

Synodically Authorized Ministries

Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod

approved by Synod Council, April 2002

According to the Constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (7.61.01.), "When need exists to render Word and Sacrament ministry for a congregation or ministry of this church where it is not possible to provide appropriate ordained pastoral leadership, the synodical bishop – may authorize a person rostered in other rostered ministry, or a non-rostered person who is a member of a congregation of the ELCA to offer this ministry."

In the Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod, the types of authorized ministries are specific, yet varied enough to meet the needs of our congregations, especially those who are without the leadership of rostered persons. The following outlines the qualifications, program of preparation, authorization for service, and supervision and accountability for ministry as a Synodically Authorized Lay Distributor of Holy Communion.

Lay Distributors of Holy Communion

Purposes: The ministry of Word and Sacrament is a privilege and right of every worshiping community. Congregations who desire to receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion during times of vacancy, or whenever an ordained clergy person is not available, may participate in this ministry. Following these guidelines and procedures of the Synod, selected lay members of a congregation may be allowed to distribute the previously consecrated and reserved elements of the Sacrament at a regular service of worship. This ministry will also be a cooperative endeavor with a neighboring Lutheran congregation and pastor, emphasizing our unity around the Lord's Table.

Qualifications

Selection of Distributors: The Congregational Council will select the lay members to be involved in this ministry. Recommendations from the Bishop and/or Pastor may be considered. Those chosen should be baptized, confirmed, active members of the congregation, willing to serve the congregation in this way, and be able to attend a seminar for instruction. It would be helpful if those selected have a level of comfort with the liturgy (chanting is not required), with the leading of prayers, and the close physical contact with others that distribution would require. A sense of trust between distributor and recipient is important.

Program of Preparation

The Synod's program of instruction will include one session of approximately two hours, taught by the Bishop, one of the assistants, and/or a neighboring Lutheran pastor. Additional instruction requested.

Authorization for Service

Upon satisfactory completion of the instruction an individual may be authorized for service with his/her congregation only. A letter of authorization from the bishop should be received before service begins as a Lay Distributor of Holy Communion. Authorization will be for six months and may be renewed upon evaluation of need.

Supervision and Accountability

Accountability for Lay Distributors of Holy Communion is the direct responsibility of the bishop of this synod who may appoint an ordained minister to provide such direct supervision with the concurrence of the Congregational Council.

Procedures and Further Matters for Lay Distributors of Holy Communion

1. The congregation will provide communion ware/dishes/decanter needed to hold communion wafers and wine necessary for the distribution of the Sacrament. The congregation may provide enough wafers and wine for one service or more, if the need is likely to continue for several weeks. (Perhaps providing elements for one month at a time would aid in efficiency.)
2. The elements for Communion will be taken to a neighboring Lutheran congregation. The ordained pastor there will include the elements in the celebration of the Sacrament and consecrate them during the regular worship service of his/her congregation. It is suggested that both congregations include the other in prayer and members be made aware of this cooperation in ministry.
3. The lay distributors of the congregation will make arrangements to pick up the consecrated elements to return them to their own church and keep them together in a clean, safe place.
4. At the next regular service of worship, following the Prayers of the Church and Sharing of the Peace, the lay distributor(s) will go to the altar and prepare the table. Acolyte assistance is permissible.
5. The Order of Worship continues with the Distribution of Holy Communion in Special Circumstances (OS, p. 76) or an order prepared and/or approved by the Office of the Bishop.
6. Written or verbal announcements concerning the service should use language that reflects that this is the Distribution of Holy Communion, and avoid "Celebration" language. Those participating in this ministry in a leadership position are to be called "Lay Distributors of Holy Communion."
7. The Ministry of Word to congregations in need of pastoral and/or worship leadership will be provided by Lay Worship Leaders of our Synod. In order to avoid confusion of roles, a Lay Worship Leader should not be a Lay Distributors of Holy Communion at the same worship service.
8. The Bishop or his assistants will make the initial contact with the neighboring Lutheran congregation to begin this partnership in ministry. Following that, once the program has begun, the Lay Distributors or Congregational Council should continue the necessary communication and organization with the neighboring congregation and pastor.
9. Other resources for bulletin announcements and liturgies are available to assist congregational members and worship leaders.