of his predecessors had used, the members of his congregation might be disturbed. Hence the status quo must be retained.” Rigid uniformity or continuity in customs is not demanded. The desirability of a given arrangement will have to be weighed on its own merits. If it is found to be desirable, charity, which includes patience, will find a way of meeting resultant problems as they may arise.

Now, I believe, we are ready to proceed to seek specific answers to our question: Who may officiate at the Lord’s Supper?

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

III.

We need spend little time establishing the fact that the called pastor or pastors of a congregation may officiate at the distribution of the Lord's Supper. This is one of the functions which has been assigned to him in his call, by which the congregation delegated him to act for the congregation and to serve the congregation.

While the call issued to vicars does not specifically mention the distribution of the Lord's Supper, its stipulations are broad enough to include this function: "... We will require that you assist with preaching, visiting the sick and unchurched, administrative work, and other ministerial duties, as directed by the supervising pastor." If the supervising pastor requests the vicar to assist in the administration of the Lord's Supper, or in the case of a vacant parish, to function alone in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, the considerations of order and love will have been met. I have heard of no case where there is among us a hesitancy to use the services of a vicar in this way.

If an ordained pastor is asked to assist in the distribution of the Lord's Supper in a given situation as guest pastor, or to take over a communion service completely, there is no essential difference between this arrangement and what happens when such a man is asked to serve as guest preacher. While there is no formal action on the part of the congregation which is being served, it is taken for granted among us that in such cases the regularly called pastor for the given situation is delegating to a qualified person the exercise of functions which have been entrusted to him. It happens right along and is considered quite orderly. If it should happen that a congregation objects to the future use of a particular substitute, let us say, because his aptitude to teach or his reputation is questioned, the wise pastor will refrain from calling upon that man again. In any event, to call upon him again without reaching a clear-cut understanding with his congregation could jeopardize confidence in his own ministry.

What about having a theological student assist with the distribution of the Lord's Supper or in an emergency even to function alone? Again it is a case where the pastor delegates this function which has been entrusted to him to another in a given situation. True, the qualifications of the student for the public ministry have not yet been established by his being presented to the church as a candidate for the holy ministry. But this does not involve a permanent call to exercise all of the functions of a pastor but only a very limited assignment. The fact that a man is a student in good standing at our Seminary will be accepted as evidence that he possesses the general qualifications which the Lord requires for the exercise of any public function in the church. If, however, there should be a question on the part of any congregation about having a student officiate at the Lord's Supper, charity would demand that the question be discussed and the arrangement continued only if unanimity has been attained. As said before, charity, which includes the avoiding of offense, must be exercised in all arrangements for the worship life of the church.

Now what is to be done when a pastor desires to receive the Lord's Supper more frequently than at conferences and conventions, or is convinced that to set a good example for his congregation he ought to let them see him receive the Lord's Supper regularly and frequently? As was mentioned in the first part of this presentation when we were enumerating the problems which underlie our theme, it was just these concerns which a century ago in Germany were responsible for agitation to allow self-communion. Because there seems to be general interest in this particular matter; because, I believe, self-communion is practiced in some bodies which are in fellowship with us; and because there may be instances of the practice also in our own synodical body, let us look into this matter somewhat more in detail.

In Meusel I found a rather lengthy article under the heading *Sumtio*, which I shall present in translation in the hope that you may find it as interesting as I did because it puts self-communion into its historical perspective:

In the ancient church until about the 9th century the *sumtio* took place in this manner that bread and the cup were placed into the hand of the communicants, who then put them into their own mouths. In the occidental church fear of desecrating the Sacrament early led to the adoption of

certain precautions. It was this fear, which grew with the increasing development and spread of the doctrine of transubstantiation, which in the west led to the custom which was becoming quite general in the 9th century, traces of which can be found even in the 6th century, to place the elements directly into the mouth of the communicants. This same fear also helped to bring about the withholding of the cup. As with the latter, so also with the former there was involved a hierarchical contempt for the laity. As a result when the Reformation abolished the withholding of the cup, there was also in the beginning an inclination on the part of the Lutherans to restore the old church manner of the *sumtio*. But when Carlstadt made it compulsory in Wittenberg and caused offense for those who were weak in the faith, Luther opposed him, declaring that it was an adiaphoron. That the Lutheran church continued to remain aloof from any change in this matter was caused essentially and more or less consciously in opposition to innovations on the part of the Reformed. On their part, following the example of Zwingli and the church at Zurich, the prevailing custom was changed not by restoring that of the old church but by passing cup and paten around from communicant to communicant and each took his own portion of the bread and wine. Thereby the distinction between *dosis* and *lepis* was blotted out and the original Reformed conception of the Sacrament was expressed that in the last analysis it is an action on the part of the church (*Selbstbetätigung der Gemeinde*) before God and the world. Over against this procedure the Lutheran Reformation, for which the Sacrament first of all is God's gift to the church, was all the less inclined to drop the prevailing manner in which the liturgical arrangement expressed the fact most emphatically that the communicants are the ones who do the receiving.

It is still necessary to touch upon a question which recently has come in for much discussion in the Lutheran church, the question of the so-called self-communion of the clergyman, i.e., whether the clergyman distributing the Sacrament, in the event that no other clergyman is present who might give it to him, is authorized to give it to himself (*se ipsum communicare*). From the earliest days the custom prevailed without being questioned that the officiating clergyman as a rule communed along, and in this way that under the circumstances referred to above he received the Sacrament from himself. With the appearance of the custom in the Roman Catholic Church of the Middle Ages that the priest celebrated private mass (*Winkelmesse*) this led to the abuse that the officiating clergyman was the only communicant, and the false interpretation that in the reception of the Sacrament he in his person was representing the congregation.

At first the Lutheran Reformation raised no objections to the self-communion of the clergyman in connection with the communing of the congregation. Luther in the *Formula missae* of the year 1523 expressly says: *Deinde communicet tum sese tum populum*. Cf. CA XXIV, 34: "Now since the mass is not a sacrifice for others, living or dead, to take away their sins, but is to be a communion in which the priest and others receive the Sacrament for themselves, this manner is observed among us that on festivals and otherwise, if there are communicants present, mass is celebrated and some who have the desire are communed." [My translation from the German. The Latin does not have the pertinent words: *da der Priester und andere das Sakrament empfangen für sich*.] A number of Lutheran church constitutions (*Kirchenordnungen*) of the 16th century have in part allowed, in part even called for self-communion. But at first opposition to the abuse of the private mass caused Luther to have second thoughts which were unfavorable to self-communion: "It is a confusion of offices if one communes himself, just as if one were to baptize himself." Compare also *Art. Sm.* Part II, Art. II, 8. Furthermore at least instinctively the opposition to the Reformed trend helped along. For in Reformed churches the participation of the ministrant in the meal of the congregation was specifically ordered, and that in this way that he, as he gives the chalice and the paten to another of the communicants, in turn for his part receives it from one of them. Here too the above mentioned conception of the Sacrament found expression, one which contradicts the *dosis* in the Lutheran sense. Over against this most of the

Lutheran church constitutions quietly abolished the self-communion of the clergy and in part expressly forbade it (so, as the first one, Bugenhagen's church constitution for the city of Goslar, 1531: "No one shall administer or give the Sacrament to himself"), so that even in the course of the 16th century this custom gradually disappeared and especially since the middle of the 17th century only appears as an exception which was hardly tolerated.

The main reason for this strange phenomenon that the Lutheran church dropped such a venerable and common custom is expressed in an opinion of the theological faculty of Wittenberg of 1612, that for the Lord's Supper both *dosis* and *lepsis* are requisite (cf. Joh. Gerhard: "Since two people are needed for the Lord's Supper, one who distributes and one who receives, the clergyman would act more correctly and more in accordance with Christ's institution if he were to receive the Sacrament from another and not from himself.") Still the fact has never been overlooked in the Lutheran church that the liturgical *dosis* in itself is an adiaphoron, and very prominent theologians like Chemnitz, Gerhard, and Hunnius have asserted that the self-communion of the clergyman is permissible at least in an emergency, with the argument that the clergyman even when receiving the Sacrament for himself is still functioning as collative organ of God.

Then follows the section about the growing sentiment among German clergymen in the 1850's to permit self-communion, a section which was quoted earlier. Meusel adds:

The obstacle to granting the request seems to be that the reception of the Sacrament is attached to the confession and absolution which precede. The objection was raised that this prerequisite is not absolutely necessary, that the clergyman may include himself in the general absolution, furthermore that he might still as before let another clergyman grant him absolution and the Sacrament. If nevertheless ecclesiastical authorities in the main have resisted the demand, the decisive factor seems to have been consideration for the congregation, for whom the self-communion of the clergy must appear to be offensive and contradictory."⁸

Roundly to condemn self-communion when it has the example of antiquity and the opinion of respected Lutheran theologians in its favor would be presumptuous. Personally I do not like it and would caution earnestly against introducing it and advise working toward replacing it with something better where it does exist. To me it smacks of clericalism, a child of the idea that an ordained clergyman is the only person in a Christian congregation who could have the right and the capacity to officiate at the Lord's Supper.

In all humility I believe that here we may borrow the words of the Apostle Paul: "Yet show I unto you a more excellent way" (I Cor. 12:31). I believe that in the matter under consideration the more excellent way is to revert to the truth of the universal priesthood of all believers. Need the right to officiate at the Lord's Supper be restricted to the theologically trained clergyman? As far as the proclamation of the Word is concerned, there can be little question that in our day the aptitude to teach which the Lord sets down as a qualification for the office of a bishop does require theological training. I am not thinking only of the formal sermon in the worship service, but also of the varied areas of teaching, the devotional addresses at organization meetings, and the devotions with the sick and shut-ins. I believe, too, that this training is requisite for the capable performers of the vast variety of pastoral duties. This applies also to the stewardship of the Lord's Supper, which involves not only granting it to those who are entitled to receive it, but also withholding it from those who are not entitled to receive it.

But to distribute to the officiating pastor the elements which have been properly consecrated does not call for the special qualifications which must be sought in those who labor in the Word and doctrine. While we know little about the workings of the newly-founded congregations in the apostolic age, the conclusion seems to

⁸ Meusel, *op. cit.*, pp. 488f.

be inescapable that the first bishops were chosen out of the ranks of the converts who formed the new congregation. We know that as soon as possible a specialized training for those who were to teach was ordered: “The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (II Tim. 2:2). But the point is that if those early believers sought out men in their own midst to perform the functions which were needed in the life of the congregation, there is no reason why we may not select someone from among the members of a congregation to administer the Lord’s Supper to his pastor. The act of the congregation, its call, if you please, would confer the right, just as the call confers upon the pastor the right to perform a much wider range of functions.

The idea of enlisting the services of a member to perform a limited function of the public ministry in our congregations is nothing new. We did something comparable to that which is being suggested here in the case of the reading service (*Lesegottesdienst*), which, I believe, was fairly common in the days when, because of the difficulties involved in traveling, substitute pastors were hard to obtain. I believe that there are some multiple parishes where the custom still obtains. How much of the liturgical service was retained may have varied, but someone designated by the pastor or the congregation read a sermon which had been prepared by the pastor. The point is that the principle was recognized that it is Scriptural to entrust a limited exercise of the Keys to one drawn from the ranks of the congregation if there was a legitimate need.

Who should be chosen? If there is a Christian day school, some might feel that the principal, if he is a man, would be the logical choice, since he too has a call into a form of the public ministry, and to add one more function might be the least complicated. Where there is no principal, and even where there is one, one might also think of using one of the elders. I’m thinking of this term in the restricted sense as I know it is used in some constitutions which make it the responsibility of elders to safeguard the purity of doctrine, to aid in the maintenance of Christian discipline, to promote peace, and to provide for good order in the worship services. Since they in a specific way are placed at the pastor’s side as far as the spiritual interests of the congregation are concerned, to charge one of them with the responsibility of serving the Lord’s Supper to the pastor if he so desires would be in line. Incidentally, if for any reason it would seem that a pastor ought to be asked to refrain from receiving the Sacrament until some difficulty had been resolved, I believe that it would be wiser to have this request come from the elders than from the principal.

The objections to instituting such an arrangement have been anticipated, I believe: 1. He’s a layman, not a pastor. 2. The members of the congregation will be upset if we start something like that. 3. What will our neighboring congregations say if they hear that one of our elders gives the Lord’s Supper to our pastor?

As to the first objection, I have all the respect in the world for the pastoral office. Anyone who has been entrusted with it will feel constrained to express the same awe which Paul expressed: “Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph. 3:8). And the Lord is very specific in urging respect for this office: “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine” (I Tim. 5:17). “We beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake” (I Thess. 5:12,13). But I also have a world of respect for the universal priesthood of all believers. It is through their call that the Lord makes a man a pastor: no call, no pastor. And He has not deposited all Christian virtues and all Christian knowledge only in pastors. Who of us has not had many an occasion to marvel at the good Christian common sense of some of our laymen? To ask a congregation to arrange to have one of its members give the Lord’s Supper to its pastor would furnish an excellent opportunity to review what the Word says about the glory of the saints, who are the church, and about the nature of the call. We spoke before of the fact that the Lord demands certain qualifications of those to whom is granted any kind of public standing in the church. If an elder were to be requested to distribute the Lord’s Supper to his pastor, it would therefore have to be one who fills his office with dignity. It would be offensive to entrust this function to a man who may have been elected to office with the idea of reforming him, but who has given no evidence of growth in Christian earnestness.

I mentioned the opportunity for instructing the congregation concerning the royal priesthood and the nature of the call. That brings us to the second objection. Certainly for a pastor out of the blue sky to announce

that beginning next Sunday Mr. So-and-So will give the Lord's Supper to the pastor would upset the congregation. Or to announce that the arrangement was to be introduced because the council had decided that it should be done. No, patient information and discussion on all levels ought to precede: in council, voters', and organization meetings, finally also by means of every-home mailings. How many weeks or months this would take will depend upon circumstances. But it can be done, and can be accepted and even welcomed.

But what about sister congregations? Might they not be offended? The question might well be raised whether it would be a matter of giving offense or taking offense. Questions may well be asked, and they deserve to be answered. But once it has been established that no difference in doctrine underlies, the *satis est* of *Augustana VII* must be allowed to stand.

If the cogency of the preceding presentation has been accepted, I believe that we also have the answer as to what is to be done if some physical impairment makes it difficult or impossible for a pastor to distribute the Lord's Supper, but does not make it impossible for him to perform the other duties of his office. If there is no other simple solution—and not all congregations have a source of ordained men close at hand—the congregation ought to be made aware of the fact that it has in its own midst the resources which are needed to solve its problem.

There yet remains the question of Christians in isolation. If there are two or three in a similar plight in the same general location, far removed from a church or pastor of their confession, may they agree to celebrate the Lord's Supper together? My answer would be a guarded Yes. First of all I would advise that they make sure that their isolation is real. The fact that it would take some effort to get to a congregation or a pastor of their faith in itself would not be cogent. Effort and sacrifice are not to be eliminated from the Christian's vocabulary. But if the isolation is real, we must bear in mind that the Lord says: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20). Where He is, the Keys are, also the right to celebrate the Lord's Supper.

I remarked, however, that my Yes was guarded. Even if circumstances do warrant that Christians in isolation exercise their spiritual priesthood by arranging for their own communion service, the principles to which we referred before ought not be ignored. If they are so earnest in their Christianity that they will avoid communing with the heterodox, it may be supposed that they will have maintained membership in their home congregations. Then order requires that they inform their home congregations of their plight and of their intentions and do not act without their knowledge and consent. The counsel ought to be forthcoming that they designate one or two of their group to officiate, but be sure that they know what is proper in the celebration of the Lord's Supper and be conscientious stewards of the Sacrament. In effect they will be forming temporarily their own congregation and calling someone qualified from their own midst to officiate.

If these cautions must be sounded in the case of even mature Christians in isolation, there is all the more reason to sound them in the case of military personnel. Age is no guarantee of spiritual maturity, to be sure, nor youth evidence of spiritual immaturity. But the Lord does warn against entrusting the bishop's office to a novice (I Tim. 3:6). The home pastor who informs a youth of his privilege must also impress upon him the solemnity of celebrating the Lord's Supper, especially the need for good order and for the conscientious stewardship which involves close communion. One need only read the solemn words which the Lord spoke through St. Paul when the communion practice at Corinth had degenerated to realize how relevant these words of caution are.

We must underscore the reminder too that what is done in an emergency, as a case of casuistry, dare not become the basis for a general practice. If some members of a congregation did not like the schedule for communion services in their congregation, or had an aversion to their pastor, and would begin to argue that because they knew that two families whose business connections had taken them to Ethiopia had their own communion services they were also going to start having their own communion services, we would have every reason to brand such action as schismatic and therefore sinful. Love would be ignored, order disrupted, and the obligation assumed in calling a pastor violated. The Lord condemns such disruption as a work of the flesh and pronounces His verdict upon it: "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: ... hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies ... of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal. 5:19–21).

That, I believe, is all that I have to say about the question: Who may officiate at the Lord's Supper? I do not presume to have said the last word on the matter. If I have been used to stimulate thought and discussion, I trust that the purpose of my coming will have been served.

May the Lord help us ever to appreciate the privilege both of officiating at the Lord's Supper and of receiving it.