

# Should We Have Lay Distributors?

By Jake Zabel, BTh, AdDipThMin

2019

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## Preface

In recent times the Church has adopted the practice of having laymen (or even women) distribute the Body/Bread and Blood/Wine during Holy Communion. This practice has often been done without any questions being raised. However, simply because we have “*always*” done this practice doesn't mean that this practice is the right practice. As a Church born of the Lutheran Reformation we must be willing to reform the Church when and where needed. As a Bible believing Church we must always check our doctrine, life and practice against the Word of God. We must question our own practices and doctrines and study the Scriptures to determine whether we are in agreement with the Word or at odds with It.

Therefore, in this book, I wish to discuss the question, “**should we have lay distributors?**” In doing so I will seek to determine whether or not this practice is right. In this paper I will study the Scriptures, Lutheran Confessions and other theological writings to determine whether the use of lay distributors during Holy Communion is **Biblical, Confessional, Historical** and/or **Necessary**.

# Is it Biblical?

All matters of faith, life, doctrine and practice should be based upon the Word of God. Thus, when discussing any theological topic we must first turn our eyes to the Scriptures. Henceforth, in our discussion on lay distributors, the first question that we must discuss is whether or not the practice is Biblical.

The term and practice of lay distributors does not occur in the Holy Scriptures. Therefore, to look for an explicit statement either confirming or condemning lay distributors would be pointless.

Instead, we need to begin by looking at the roles and functions of the Office of the Ministry of Word and Sacrament.

The Scriptures teach us that God gave pastors for the work of the Ministry of Word and Sacrament (Ps. 68:11, Isa. 41:27, Jer. 3:15, 23:4, John 20:21-23, Acts 20:28, 1 Cor. 1:17, 12:28-29, 2 Cor. 2:18-19, Eph. 3:2, 4:11-12, Col. 1:25, 1 Pet. 5:2).<sup>1</sup> The pastors are the ones who have been instituted by God for the work of the Ministry. Pastors are the ones given to serve the laity while the laity are the ones who are to be served by the clergy (Acts 20:28, 1 Cor. 3:9, Eph. 3:2, Col. 1:25, 1 Pet. 5:2). This is because those in the Office of the Ministry stand in the place and stead of Christ as His representatives, ambassadors, servants and co-workers (Luke 10:16, 1 Cor. 3:9, 4:1, 2 Cor. 5:20, 13:3).<sup>2</sup>

Those who belong to the Office of the Ministry are the Stewards of the Mysteries of God (1 Cor. 4:1, Tit. 1:7), that is, they are the ones responsible for the administration of Word and Sacrament.<sup>3</sup> No one is to serve in this capacity unless they have been called (sent, appointed) into the Office of the Ministry (John 20:21, Acts 14:23, Rom. 10:15, 1 Tim. 1:3, 2 Tim. 2:2, Tit. 1:5, Heb. 5:4). The Scriptures give us grave warnings about those who serve in this capacity without being rightly called (Num. 16:32, 2 Chron. 26:19, Jer. 23:21,32).

The call as a Steward of the Mysteries of God doesn't end with the consecration. Being a Steward of the Mysteries of God is not limited to consecration and overseeing the distribution, but includes the very distribution itself. *"Being a steward doesn't mean that we are "delegators" of the mysteries of God."*<sup>4</sup>

When Christ instituted the Lord's Supper He commanded us to *"do this."* (Luke 22:19, 1 Cor. 11:24-25) We are commanded to **do** as Christ did. When celebrating the Lord's Supper we are to celebrate it just as Christ celebrated it on the night when He was betrayed. As Martin Luther said, *"The more closely our celebration of the Mass [Holy Communion] matches the first Mass of Christ, that is without doubt better, and the more divergent it is, the more dangerous our approach."*<sup>5</sup>

As Luther said, we should strive to "do this" as closely as possible to how Christ did it. And on the night when He was betrayed it was Christ who distributed both the bread and the wine to the Disciples (Matt. 26:26-27, Mark 14:22-23, Luke 22:19). Therefore, it should be the pastors, as those who stand in the place and stead of Christ (Luke 10:16, 1 Cor. 3:9, 4:1, 2 Cor. 5:20, 13:3), who distributes the bread and the wine during Holy Communion. In this way they follow Christ's command to *"do this"* as Christ did.

As Martin Luther said concerning the distribution of the Lord's Supper, *"Christ's order and institution are clear: 'This do in remembrance of Me.' What should we do? And what is meant by 'this'? Nothing else than what He indicated by action and word when He took the bread, blessed and*

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<sup>1</sup> See *The Augsburg Confession* Article 28.6 for the connection of John 20:21-23 with pastors.

<sup>2</sup> See *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession* Article 7&8. 28 for the connection of Luke 10:16 with pastors standing in the place and stead of Christ. See *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession* Article 24.80 for the connection of 1 Corinthians 4:1 and 2 Corinthians 5:20 with pastors.

<sup>3</sup> See *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession* Article 24.80 for the connection of the "mysteries of God" with Word and Sacrament.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Van der Hoek, *The Lord's Supper: Four Sermons preached at St. Mark's Lutheran Church, Mount Barker, South Australia, Lent 2015*, page 40. (See Appendix 3)

<sup>5</sup> Martin Luther quoted by Albrecht Peters, *Commentary of Luther's Catechisms: Baptism and Lord's Supper*, page 183.

broke it, and gave it to His disciples, saying: Take, eat; this is My body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me. After the same manner also He took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying: Drink ye all of it; this is the cup of the new testament in My blood. This do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me. If then Christ's institution is to be observed (as He Himself says: 'This do'), we [pastors] must not only take the bread and wine with the words of Christ but also give and impart it to others."<sup>6</sup>

As Johann Gerhard said concerning the distribution of the Lord's Supper, "Since at the Institution of the Holy Supper, Christ explicitly commands that we do what He did when we administer it, it follows that the ministers<sup>7</sup> of the church, when they want to celebrate the Holy Supper, must repeat the Words of Institution, consecrate the bread and wine in this way, and distribute them to the communicants.<sup>8</sup> So when the minister repeats the Lord's Words of Institution, consecrates the bread and wine with them, and distributes them to the communicants, that is not merely a historic repetition of what Christ did, as when those words are customarily repeated to the people in sermons to be presented to them."<sup>9</sup>

Now the question will be raised, "if laymen are not to distribute the bread and wine during Holy Communion, then who communes the pastor when only one pastor is present?"

Let me answer this question by asking another question, "who communed Christ?"

Now the Scriptures do not explicitly state that Christ communed with the Twelve Disciples on the night when he was betrayed (Matt. 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:14-23, 1 Cor. 11:23-25). However, this was a fellowship meal between Christ and His Disciples, therefore we can assume that Christ shared in this Holy Communion meal with the Disciples in order to unite them together in fellowship. Just as Christ had declared fellowship with sinners by eating with them (Matt. 9:11, Mark 2:16, Luke 5:30).

And in Matthew 26:29 and Mark 14:25, just after the distribution of the cup, Jesus said that He would not drink of this cup (fruit of the vine) again until the day when "I drink it new with you in My Father's Kingdom." The "again" implies that Jesus had drunk from the cup now during the distribution, and the statement "*drink it new with you*<sup>10</sup> in My Father's Kingdom," (Matt. 26:29) implies that He has first drunken the cup here with the Disciples on Earth.

Therefore, even though the text does not explicitly say that Christ communed with the Disciples, the situation would imply that He did. Therefore, the question is asked, "who communed Christ?"

The answer is that Christ would have communed Himself, as He was the one distributing the bread and the wine. Thus, when there is only one pastor distributing Holy Communion, he, as the one who stands in the place and stead of Christ (Luke 10:16, 1 Cor. 3:9, 4:1, 2 Cor. 5:20, 13:3), may commune himself.

As Martin Luther<sup>11</sup> said, "*The bishop should also be free to decide on the order in which he will receive and administer both species [bread and wine]. He may choose to bless both bread and wine before he takes the bread. Or else he may, between the blessing of the bread and of the wine, give bread both to himself*<sup>12</sup>*and to as many as desire it, then bless the wine and administer it to all. This is the order Christ seems to have observed.*"<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Martin Luther, *On the Private Mass and Holy Orders*, quoted in C.F.W. Walther, *Church and Ministry*, page 260.

<sup>7</sup> Emphasis mine.

<sup>8</sup> Emphasis mine.

<sup>9</sup> Johann Gerhard quoted by C.F.W. Walther, *Pastoral Theology*, page 131.

<sup>10</sup> Emphasis mine

<sup>11</sup> Walther commented on this statement of Luther saying, "*Luther said that one may consecrate both elements and then distribute both – or consecrate and distribute the bread, then consecrate and distribute the wine.*" *Pastoral Theology*, page 140. (Emphasis mine).

<sup>12</sup> Emphasis mine

<sup>13</sup> Martin Luther, *An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church of Wittenberg*, LW 53, page 30.

Therefore, in obedience to the command of Christ to “do this” we should do as He did. Thus, the pastor as the ambassador of Christ (Luke 10:16, 1 Cor. 3:9, 4:1, 2 Cor. 5:20, 13:3) should consecrate the elements of the Lord’s Supper and distribute them both to himself and to as many as desire it.

The question will be asked, “but doesn’t Acts 6 permit the Church to establish auxiliary (assisting) offices?”

The answer is, yes, in Acts 6:1-6 the Apostles instituted the office of deacon<sup>14</sup> as an assisting office to the Office of the Ministry. But does this text suggest that laymen can distribute the Lord’s Supper?

Let us take a deeper look at this text. In the earlier Church of Acts the Christians had everything in common, they sold their possessions and were distributing the proceeds to all in need (Acts 2:44-45).

Now, in Acts 6:1 a complaint arose from the Hellenistic Jews concerning the Hebraic Jews. It appears that during the daily distributions the widows from the Hellenistic Jews were being neglected. Then in order that the Disciples should not give up the Ministry of the Word (and Sacrament, the physical Word) they appointed seven deacons to assist them in their Ministry by serving tables. Acts 6 shows us that this lay auxiliary office of deacon was distinct from the Office of the Ministry of Word and Sacrament.<sup>15</sup> The Apostles (and pastors), as the ones called into the Office of the Ministry of Word and Sacrament, were to continue serving the Church through Word and Sacrament, while the deacons were called to serve the physical needs of the Church, such as distribution of charity. It is clear from Acts 6:1-6 that the auxiliary office of deacon was distinct from the Office of the Ministry of Word and Sacrament.

As P. F. Koehneke said, “when the need arose in the congregation at Jerusalem to establish the office of deacon, the Apostles presented the situation to the people and suggested the election of seven men to provide for the poor in the congregation.”<sup>16</sup>

As Bo Giertz said, “we learn with certainty that the deacons then as well as now primarily did work of mercy, while presbyters and bishops proclaimed the Word and generally handled the administration of the Church.”<sup>17</sup>

As Martin Luther said, “The priesthood [office of pastor] is properly nothing but the Ministry of the Word – the Word, I say; not the Law, but the Gospel. And the diaconate is the ministry, not of reading the Gospel or the Epistle, as is the present practice<sup>18</sup>, but of distributing the church’s aid to the poor, so that the priests may be relieved of the burden of temporal matters and may give themselves more freely to prayer and the Word. For this was the purpose of the institution of the diaconate, as we read in Acts 5<sup>19</sup> [Acts 6:1-6].”<sup>20</sup>

As Kurt Marquart said, “This is the origin of the diaconate, whose special responsibility is the care of the needy. In this technical sense we find deacons contrasted with bishops (Phil. 1:1, 1 Tim. 3:8).”<sup>21</sup> And later on in the same section, “what is clear is that the church’s diaconic sharing at “tables” is not as such the ministry of the Word, from which it is expressly distinguished (Acts 6:2,4).”<sup>22</sup>

As Jeffrey Radt said, “If we look at the Bible again, isn’t our understanding of a Deacon’s role, as found in Acts 6, that it was a new office created for the sole purpose of taking care of other menial tasks (Acts 6:1-4) so that they could enable the Apostles more time for preaching God’s Word and

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<sup>14</sup> See Bo Giertz, *Christ’s Church: Her Biblical Roots, Her Dramatic History, Her Saving Presence, Her Glorious Future*, page 153.

<sup>15</sup> For a further discussion on the office of deacon see below the section on *Deacons: What Are They?* under the *Is it Historical?* section.

<sup>16</sup> P.F. Koehneke, *The Call into the Holy Ministry*, from *The Abiding Word* volume 1, page 371.

<sup>17</sup> Bo Giertz, *Christ’s Church: Her Biblical Roots, Her Dramatic History, Her Saving Presence, Her Glorious Future*, page 154.

<sup>18</sup> The Roman Catholic Church views the office of deacon as part of the three-fold Ministry of Word and Sacrament, Bishop-Priest-Deacon. In Luther’s day the office of deacon was not a lay office but an office of assisting pastor.

<sup>19</sup> Misquote by Luther.

<sup>20</sup> Martin Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, LW 36, page 116.

<sup>21</sup> Kurt Marquart, *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance*, page 140.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* page 141.

administering God's Sacrament, which is what the Pastor is uniquely called to do today according to AC AXIV? Even 1 Timothy 3 doesn't indicate that deacons teach the Word or administer the Sacraments."<sup>23</sup>

Outside of Acts 6:1-6<sup>24</sup> the office of deacon appears in Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13, where the office of deacon is put in contrast with the office of bishop (pastor)<sup>25</sup>. If we look at 1 Timothy 3:2-13 and Titus 1:5b-9, we can compare the Biblical roles of pastors and deacon.

<p><i>Therefore a bishop must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children subordinate, for if someone does not know how to govern his own household, how will he care for God's Church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.</i></p> <p><b>1 Timothy 3:2-7</b></p>	<p><i>Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain, they must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first, then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in faith that is in Christ Jesus.</i></p> <p><b>1 Timothy 3:8-13</b></p>	<p><i>Appoint elders in every town as I directed you – if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. He must hold firm to the trustworthy Word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.</i></p> <p><b>Titus 1:5b-9</b></p>
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What we can learn from these texts, along with texts such as 2 Timothy 2:1-2, Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:1-3, 1 Corinthians 4:1 etc. is that the functions of the office of pastor include: preaching, teaching, administration of the Sacraments and oversight or governance of the Church. While deacons are not called to teach or be stewards of God, but are called to serve the congregation. Act 6:1-4 shows us that this serving takes place not through Word or Sacrament but through works of charity and the like.

According to the Scriptures the office of pastor has been instituted by God for service of the Church through Word and Sacrament (Ps. 68:11, Isa. 41:27, Jer. 3:15, 23:4, John 20:21-23, Acts 6:2,4, 20:28, 1 Cor. 1:17, 12:28-29, 2 Cor. 5:18-19, Eph. 3:2, 4:11-12, Col. 1:25, 1 Pet. 5:2), while the lay auxiliary office of deacon was instituted by the Church for the service of the Church through the physical needs of the Church, such as charity, property and finances (Acts 6:1-6, Rom. 16:1,3-5, 1 Cor. 1:11, 16:19, Col. 4:15). As Hermann Sasse said, "*all this external business, all the meetings of church groups, all this having to get the money together. Deacons are to have the responsibility for such things. They<sup>26</sup> are not to draw a pastor away from what he is called to do as a pastor.*"<sup>27</sup>

The Scriptures teach us that it is the clergy and not the laity who are to serve the congregation in the authoritative leadership roles through Word and Sacrament; while the lay workers (deacons) are to serve the congregation in subordinate assisting roles through the care of the physical needs of the congregation. For this reason lay people are not to distribute the elements of Holy Communion, as this is a function of the Ministry of Word and Sacrament.

<sup>23</sup> Jeffrey Radt, *Article 14 and LCMS Lay Deacons*, [www.lutheranlayman.com/2013/10/article-xiv-and-lcms-lay-deacons.html](http://www.lutheranlayman.com/2013/10/article-xiv-and-lcms-lay-deacons.html) (See Appendix 1)

<sup>24</sup> Note that the term 'deacon' does not appear in Acts 6. However, the Church has historically interpreted the Seven to be deacons and Acts 6:1-6 to be the institution of this office.

<sup>25</sup> The Biblical office of bishop is synonymous with the office of pastor, see Acts 20:28, Tit. 1:5-7, 1 Pet. 5:1-2.

<sup>26</sup> The 'they' refers to the meetings and physical needs of the Church, not the deacons.

<sup>27</sup> Hermann Sasse, *On the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, from *We Confess: The Church*, page 18.

However, many have “gotten around this for years by saying that the Lay Deacon is really just “assisting” the Pastor in his work.”<sup>28</sup>

Many claim that the distribution of the Sacrament may be delegated to suitable laymen because they are purely assisting functions.<sup>29</sup> However is this the reality of the matter?

As stated above, Acts 6 makes it clear that the functions of a lay deacon are distinctly separate from the Ministry of Word and Sacrament. These functions are defined as “works of charity,” “menial tasks” and “physical needs of the congregation”.

In addition Christ commands us to “do this” as He did (Luke 22:19, 1 Cor. 11:24-25). During the Last Supper Christ both consecrates (blesses, gives thanks over) the bread and the wine and distributes the bread and the wine. Therefore, in keeping with Christ’s command to “do this” it is the role of the clergy, as the ambassadors of Christ, who are to consecrate and distribute the bread and the wine of Holy Communion (Luke 10:16, 1 Cor. 3:9, 4:1, 2 Cor. 5:20, 13:3) and not the laity.

It is the pastors who have been called (John 20:21, Acts 14:23, Rom. 10:15, 1 Tim. 1:3, 2 Tim. 2:2, Tit. 1:5, Heb. 5:4) to serve the laity through Word and Sacrament (Ps. 68:11, Isa. 41:27, Jer. 3:15, 23:4, John 20:21-23, Acts 6:2,4, 20:28, 1 Cor. 1:17, 12:28-29, 2 Cor. 5:18-19, Eph. 3:2, 4:11-12, Col. 1:25, 1 Tim. 3:2, 2 Tim. 2:2, Tit. 1:7,9, 1 Pet. 5:2). While the laity are the ones who are to be served (Acts 20:28, 1 Cor. 3:9, Eph. 3:2, Col. 1:25, 1 Pet. 5:2).

It is also the pastors who have been called to serve the congregation in the authoritative positions of leadership (Acts 20:28, Phil. 1:1, 1 Tim.3:1-2,5, Tit. 1:7, 1 Peter 5:1-3). The lay workers are only to serve in subordinate assisting positions. Therefore, the question is “is Lay Distribution truly only an assisting position or is it an authoritative position?” For if it is the latter, then it is not a truly assisting position and is not to be held by laity.

The claim that Lay Distribution is an assisting role is based on fact that the lay distributors are under the pastor’s authority, and thus it is claimed that they do not exercise any authority.

In the LCA’s (*Lutheran Church of Australia*) paper on *The Distribution of the Sacrament of the Altar*<sup>30</sup> they claim that the lay assistant does not exercise the Office of the Keys as he is under the authority of the presiding pastor<sup>31</sup>. However, simply being under someone’s authority doesn’t mean that you don’t exercise authority yourself. You can be both under authority and still exercise authority over others. I have called this the Under-Over Principle of Authority<sup>32</sup>. This can be seen in Scripture when Jesus speaks to a centurion who states that he is both under the authority of men and has men under his authority (Matt. 8:9, Luke 7:8).

The position of lay distributor may be under the pastor’s authority but the distributor still possesses authority over all who receive communion from his hands. This authority is evident in the fact that women are not allowed to distribute the Lord’s Supper<sup>33</sup> as they would be exercising authority over men, which Scripture has forbidden (1 Tim. 2:12).

Even the LCA acknowledges this authority in their statement when they state that “*Since the words used for admitting communicants (‘Take and eat...drink’) presuppose the office of the keys, they are best used by the presiding minister. Thus the ritual function of the words is directly related to those who are ritually authorised to use them for the admission of people to the Lord’s Table.*”<sup>34</sup> Therefore, the lay assistant is only to say the words “*this is the body of Christ given for you*” and “*this is the*

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Kurt Marquart, *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance*, page 165.

<sup>30</sup> The Lutheran Church of Australia, Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinion Volume 2. Section E: The Sacraments, *The Distribution of the Sacrament of the Altar*, [www.lca.org.au/departments/commissions/cticr/](http://www.lca.org.au/departments/commissions/cticr/)

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. page E17.

<sup>32</sup> See Jake Zabel, *The Role of Female Laity in the Church*, page 6.

<sup>33</sup> The Australian Evangelical Lutheran Church, *Statement of Faith*, Women in the Church, page 65. [www.aelc.org.au/statement.php](http://www.aelc.org.au/statement.php). Also, Melvin Grieger, Vernon Grieger, Clarence Priebbenow, *The Word Shall Stand: Our Evangelical Lutheran Confession*, pages 155, 194.

<sup>34</sup> The Lutheran Church of Australia, Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinion Volume 2. Section E: The Sacraments, *The Distribution of the Sacrament of the Altar*, page E19

blood of Christ, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins” or simply “the body of Christ, given for you” and “the blood of Christ, shed for you.”<sup>35</sup>

The LCA teaches that a layman is not to say the words “take and eat/drink” for these are the authoritative Words of Christ, which presuppose the Office of the Keys. These words are the command of Christ and are to be spoken only by those who stand in the place and stead of Christ.

However, this authority is not limited only to the Words of Christ, but are also contained in the actions of Christ. For Christ command us to “do this” just as He did. And during the Last Supper it was Christ who did the distributing. Therefore, the action of distribution also presupposes the Office of the Keys, and the Office of Word and Sacrament.

Henceforth, not only the consecration but also the distribution is to be done only by those who stand in the place and stead of Christ. For as the LCA’s paper says, the administration of the Lord’s Supper is defined as: “The entire celebration of the sacrament in the church service. This includes the taking of bread and wine; their consecration with thanksgiving and the words of institution; their distribution; their reception and consumption by the communicants; and their use for the proclamation of Christ’s death (FCSD 7.84).”<sup>36</sup>

Administration of the Sacrament includes both consecration and distribution, and only those who have been called into the Office of the Ministry of Word and Sacrament may administer the Sacrament.<sup>37</sup>

As the Faculty of Theology in Leipzig (1671) said concerning lay distribution, “Those who do not have a public call in this regard shall not allow themselves to do this and it does not matter that the consecration has already been performed by the preacher.”<sup>38</sup>

By distributing the Lord’s Body and Blood, the distributor is serving as a Steward of the Mysteries of God. When you distribute the elements of a Sacrament you are exercising the Office of Word and Sacrament. For Christ has instituted the Office of the Ministry of Word and Sacrament for the administration of the Sacraments, and when you perform the actions commanded by Christ in connection with these Sacraments, you are exercising that office.

For example, Christ commanded the Apostles to go and Baptize (Matt. 28:19). If during a Baptism the pastor spoke the Words “I Baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” but the layman did the application of water, we would consider this to be a breaking of God’s Order (see 1 Cor. 14:33,40, Tit. 1:5). Even though he hasn’t spoken the Words of Christ, the layman has still exercised the Office of Word and Sacrament by performing the action connected with the administration of that Sacrament. For Christ commanded the Apostles (clergy)<sup>39</sup> to baptize, that is the application of the water.

In the same way, Christ gave the Apostles (clergy) the command to “do this” with the Lord’s Supper. The command “do this” refers to the entire action of the Lord’s Supper, including both the consecration and distribution of the elements.<sup>40</sup>

As Martin Chemnitz said, “For what He Himself did in the Supper, that He commanded the apostles to do thereafter... Now Paul is the most reliable interpreter that the pronoun “this” in the command of Christ: “Do this,” is to be referred to the whole preceding action: “This (namely, what was done at the first Supper) you are to do hereafter.” Therefore the command of Christ: “Do this,” means nothing other than that the ministers of the church in the administration of the Lord’s Supper

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. page E16.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. page E17.

<sup>38</sup> Faculty of Theology in Leipzig, quoted by Tom Hardt in *Lay Distribution of the Lord’s Supper is Impossible for Orthodox Lutheranism*, page 3. (See Appendix 4)

<sup>39</sup> Although a layperson may be permitted to Baptism in a case of emergency. See *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of Pope* .67. See Martin Luther, *Table Talk*, LW 54, page 460.

<sup>40</sup> *Formula of Concord: Solid Declaration* Article 7.83-84.

ought to do that of which it is established and certain that Christ did at the institution of the Supper.”<sup>41</sup>

Christ’s Word “*do this*” was a command given to the ministers of the Church to administer the Lord’s Supper, just as Christ did at the Institution of the Supper. This includes both the consecration and distribution, which were done by Christ during the Institution of Holy Communion (Matt. 26:26-27, Mark 14:22-23, Luke 22:19-20, 1 Cor. 11:24-25).

Therefore, even if the pastor were to speak the Words of Christ “*take and eat...drink*”, the layman would still be exercising the Office of Word and Sacrament by performing the actions connected with the administration of the Sacrament of the Altar.

Thus, the distribution of the Lord’s Supper is not merely an assisting role but is an authoritative role that presupposes the Office of Word and Sacrament and the Stewardship of the Mysteries of God.

There are, however, ways in which a layman can assist in the administration of Sacraments, in a purely assisting function. For example, a layman may not perform the application of the water during a Baptism but a layman (or even a laywoman) may assist the pastor by holding the infant over/near the water. In this way the layman assists in the administration of the Sacrament but does not himself administer the Sacrament. For the pastor handles the Word and actions commanded by Christ, and the layman serves by taking care of the earthly needs.

Examples of ways that a layman can assist in the Sacrament of the Altar without exercising the Office of Word and Sacrament are as follows:

1. The pastor can distribute both the bread and the cup and the lay assistant can follow the pastor with the tray of individual cups. However the pastor alone would speak the “*take, drink, the very Blood of Christ, shed for you.*”<sup>42</sup> This was the former practice performed at the LCA’s Zion Lutheran Church at Minden.
2. The pastor may wish to distribute the bread and wine consecutively to each communicant. In doing so he may carry the cup in one hand, while the lay assistant carries the plate of wafers. Then during the distribution the pastor will use his free hand to take the wafer from the plate and distribute it to the communicant before distributing the cup. This is a common practice in Scandinavia.<sup>43</sup> In this way the laity are not actually administering to the congregation but only standing nearby holding what is needed.<sup>44</sup>
3. If an elderly pastor has shaky hands and would otherwise spill the wafers or wine, a lay assistance may carry the plate or cup for him. However, the pastor should still distribute the elements to each communicant and speak the Words “*take and eat/drink...*”

In these practices the layman serves as merely an extra pair of hands for the pastor, while the pastor is still the one distributing the elements. In this way the layman assists the pastor in a truly assisting role.

Now, one could argue that a layman could also perform the distribution in a case of emergency, when the elements have been consecrated and the pastor is suddenly unable to perform the distribution (whether due to illness, etc.). For, in such a case the Sacraments that have been consecrated are the Body and Blood of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16) and are under the command to “*take and eat...drink*”. (Matt. 26:26-27) In order to fulfil this command of Christ to “*eat and drink*”, we must temporarily bypass the established order of God. In the Gospels Jesus gives us the Biblical precedent for emergency situations (Matt. 12:10-12, Mark 3:4, Luke 13:16, 14:3,5). In the Gospels Jesus

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<sup>41</sup> Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, volume 2, page 465. Quoted in John Stephenson, *The Lord’s Supper*, page 84.

<sup>42</sup> Heath Curtis, *Lay Assistance in Communing the People and Something About Deacons*, [www.gottesdienstonline.blogspot.com.au/2011/01/lay-assistance-in-communing-people-and.html](http://www.gottesdienstonline.blogspot.com.au/2011/01/lay-assistance-in-communing-people-and.html) (See Appendix 2)

<sup>43</sup> Stephen Van der Hoek, *The Lord’s Supper: Four Sermons preached at St. Mark’s Lutheran Church, Mount Barker, South Australia, Lent 2015*, page 41. (See Appendix 3)

<sup>44</sup> Jeffrey Radt, *Article 14 and LCMS Lay Deacons*, [www.lutheranlayman.com/2013/10/article-xiv-and-lcms-lay-deacons.html](http://www.lutheranlayman.com/2013/10/article-xiv-and-lcms-lay-deacons.html) (See Appendix 1)

affirmed that the Jews could break God's ordinance of the Sabbath (Exod. 20:8-11, Lev. 23:3, Deut. 5:12-15) in order to save a life. Here, Jesus is referring to the Jewish teaching of *pikauach nephesh*, which means 'soul saving'. This teaching was based upon Leviticus 18:5 and Ezekiel 20:11, and followed the rule "it is better to break the Sabbath and save a life so that that life may go on to keep many more Sabbaths." Jesus, thus taught that it was okay to break God's orders, ordinances and institutions in order to save a physical life, therefore, how much more is it appropriate to break God's orders, ordinances and institutions in order to save one's soul. It is for this reason that the Church has, for millennia, allowed the break of God's good order in cases of emergency<sup>45</sup>, such as allowing an uncalled female nurse to baptise a dying baby.

Therefore, in order to fulfil the command of Christ to "*eat and drink*" the consecrated bread and wine, now His very Body and Blood, it would be permissible for a layman to distribute the Sacrament if the pastor, after consecration, was suddenly unable to continue. But such a case is rare, and this exception, in the case of an emergency, should not be used as an excuse to permit laymen to distribute the Lord's Supper on a regular basis. For such a practice would destroy the good order of God.

It is important at this point to note that the Faculty of Theology in Leipzig did address this point in 1671. The question was asked, "*When a priest in a village during the distribution (of the Lord's supper) is overtaken by fainting, can the churchwarden or another Christian continue the distribution?*"<sup>46</sup> The response of the faculty was "No!" However, the Faculty did suggest that it would be permissible, in such a rare emergency circumstance, that the communicants each come up to altar and individually take and eat the bread/Body and take and drink the wine/Blood. For, "*the preacher had already performed the consecration and placed the bread and the Lord's cup for reception, and then in modo distribuendi & accipiendi (the way of distribution and reception) the Christian liberty prevails, if one himself received it from the altar, though not with the mouth, but with the hand and this not directly from the priest's hand but as put down by him in weakness.*"<sup>47</sup> In other words, if the pastor were to faint during the distribution it is to be understood that he has distributed the Lord's Supper as far as possible and that it would be permissible for the communicants to receive the Lord's Body and Blood from that spot. The logic behind this is that during the distribution the pastor brings the elements to a particular spot where the communicants receive it, usually at the Altar Rail. But in some cases the pastor may bring the elements to elderly or disabled communicants in their pew. It doesn't matter if the pastor brings the elements to the pews or whether the communicants meet him at the Altar Rail. Therefore, the Faculty argued, if the pastor placed the elements on the Altar and then fainted, it would be permissible for the communicants to come right up to the Altar and take and eat/drink the Body and Blood directly off the Altar.

Before we move onto our next section, *Is it Confessional?*, let us first respond to one final argument in favour of Lay Distribution.

During the feeding of the 5000 and the feeding of the 4000 Christ took the bread and blessed it (i.e. consecration) and then gave it to the Twelve Disciples to distribute (Matt. 14:19, 15:36, Mark 6:41, 8:6, Luke 9:16)<sup>48</sup>. Isn't this Biblical proof of Lay Distribution?

In order to answer this we must discuss two points:

1. Although the feedings of the 5000 and 4000 are foreshadows of the Last's Supper (and thus Holy Communion), they are not a one to one parallel. Therefore, we are not commanded to follow the practices performed during the feeding of either the 5000 or 4000. For example, we don't eat fish during Holy Communion.
2. Even if we were to use the feedings of the 5000 and 4000 as parallel practices for Holy Communion this would not support Lay Distribution. As the Disciples had already been called and commissioned as Apostles before the feeding of the 5000 (Matt. 10:1,5, Mark 3:14,16, 6:7, Luke 6:13, 9:1-2). And according to Ephesians 4:11 and 1 Corinthians 12:28-29, Apostles are among those given by God for the work of the Ministry of Word and Sacrament.

<sup>45</sup> *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope*. 67

<sup>46</sup> Faculty of Theology in Leipzig, quoted by Tom Hardt in *Lay Distribution of the Lord's Supper is Impossible for Orthodox Lutheranism*, page 3. (See Appendix 4)

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> John 6:11 only mentions Jesus distributing and not the Disciples.

Therefore, the feeding of the 5000/4000 does not support the use of lay distributors. If these texts support any practice of distribution they support the use of assisting pastors in the distribution of the Lord's Supper.

This ends our analysis of the question "is Lay Distribution Biblical?"  
I would answer this question with "No, Lay Distribution is not Biblical."

# Is it Confessional?

As Confessional Lutherans we hold a *quia*<sup>49</sup> subscription to the *Book of Concord* of 1580, that is we confess that which is contained in the *Book of Concord* **because** it is a true and accurate explanation and interpretation of the Holy Scripture.

We believe that the Scriptures are the *norma normans*<sup>50</sup> and that the *Book of Concord* is the *norma normata*<sup>51</sup>. This means that Scripture is the basis upon which all matters of faith, life and doctrine are based, while the *Book of Concord* is the basis that is based on Scripture. The *Book of Concord* has been built upon Scripture, and we as the successors of the Lutheran Reformation build upon the *Book of Concord*. For this reason the *Book of Concord* is used as our guide to help us interpret Scripture. Therefore, when discussing the matter of Lay Distribution we need to study the *Book of Concord* and determine whether this practice is confessional.

Article 5 of the *Augsburg Confession* (AC) says that, “So that we may obtain this faith<sup>52</sup>, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted.”<sup>53</sup> And Article 14 of the *Augsburg Confession* says that, “Our churches<sup>54</sup> teach that no one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments, without a rightly ordered call.”<sup>55</sup>

This teaches us that the functions of the Office of the Ministry are “publicly teaching the Gospel” and “administering the Sacrament.” God has instituted the Office of the Ministry to perform these functions and no one is to perform these functions unless they have been called into the Office of the Ministry. Therefore, laymen should not be distributing the Sacraments as only the pastor has been called to administer the Sacraments.

Now, people will claim that laymen can distribute the Lord’s Supper because “the *Augsburg Confession* says administer not distribute.”<sup>56</sup> However, we must ask ourselves, “what do the authors of the *Book of Concord* mean by the term ‘administer’?”

“Anyone reading AC XIV in 1530 would know exactly what it meant: only clergy consecrate and distribute the Lord’s Body and Blood. That is the original intent of the article.”<sup>57</sup>

“In recent times, “administering” has often meant “officiating” at the Lord’s Supper – “being in charge of it” – even if others would perform the distribution.”<sup>58</sup> However, this is not the original intent of Articles 5 and 14 of the *Augsburg Confession*.

In the original languages (German and Latin) the term ‘administration’ (Latin: *administrandi*) doesn’t even appear in the AC 5.1. Instead the Latin text uses the word *porrigendi*, which means ‘to give out’, while the German text uses the word *gegeben*, which also means ‘to give out’.<sup>59</sup> This is most accurately translated in the Kolb and Wengert translation of the *Augsburg Confession* which reads, “to obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments.”<sup>60</sup>

Thus God did not institute an office that only consecrates the elements but one that gives out the elements.

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<sup>49</sup> Latin: “because”

<sup>50</sup> Latin: “the norm that norms”

<sup>51</sup> Latin: “the norm that is normed”

<sup>52</sup> “This faith” refers to faith that justifies us before God, see *Augsburg Confession* Article 4

<sup>53</sup> Paul McCain, *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions, Augsburg Confession* Article 5.1, page 59.

<sup>54</sup> The Lutheran Churches.

<sup>55</sup> Paul McCain, *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions, Augsburg Confession* Article 14, page 65

<sup>56</sup> Heath Curtis, *Lay Assistance in Communing the People and Something About Deacons*,

[www.gottesdienstonline.blogspot.com.au/2011/01/lay-assistance-in-communing-people-and.html](http://www.gottesdienstonline.blogspot.com.au/2011/01/lay-assistance-in-communing-people-and.html) (See Appendix 2)

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Stephen Van der Hoek, *The Lord’s Supper: Four Sermons preached at St. Mark’s Lutheran Church, Mount Barker, South Australia, Lent 2015*, page 39, footnote 29. (See Appendix 3)

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Augsburg Confession* Article 5.1, page 40.

Now the term ‘administer’ does appear in the Latin text of AC 14. Here the Latin uses *administrare*. Now we can observe what the authors of the *Book of Concord* meant by the Latin phrase ‘*administrare*’ by comparing it with the original German text. In the German text of AC 14 the word used is *reichen*, which means ‘to give out’. This teaches us that the authors of the *Book of Concord* equated the ‘administration of the Sacraments’ with ‘giving out the Sacraments,’ or in other words ‘distributing the Sacraments’.

In fact, if we look closely at the word ‘administer’ we learn what the term literally means. Administer is made from the Latin word *ministrare*, which means ‘to serve’ and the Latin prefix *ad*, which means ‘to’. Thus a literal translation of ‘administer’ would be ‘to serve to’.

Therefore Article 14 of the *Augsburg Confession* teaches us that no one should ‘give out the Sacrament’ (German) or ‘serve the Sacrament to someone’ (Latin) without being called into the Office of the Ministry of Word and Sacrament.

Trying to permit Lay Distribution on the argument that AC 14 says ‘administer’ and not ‘distribute’ “*is to be anachronistic.*”<sup>61</sup> That is, incorrectly interpreting a statement by using terminology from a period of time other than the period in which the statement was made.

Later in the *Augsburg Confession*, in AC 28.5 it says “*our teachers assert that according to the Gospel the power of the keys or the power of bishops is a power and command of God to preach the Gospel, to forgive and retain sins, and to administer and distribute the sacraments.*”<sup>62</sup> Here the Office of the Keys or the Office of Bishop (pastor) is defined as the preaching of the Gospel, the forgiving and retaining of sins and the administration and distribution of the Sacraments.

And if we look at the original languages of AC 28.5, we can again observe the original intention behind this statement. The Latin text uses only a single word *administrandi* meaning ‘administration’. While the German uses two words (translated as administer and distribute in Tappert and Kolb/Wengert), *reichen* and *handeln*, which translates to ‘give out’ and ‘handle’. This demonstrates to us that when Melanchthon, in the Latin text, said “*administration of the Sacraments*” he intended the phrase to mean, ‘to give out and to handle the Sacraments’.

This section of the *Augsburg Confession*, which attributes distribution of the Sacraments to the Office of the Keys, is based on John 20:21-23, where Christ commissioned the Disciples with the Words, “As the Father has sent Me, so I send you.” Meaning that the Disciples were to do in their ministry what Christ had done in His. For the Disciples (clergy) were the ambassadors of Christ (2 Cor. 5:20). As the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* Article 7&8. 28 says, when the ministers offer the Word and Sacraments they do so in the place and stead of Christ (Luke 10:16).

The Latin used here for ‘offer’ is *porrigunt*, which is another form of *porrigendi* (used in AC 5.1), and means ‘to offer to’. The German text says that the pastors *predigen* (preach) the Gospel and *reichen* (give out) the Sacraments in the place and stead of Christ.

This teaches us that those who hand out (distribute) the Sacraments do so in the place and stead of Christ, which is a position reserved for those who have been called (John 20:21, Acts 14:23, Rom. 10:15, 1 Tim. 1:3, 2 Tim. 2:2, Tit. 1:5, Heb. 5:4) into the Office of the Ministry of Word and Sacrament (Luke 10:16, 1 Cor. 3:9, 4:1, 2 Cor. 5:20, 13:3). Thus, the laity, who do not stand in the place and stead of Christ (1 Cor. 3:9), are not to distribute the Sacraments. For the distribution of the Sacraments belongs to the Office of the Keys and this office is to be exercised by those who have been called into it.

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<sup>61</sup> Heath Curtis, *Lay Assistance in Communing the People and Something About Deacons*

<sup>62</sup> Theodore Tappert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Augsburg Confession Article 28.5*, page 81. See also Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Augsburg Confession Article 28.5*, page 92.

AC 28.8 confirms this point when it says “*the power of the keys or of the bishops is used and exercised only by teaching and preaching God’s Word and by administering the sacraments to many persons or individuals, depending on one’s calling.*”<sup>63</sup>

Here Melanchthon explicitly states at the Office of the Keys and the Office of Bishop is used and exercised when one teaches and preaches God’s Word and when one administers the Sacraments, which is then connected to the call. The Latin used here for ‘administering’ is *porrigendo* (see AC 5.1), which means ‘to give out’, and the German uses *handreichung*, which means ‘to give out by hand’. (Note the inclusion of *reichen*, ‘to give out’).

The German text makes it explicit, that one exercises the Office of the Keys and the Office of Bishop when they ‘give out the Sacrament by hand’.<sup>64</sup>

“*In the Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions of the Lutheran Church of Australia, vol 2, on “The Distribution of the Sacrament of the Altar”, it states: “In assisting with the distribution of the sacrament, lay people do not exercise the office of the keys”. It seems that the Book of Concord does not make this conclusion, but rather the opposite.*”<sup>65</sup>

Furthermore, in the *Apology* Article 24.80 Melanchthon states, “*Let us speak about the term “liturgy”. This word does not properly mean a sacrifice but rather public service [the public ministry<sup>66</sup>]. Thus, it agrees quite well with our position, namely, that one minister who consecrates gives the body and blood of the Lord to the rest of the people, just as a minister who preaches set forth the gospel to the people, as Paul says [1 Cor. 4:1], “Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God’s mysteries,” that is, of the gospel and the sacraments. And 2 Corinthians 5:20, “So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.*”<sup>67</sup>

Here Melanchthon states the position of the Lutherans, that the one minister who consecrates is the minister who gives<sup>68</sup> the Body and Blood to the rest of the people.

Here Melanchthon bases the position of the Lutherans, that is the consecration and distribution of the bread and wine by a public minister, upon two Scriptural texts, 1 Corinthians 4:1 and 2 Corinthians 5:20. Since the minister is the servant of Christ and the Steward of the Mysteries of God and the ambassador for Christ, he is the one who is to publically preach the Gospel, and consecrate and distribute the Lord’s Body and Blood.

To hammer this point even further, if one looks at the Latin text of the *Apology* 24.80<sup>69</sup>, in Latin Melanchthon refers to the ministers as “*dispensatores sacramentorum Dei*” that is ‘dispensers of the

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<sup>63</sup> Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Augsburg Confession Article 28.8*, page 92.

<sup>64</sup> The *Apology of the Augsburg Confession Article 28.13* (German text only) also states that bishops (pastors) possess the power of jurisdiction “*that is, the administration of the Sacraments and the exercise of spiritual jurisdiction.*” (*Concordia Triglotta: The Symbolical Books the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, page 447). The German used for ‘administration’ is *reichung*, which means ‘the giving out.’

<sup>65</sup> Stephen Van der Hoek, *The Lord’s Supper: Four Sermons preached at St. Mark’s Lutheran Church, Mount Barker, South Australia, Lent 2015*, page 39, footnote 29.

<sup>66</sup> Paul McCain, *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions, Apology of the Augsburg Confession Article 24.80*, page 258.

<sup>67</sup> Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Apology of the Augsburg Confession Article 24.80*, page 272.

<sup>68</sup> There is no German text used here. The Latin text uses the word *exhibet* in place of ‘gives’. Henceforth, Theodore Tappert translates the passage as “*that a minister who consecrates shows forth the body and blood of the Lord to the people.*” (*The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Apology of the Augsburg Confession Article 24.80*, page 264). Based on the modern English word ‘exhibit’ which means ‘to show’ some take this passage to mean that the pastor who consecrates the bread ‘shows’ it to the people, as in the pastor venerates the bread. However, the original Latin ‘*exhibet*’ comes from *hibet*, which means ‘to hold’ and the Latin prefix *ex*, which means ‘out’. Thus, the original meaning of *exhibet* is ‘to hold out’, which in the *Apology* refers not to veneration but to distribution.

<sup>69</sup> *Concordia Triglotta: The Symbolical Books the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, page 410.

Sacraments of God'. This matches the Latin Vulgate which reads "*dispensatores mysteriorum Dei*" that is 'dispensers of the Mysteries of God'.<sup>70</sup>

Now, if one turns to the *Formula of Concord: Solid Declaration* Article 7.84, Chemnitz defines the administration of the Lord's Supper as both consecration and distribution. And the Latin word used here for distribution is '*dispensentur*' which means 'to dispense'.<sup>71</sup>

The *Apology* 24.80 and the *Formula* 7.84 use the exact same Latin word, which means 'to dispense', and the *Formula* uses this word to refer to the distribution of the Lord's Supper. Thus, when Melancthon (and the Vulgate) uses the word '*dispensatores*' they are in fact calling pastors the distributors of the Sacraments of God. This shows us that 1 Corinthians 4:1 teaches us that the pastors, and not the laity, are the ones who are to distribute the Lord's Supper.

Furthermore, the *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope* (forever after referred to as the *Tractate*), passage 31 says, "*Christ gave to His Apostles only spiritual authority, that is the command to preach the Gospel, to proclaim the forgiveness of sins, to administer the Sacraments and to excommunicate the ungodly without the use of physical force.*"<sup>72</sup> Here Melancthon attributes to the clergy the spiritual authority to administer the Sacrament. He bases this on the commands of Christ given in John 21:17 to "*feed my sheep*", Matthew 28:19-20 to "*go forth and baptise*", and John 20:21 "*As the Father has sent Me, so I send you*".

In *Tractate* .60 Melancthon writes that "*the gospel bestows upon those who preside over the churches the commission to proclaim the Gospel, forgive sins, and administer the Sacraments.*"<sup>73</sup> In *Tractate* .61-62 he defines 'those who preside over the churches' as pastors, presbyters and bishops.

In both of these passages Melancthon uses *administrandi* (administer) in the Latin, and *reichen* (give out) in the German. Again, showing what Melancthon intended by the term 'administration of the Sacraments' and confessing that pastors are the ones who have the spiritual authority to give out the Sacraments.

Furthermore, if we turn to the *Formula of Concord: Solid Declaration* Article 7.84 we are given a definition of the term 'administration the Sacraments': "*Christ's command, "do this," must be observed without division or confusion. For it includes the entire action or administration of this Sacrament.*"<sup>74</sup> Here the *Formula* uses 'entire action' and 'administration' as parallel terms (just as AC 28 used the terms power of the keys and power of bishops), thus meaning that the author intends for these terms to be synonymous. Therefore the term 'administration of the Sacrament' is equal to the term 'entire action of the Sacrament'.

As Martin Chemnitz said in his *Examination of the Council of Trent*, "*For what He Himself did in the Supper, that He commanded the apostles to do thereafter... Now Paul is the most reliable interpreter that the pronoun "this" in the command of Christ: "Do this," is to be referred to the whole preceding action*<sup>75</sup>: "*This (namely, what was done at the first Supper) you are to do hereafter.*" Therefore the command of Christ: "*Do this,*" means nothing other than that the ministers of the church in the administration of the Lord's Supper ought to do that of which it is established and certain that Christ did at the institution of the Supper."<sup>76</sup>

At the Institution of the Lord's Supper Christ command the Apostles (clergy) to administer the Sacrament as He administered it. The *Formula* states that Christ's command to "*do this*" (22:19, 1

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<sup>70</sup> Note: Melancthon has changed '*mysteriorum*' to '*sacramentorum*' to reinforce his point that the Mysteries of God are the Word and Sacraments. See, *The Vulgate New Testament with the Douay Version of 1582 in Parallel Columns*.

<sup>71</sup> *Concordia Triglotta: The Symbolical Books the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, page 1000.

<sup>72</sup> Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope* .31, page 335.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid. Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope* .60, page 340.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid. Formula of Concord: Solid Declaration* Article 7.84, page 607.

<sup>75</sup> Emphasis mine.

<sup>76</sup> Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, volume 2, page 465. Quoted in John Stephenson, *The Lord's Supper*, page 84.

Cor. 11:24-25) refers to the entire action or administration of the Lord's Supper, which the *Formula* defines as: "in a Christian assembly bread and wine are taken, consecrated, distributed, received eaten and drunk, and that thereby the Lord's death is proclaimed."<sup>77</sup>

Here the *Formula* teaches us that the term 'administration' of the Sacrament includes both consecration and distribution.<sup>78</sup> Therefore, when the *Book of Concord* uses the term 'administration' (Latin: *administrandi*) elsewhere it includes both consecration and distribution.

Henceforth, when AC 14 says that no one should administer the Sacraments without a proper call, and when AC 28.5,8 says that those who administer the Sacraments exercise the Office of the Keys and the Office of Bishop, and when *Tractate* .31 and .60-62 says that the pastors have the authority and power to administer the Sacraments, the term 'administer' used in these passages includes both consecration and distribution. For, as the *Formula* teaches us, the command of Christ to "do this", which Christ gave to His Disciples (clergy), includes both consecration and distribution.

If we turn our attention to the LCA's paper *The Distribution of the Sacrament of the Altar* we are provided with a definition of 'administration' on the first page. Under the section *The Use of Terms* the LCA defines 'administration' as: *The entire celebration of the sacrament in the church service. This includes the taking of bread and wine; their consecration with thanksgiving and the words of institution; their distribution; their reception and consumption by the communicants; and their use for the proclamation of Christ's death (see FCSD VII, 84).*<sup>79</sup> Here the LCA, in accordance with the *Formula*, includes both consecration and distribution in their definition of 'administration'.

Then on the following page under, the section *Theological Presuppositions*, they confess that "Christ commissioned the apostles and their successors in the apostolic ministry to perform this task on his behalf. Therefore only a called and ordained pastor may administer the sacrament in the Lutheran church (AC XIV)."<sup>80</sup>

The paper then proceeds to explain how laypeople are permitted to distribute the bread and/or wine during the Lord's Supper. This is a straight out contradiction on the part of the LCA. If you define 'administration' as "the entire celebration of the Sacrament", including both consecration and distribution, and also say that only pastors may administer the Sacrament, you have explicitly said that only pastors can distribute. To then state that laypeople can distribute the Sacrament is a contradiction.

The phrase 'administration of the Sacraments' in the 1500's referred to the entire action of the Sacrament; including both consecration and distribution. The use of 'administration of the Sacraments' to refer only to the consecration is a recent development, and is not what the authors of the *Book of Concord* intended by this phrase.<sup>81</sup>

As Heath Curtis said "To try to find wiggle room in there for another practice ("it says administer – not distribute) is to be anachronistic."<sup>82</sup> For "anyone reading AC XIV in 1530 would know exactly what it meant: only clergy consecrate and distribute the Lord's Body and Blood. That is the original intent of the article."<sup>83</sup>

Further evidence that those in the 1500's included both consecration and distribution in the term 'administration of the Lord's Supper' can be found in Martin Luther's *On the Private Mass and Holy*

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<sup>77</sup> Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Formula of Concord: Solid Declaration Article 7.84*, page 607.

<sup>78</sup> The Latin says *administratio* (administration), *consecratur* (consecration) and *dispensatur* (dispensation), while the German says *verrichtung* (carrying out), *segne* (bless) and *austelle* (dish out (referring to how one would dish out food for a meal)).

<sup>79</sup> The Lutheran Church of Australia, *Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinion Volume 2. Section E: The Sacraments, The Distribution of the Sacrament of the Altar*, page E16.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.* page E17.

<sup>81</sup> Stephen Van der Hoek, *The Lord's Supper: Four Sermons preached at St. Mark's Lutheran Church, Mount Barker, South Australia, Lent 2015*, page 39, footnote 29.

<sup>82</sup> Heath Curtis, *Lay Assistance in Communing the People and Something About Deacons*.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

*Orders*.<sup>84</sup> In this writing Luther repeatedly uses the term ‘administer’ alongside a parallel term ‘impart’.<sup>85</sup> In this same writing he uses the term ‘impart’ as a parallel term with ‘give’.<sup>86</sup> For Luther the terms ‘administer’, ‘impart’ and ‘give’ were synonymous with each other. And twice in this paper Luther explicitly uses the terms ‘impart’ and ‘give’ to refer to the distribution of the bread and wine, which he states is done by the pastors in accordance with Christ’s command to “do this”.<sup>87</sup>

This writing from Luther shows us how he and the other Reformers understood the term ‘administration of the Sacraments’.

When the *Book of Concord* refers to the administration of the Lord’s Supper, it refers not only to consecration but to both consecration and distribution.

Henceforth, in regards to the distribution of the Lord’s Supper the *Book of Concord* teaches us that:

- God instituted the Office of the Ministry for the consecration and distribution of Holy Communion (AC 5.1)
- The authority to consecrate and distribute Holy Communion belongs to the Office of Pastor/Presbyter/Bishop (*Tractate* .31, .60-62)
- Those who consecrate and distribute Holy Communion exercise the Office of the Keys and the Office of Bishops/Pastor/Presbyter (AC 28.5,8)
- No one should consecrate and distribute Holy Communion unless they are rightly called (AC 14)

In Article 18 affirmative 16 of *The Word Shall Stand* the *Australian Evangelical Lutheran Church* says that “laymen (‘elders’ or others) [may] assist in the distribution of the Lord’s Supper, but they should not consecrate it.”<sup>88</sup> And Article 18 Negative 8 of *The Word Shall Stand* rejects the notion that “speaking roles in public services, such as reading lessons or distributing the Lord’s Supper, [are] the authority of the pastor alone.”<sup>89</sup>

But it would seem that the *Book of Concord* does not make this same conclusion.<sup>90</sup>

The question is raised then about the Communion of the pastor, “if only the pastors are to distribute the Lord’s Supper, what are we to do when there is only one pastor present? Who distributes the Lord’s Supper to him?”

The easy answer would be that he distributes the Lord’s Supper to himself (Self-Communion).

But what does the *Book of Concord* say on the subject of Self-Communion. Many have argued that the *Smalcald Articles* Part 2 Article 2.8-9 condemns the practice of Self-Communion.

The passage from the *Smalcald Articles* reads, “If anyone says that he wants to administer the Sacrament to himself as an act of devotion, he cannot be serious. If he sincerely wishes to commune, the surest and best way for him is in the Sacrament administered according to Christ’s institution. To administer Communion to oneself is a human notion. It is uncertain, unnecessary, even prohibited. He does not know what he is doing, because without God’s Word he follows a false human opinion and invention. It is not right (even if otherwise done properly) to use the Sacrament that belongs to the community of the Church for one’s own private devotion. It is wrong to toy with the Sacrament without God’s Word and apart from the community of the Church.”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Quoted in C.F.W. Walther, *Church and Ministry*, pages 254-260.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. pages 254, 257.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. pages 255, 260.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. pages 255,260.

<sup>88</sup> Melvin Grieger, Vernon Grieger, Clarence Priebbenow, *The Word Shall Stand: Our Evangelical Lutheran Confession*, page 154.

<sup>89</sup> Melvin Grieger, Vernon Grieger, Clarence Priebbenow, *The Word Shall Stand: Our Evangelical Lutheran Confession*, page 155.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Stephen Van der Hoek, *The Lord’s Supper: Four Sermons preached at St. Mark’s Lutheran Church, Mount Barker, South Australia, Lent 2015*, page 39, footnote 29.

<sup>91</sup> Paul McCain, *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions, Smalcald Articles Part 2 Article 2.8-9*, page 291.

Here Luther harshly condemns this practice as uncertain, unnecessary and even prohibited. However, Luther is not referring to a situation in which a lone pastor distributes Communion to himself either before or after he has distributed it to the whole congregation. SA 2.2.9 gives us the context of what Luther is talking about. He is referring to pastors administering (consecrating and distributing) Holy Communion to themselves apart from the congregation. He condemns those pastors who partake of Holy Communion by themselves apart from the congregation as part of their own personal private devotion.

*“The confessors direct these words to the case of private self-Communion. They would not preclude public self-Communion where the pastor has no assistant.”<sup>92</sup>*

As Walther wrote, concerning whether a pastor may commune himself, *“the consensus of Lutheran theologians is that he may not do so privately, apart from the congregation, which is the meaning of Smalcald Articles II.2. But he may commune himself in the public service.”<sup>93</sup>*

In the *Smalcald Articles* Luther is not condemning those pastors who commune themselves during the public worship. In fact Luther himself approved the practice of Self-Communion<sup>94</sup> and repeatedly defended it.<sup>95</sup>

Therefore in regards to the question “is Lay Distribution Confessional?” I would answer, “No, Lay Distribution is not Confessional.”

In the conclusion to the *Augsburg Confession* Melancthon wrote that *“nothing has been received among us, in doctrine or in ceremonies, that is contrary to Scripture or to the Church Catholic.”<sup>96</sup>* Here the Lutherans confess that they had not changed or introduced any new practices, but that they were consistent with the traditional Church Catholic.

This does not mean that the Lutherans held to all the practices of the Roman Catholic Church, but that they held to all the doctrines and ceremonies of the true historic Christian Church.

Therefore, if anyone wishes to dispute the point that Lay-Distribution is not in keeping with the *Book of Concord* then *“we’ll need historical evidence that laity ever distributed the Sacrament before the 16<sup>th</sup> Century.”<sup>97</sup>*

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<sup>92</sup> Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, *Theology and Practice of the Lord’s Supper: Part 1*, endnote 10, page 37.

<sup>93</sup> C.F.W. Walther, *Pastor Theology*, page 151.

<sup>94</sup> Martin Luther, *An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church of Wittenberg*, LW 53, page 30.

<sup>95</sup> Luther Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, page 372.

<sup>96</sup> Theodore Tappert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, *Augsburg Confession Conclusion .4*, page 95.

<sup>97</sup> Heath Curtis, *Lay Assistance in Communing the People and Something About Deacons*

# Is it Historical?

When it comes to Lay Distribution many would feel that “we’ve always done it that way”. But how far back does ‘always’ actually go? In this section I will seek to determine how historical the practice of Lay Distribution is, and attempt to determine when it first emerged.

Due to the amount of information that will be discussed in this section, it has been broken up into four separate historical sections: Australia (1800-2000’s), America (1900-2000’s), Walther (1800’s) and Luther and the Early Lutherans (1500-1800’s).

## Australia

Lutherans first arrived in Australia as of 1838. Two groups of Lutherans arrived in Australia; the confessional *Old Lutherans* and those of the *Prussian Union* who had been formed from a combining of the Evangelical Church (now called Lutheran Church) with the Reformed Churches (Calvinists). By the mid-1800’s there were three prominent Lutheran church bodies in Australia, the *Evangelical Lutheran Church*<sup>98</sup> of Australia (ELCA) founded by Pastor Gotthard Daniel Fritzsche, the *Immanuel Synod* founded by Pastor August Ludwig Christian Kavel and lastly the *Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Victoria* (ELSV) founded by Pastor Matthias Goethe.

Both the ELCA and *Immanuel* were founded by *Old Lutherans*, and were split mainly over issues such as Chiliasm<sup>99</sup>. As for the ELSV, it was founded by *Union Lutherans* and had obtained a number of pastors from the Presbyterian and Baptist churches in Australia.

At this point in time the Lutherans in Queensland were yet to form a synod. Queensland had obtained pastors from three different theological seminaries, the *Gossner Theological College*, the *Evangelical Mission Society of Basel*, and the *Hermannsburg Mission Seminary*. The *Gossner/Basel* pastors were confessionally-loose *Union Lutherans* while the *Hermannsburg* pastors were confessionally-sound *Old Lutherans*.

In May of 1869, a meeting was held among the *Gossner/Basel* pastors in Ipswich to discuss the formation of a synod. However, one significant figure was missing, Pastor Carl Frederick Alexander Francis Schirmeister. Pastor Schirmeister was a *Gossner* pastor, but, unlike his companion, he was more confessionally-sound, having actually read the *Book of Concord*. Schirmeister often saw himself as too confessional for the *Gossner/Basel* pastors but also too liberal for the *Hermannsburg* pastors.<sup>100</sup>

It appeared Pastor Schirmeister had avoided the 1869 meeting because a number of the *Gossner/Basel* pastors were approving lay ministry in their churches.<sup>101</sup> It seems that the *Gossner/Basel* pastors had adopted this practice from the surrounding Reformed church bodies in Queensland.

As Pastor Theile stated, they were practicing the “*un-Lutheran practice of laymen preaching in the Churches. The Lutheran Church holds that the preaching of the Word is the duty of the ordained pastor.*”<sup>102</sup>

There is no explicit mention of either Lay Distribution or Lay Consecration at this time, however, this was a period of time still influenced by the belief that you should only partake of Holy Communion at most once a month. What we can learn for this situation is that laymen in Australia who came to the *Union Lutherans* were already beginning to attribute to themselves the functions of the Office of the Ministry.

Lay ministry was rejected by the confessionally-sound *Hermannsburg* pastors, and the pastors of the ELCA and *Immanuel Synod*.

We can also learn from this that in 1938 Theile thought the practice to be un-Lutheran. This is significant, as Theile was a member of the *United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia*

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<sup>98</sup> Or *Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Australia*, the body did not change the term ‘synod’ to ‘church’ until 1944.

<sup>99</sup> The *Immanuel Synod* believed in a literal thousand year reign of Christ on Earth.

<sup>100</sup> See Pastor Schirmeister’s *1877 Letter to Brother Herlitz*, translated by Jake Zabel. Quoted in Jake Zabel, *Pastor C.F.A.F. Schirmeister: The Father of the Lutheran Church in Queensland*, page 21.

<sup>101</sup> F. Otto Theile, *One Hundred Years of the Lutheran Church in Queensland*, page 14.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

(UELCA) which was founded in 1921<sup>103</sup>. The UELCA was regarded as the more confessionally-loose synod and yet it still considered lay ministry to be an un-Lutheran Practice.

As we enter the 1900's we will begin to see when the practice of Lay Distribution first emerges. The ELCA's hymnal, the *Australian Lutheran Hymn Book* (ALHB), released in 1922, states that during the distribution of the Lord's Supper "Giving the Consecrated Bread, the Pastor shall say... Giving the Cup of Blessing, he shall say..."<sup>104</sup> and also "When the Minister giveth the Bread he shall say... When he giveth the Cup he shall say..."<sup>105</sup>

Not only is no lay assistant mentioned in the distribution of Lord's Supper, but both services attribute the distribution to a single pastor. Notice that both services in the ALHB mentions that 'the minister' gives the bread and that 'he' also gives the cup. There is no assistant lay or clergy.

We can learn from this that as of the 1920's the ELCA did not practice Lay Distribution.

If we study the hymn books of the *Lutheran Church of Australia* (LCA) we can see when the practice of Lay Distribution first emerged.

As Pastor Van der Hoek said on the topic of Lay Distribution, "In the old days in Australia, the pastor would simply do two rounds, one with the plate and then with the chalice. In the 1973 hymnbook, the instructions say: "When the Minister gives the bread, he says..." "When the Minister gives the cup, he says..."<sup>106</sup> But then only 14 years later in 1987, when the Supplement was published, the words were changed: "When the minister and his assistants give the bread and the cup, they say..."<sup>107</sup> The older practice was changed sometime in between."<sup>108</sup>

As Pastor Van der Hoek pointed out in the 1973 *Lutheran Hymnal* (LH), only the pastor was to distribute the Lord's Supper (see also the accompanying *The Service Orders and the Propers* also released in 1973).<sup>109</sup> This is seen even clearer in the statement "the officiating Minister or Ministers may commune during the Agnus dei."<sup>110</sup> This makes it explicitly clear that as of 1973 the LCA's position was that only ministers were to distribute the Lord's Supper. If there was only one minister, he was to give both the bread and the cup. If he were to have assistants, they were only to be ministers and not laity.

However in 1987, the *Supplement to Lutheran Hymnal* changed this practice to "the minister and his assistants."<sup>111</sup> The distinction made between the minister and the assistants makes it clear that these assistants were not ministers but laymen.

As Pastor Van der Hoek said, somewhere in the 14 year period between 1973-1987 the LCA changed their position to allow laymen to assist in the distribution of Holy Communion.

Trying to pinpoint the exact year is difficult. In 1985 the LCA released the *Service Orders for Particular Occasions*. Under the *Order for Holy Communion in Special Circumstances* it says that "the minister gives the bread and wine."<sup>112</sup> Here no assistant is mentioned, however, this order was for celebrating Holy Communion with "the sick or shut-in."<sup>113</sup>

If we look at the official statements of the LCA, in the 1981 paper *Concerning the Sacrament of the Altar*, point 10 reads, "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."<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> The UELCA was formed by an amalgamation of the *Immanuel Synod*, the *Immanuel Synod: Old Basis*, the *Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Victoria*, the *Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Queensland* (the *Gossner/Basel* pastors) and the *United German and Scandinavia Lutheran Synod of Queensland* (the *Hermannsburg* pastors).

<sup>104</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia, *Australian Lutheran Hymn Book*, page 7.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid. page 23.

<sup>106</sup> Lutheran Church of Australia, *Lutheran Hymnal*, page 14.

<sup>107</sup> Lutheran Church of Australia, *Supplement to Lutheran Hymnal*, page 20.

<sup>108</sup> Stephen Van der Hoek, *The Lord's Supper: Four Sermons preached at St. Mark's Lutheran Church, Mount Barker, South Australia, Lent 2015*, page 41.

<sup>109</sup> Lutheran Church of Australia, *The Service Orders and the Propers*, page 21.

<sup>110</sup> Lutheran Church of Australia, *Lutheran Hymnal*, page 14.

<sup>111</sup> Lutheran Church of Australia, *Supplement to Lutheran Hymnal*, page 20.

<sup>112</sup> Lutheran Church of Australia, *Service Orders for Particular Occasions*, page 53.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. page 52.

<sup>114</sup> The Lutheran Church of Australia, *Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinion Volume 1. Section E: The Sacraments, Concerning the Sacrament of the Altar*, page E9. [www.lca.org.au/departments/commissions/cticr/](http://www.lca.org.au/departments/commissions/cticr/)

Here is the first official statement by the LCA allowing Lay Distribution. At this point in time the practice was only to be done “*in cases of necessity*”, but by 1987 it had become a standard liturgical practice.

What we can learn from this is that Lay Distribution is not something that was ‘always’ done in the LCA. As of 1973 the standard practice was that only pastors were to distribute the Lord’s Supper. It was not until 1981 that the LCA officially allowed laymen to assist in the distribution of the Lord’s Supper in cases of necessity.

In fact in the preface to the LCA’s paper *The Distribution of the Sacrament of the Altar*, written in 1995, but only adopted in 1998, it says “*The use of lay assistants as servers for the distribution of the sacrament is a recent development in the church.*”<sup>115</sup>

Here the LCA admits that Lay Distribution is a ‘**recent development**’ in the church. How recent? Since about the 1980s.

## America

The earliest hymnals of the Lutheran churches in America follow the same pattern as the ELCA’s ALHB and the LCA’s LH.

The earliest hymnal in America was the *Kirchengesangbuch für Evangelisch-Lutherische Gemeinden ungeänderter Augsburgischer Confession* (the *Church Hymnbook for Evangelical Lutheran Congregation of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession*), colloquially referred to as *Walther’s Hymnal* as it was compiled by Pastor C.F.W. Walther, which was released in 1847. However, this was merely a hymnal and did not contain an Order of Service.<sup>116</sup>

At this point in time the Lutheran churches of America (particularly the *Lutheran Church Missouri Synod*) used the order of service found in Wilhelm Löhe’s 1844 *Agende für Christliche Gemeinden des Lutherischen Bekenntnisses* (*Agenda for Christian Congregations of the Lutheran Confessions*). This *Agende* contained the *Die Communio oder der hauptgottesdienst* (*The Communion or the Main Service*) which says concerning the distribution of the bread, “*Der Psarrer reicht der ganzen Reihe die Brote.*”<sup>117</sup> Or in English, “*The Pastor gives out the bread to the whole row.*” And concerning the distribution of the wine, “*hierauf reicht er derselben Reihe den Kelch herum.*”<sup>118</sup> Or in English, “*hereafter he gives out the chalice to the same row.*” Here Wilhelm Löhe clearly states that the pastor gives out the bread and the wine (chalice). Löhe even uses the word “*reicht*” meaning to “give out”, which is the same as “*reichen*”, which is used in article 14 of the *Augsburg Confession*.

Löhe’s *Agende für Christliche Gemeinden des Lutherischen Bekenntnisses* was eventually replaced in 1856 by the LCMS’s *Kirchen-Agende* (Church-Agenda). Which was later translated into English in 1881 under the title *Church Liturgy for Evangelical Lutheran Congregations of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession*. Regarding the distribution of Holy Communion the *Kirchen-Agende* says, “*Then a Communion hymn is sung while the communicants approach. The minister gives them at first the Bread, three at a time, and says...Having thus given the Bread to a number of communicants, who either kneel around the altar or pass around from the left to right behind around the Altar, he now gives them the Cup also in the same manner, and says....*”<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> The Lutheran Church of Australia, *Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinion* Volume 2. Section E: The Sacraments, *The Distribution of the Sacrament of the Altar*, page E16.

<sup>116</sup> The service order provided in the 2012 English Translation of *Walther’s Hymnal* is the 1881 English translation of the 1856 *The Morning Service on Sundays and Festivals with Communion* found in the *Church Liturgy for Evangelical Lutheran Congregations of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession*. See C.F.W. Walther, *Walther’s Hymnal: Church Hymnbook for Evangelical Lutheran Congregations of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession*, page 389, footnote 64.

<sup>117</sup> Wilhelm Löhe, *Agende für Christliche Gemeinden des Lutherischen Bekenntnisses*, page 30.

[www.books.google.com.au/books?id=S-BIAAAAcAAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://www.books.google.com.au/books?id=S-BIAAAAcAAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false)

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.* page 31.

<sup>119</sup> Quoted in the 2012 *Walther’s Hymnal: Church Hymnbook for Evangelical Lutheran Congregations of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession*, page 393.

The 1912 *Evangelical Lutheran Hymn Book of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States* (original presented to the *English Lutheran Conference of Missouri* in 1889)<sup>120</sup> says, “When the Minister giveth the Bread he shall say...When he giveth the Cup he shall say...”<sup>121</sup>

The 1917 *Common Service Book of the Lutheran Church*, compiled by the *General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States of America*, the *General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America* and the *United Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the South*, says, “When the Minister giveth the Bread he shall say... When he giveth the Cup he shall say...After he hath given the Bread and the Cup, the Minister shall say...”<sup>122</sup>

The 1941 *The Lutheran Hymnal* of the *Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America* says, “When the minister giveth the bread, he shall say... When he giveth the cup he shall say...”<sup>123</sup>

The 1946 *Lutheran Liturgy* of the *Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America* says, “When the minister giveth the Bread, he shall say... When he giveth the Cup he shall say...”<sup>124</sup> And in the General Rubrics is says, “If there be another Minister to assist in the Distribution, he may approach the altar during the singing of the *Agnus Dei*.”<sup>125</sup>

In the 1958 *Service Book and Hymnal of the Lutheran Church in America*, compiled by the *American Evangelical Lutheran Church*, the *American Lutheran Church*, the *Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church*, the *Evangelical Lutheran Church*, the *Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, the *Lutheran Free Church*, the *United Evangelical Lutheran Church* and the *United Lutheran Church in America*, says, “When the Minister giveth the Bread he shall say... When he giveth the Cup he shall say...After he hath given the Bread and the Cup, or after all have been communicated, the Minister shall say...”<sup>126</sup>

It is clear that for the 1800s and for the first half of the 1900s the standard liturgical practice of the Lutheran Churches in America was that the pastor distributes both the bread and the wine. All of them clearly state that it is ‘he’ the pastor who distributes the bread and the cup. The *Lutheran Liturgy* is the only one that mentions any form of assistance, and it states that this assistance is to come from another minister.

This list of Hymnals also shows us that this was the standard liturgical practice not only for the churches of the *Synodical Conference* (*Lutheran Church Missouri Synod*, *Joint Synod of Wisconsin*, *Slovak Lutheran Church*, *Norwegian Lutheran Church*) but also the *American Evangelical Lutheran Church*, the *American Lutheran Church*, the *Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church*, the *Evangelical Lutheran Church*, the *Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, the *Lutheran Free Church*, the *United Evangelical Lutheran Church*, the *United Lutheran Church in America*, the *Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States of America*, the *Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America* and the *United Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the South*.

The earliest mention of assistance in an Order of Holy Communion appears in the 1969 *Worship Supplement* of the *Lutheran Church Missouri Synod* and the *Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches* (formerly the *Slovak Lutheran Church*), written as a supplement to the 1941 *The Lutheran Hymnal*.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Carl Schalk, *A Brief History of LCMS Hymnals (before LSB)*, page 2.

<sup>121</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States, *Evangelical Lutheran Hymn Book*, page 16. [www.projectwittenberg.org/etext/hymnals/ELHB1912/morning\\_service.htm](http://www.projectwittenberg.org/etext/hymnals/ELHB1912/morning_service.htm)

<sup>122</sup> The General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States of America, the General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America and the United Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the South, *Common Service Book of the Lutheran Church*, pages 26 and 63.

<sup>123</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, *The Lutheran Hymnal*, page 29.

<sup>124</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, page 24

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.* page 421.

<sup>126</sup> The American Evangelical Lutheran Church, the American Lutheran Church, the Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Lutheran Free Church, the United Evangelical Lutheran Church and the United Lutheran Church in America, *Service Book and Hymnal of the Lutheran Church in America*, pages 13, 38 and 66.

<sup>127</sup> Lutheran Church Missouri Synod and Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, *Worship Supplement*, page 9.

In the second setting of the Holy Eucharist service it says, “*The minister should first receive Holy Communion himself, and then he (and his assistants) should give the Blessed Sacrament to the other communicants.*”<sup>128</sup>

At first glance it would appear that as of 1969 the LCMS was approving Lay Distribution as a common liturgical practice. However, if we turn to the General Rubrics of the *Worship Supplement* under ‘distribution’ we read, “*The Distribution shall begin with the Agnus Dei, the celebrant receiving the Blessed Sacrament first, and after him the other ministers. The celebrant shall customarily distribute the bread, and an assistant the wine.*”<sup>129</sup>

From this we can learn that, as of the 1969, those assisting the minister (celebrant) were to be ‘other ministers’.

In 1979, the *Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship* comprised of the *Lutheran Church in America*, the *American Lutheran Church*, the *Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada* and the *Lutheran Church Missouri Synod* released the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, which says, “*The presiding minister and the assisting ministers receive the bread and wine and then give them to those who come to receive. As the ministers give the bread and wine, they say these words to each communicant...*”<sup>130</sup>

This shows us that the common liturgical practice of the ALC, LCA, LCC and LCMS, as of 1979, was that only ministers were to distribute the elements of the Lord’s Supper. If anyone were to assist in the distribution they were to be an ‘assisting minister’.

Now, there is some contention surrounding this phrase ‘assisting minister’. Luther Reed, a member of the *Lutheran Church in America*, in his book *The Lutheran Liturgy*, written in 1947, refers to assistant ministers as deacons.<sup>131</sup> As previously mentioned, in my section *Is It Biblical?*, deacons were laymen and not ministers. However, there doesn’t seem to be a consensus on this. Some Lutherans see the office of deacon as a lay office, while others see it as an office of assisting pastors. See below my section *Deacons: What Are They?* for a more thorough historical study on the term ‘deacon’.

Carl Schalk in his paper *Music and the Liturgy: The Lutheran Tradition*, mentions that “*assisting ministers may be non-ordained lay people with the gift of leadership in worship.*”<sup>132</sup> However, this is written in 1993, after the LCMS had already approved Lay Distribution<sup>133</sup> and the practice of Lay Consecration in the form of Licensed Lay Deacons.<sup>134</sup>

As for Reed, however, he makes a distinction between the assisting ministers (deacons) who assist in the distribution of Holy Communion and the lay church officers who assist with ushering.<sup>135</sup>

Also in the *Lutheran Book of Worship* both the presiding minister and the assisting ministers are included in the single term ‘the ministers’. As there must be at least one pastor distributing the Lord’s Supper, this term ‘the ministers’ refers to called and ordained pastors. Henceforth, in the 1979 *Lutheran Book of Worship* the term ‘assisting ministers’ referred to assisting pastors; demonstrating that the common liturgical practice of 1979 was that only the pastors distributed Holy Communion.

Everything changed, however, when the LCMS decided to release their own version of the *Lutheran Book of Worship*. In 1982 the *Commission on Worship* of the LCMS released their own *Lutheran Worship*. In this hymnal the LCMS had made a number of alterations. The most noticeable

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid. page 61.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid. page 52.

<sup>130</sup> Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship, *Lutheran Book of Worship*, pages 71, 92, and 114.

<sup>131</sup> Luther Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy: A Study of the Common Liturgy of the Lutheran Church in America*, pages 372 and 375.

<sup>132</sup> Carl Schalk, *Music and the Liturgy: The Lutheran Tradition*, in *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice*, page 251.

<sup>133</sup> Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, *Theology and Practice of the Lord’s Supper: Part 1*, page 31.

<sup>134</sup> Cf. Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, *66<sup>th</sup> Regular Convention*, page 374.

<sup>135</sup> Luther Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy: A Study of the Common Liturgy of the Lutheran Church in America*, pages 374.

alteration was the formula of distribution, which now read, “*the minister and those who assist him are given the body and blood of Christ first and then give them to those who come to receive, saying...*”<sup>136</sup>

This is the first time in American history that a Lutheran hymnal explicitly promotes Lay Distribution as a common liturgical practice.

This is then repeated in the 2006 *Lutheran Service Book*, which says, “*the pastor and those who assist him receive the body and blood of Christ first and then distribute them to those who come to receive, saying...*”<sup>137</sup>

Here the LSB uses the term ‘pastor’ rather than the more generic ‘minister’, making it explicitly clear that the assistants are not pastors.

We can learn from all of this that before 1982 the common liturgical practice of the LCMS was that only pastors were to distribute the Lord’s Supper, but that as of 1982 their common liturgical practice changed to include lay distributors.

The rather sudden change of ‘assisting ministers’ (pastors) to ‘those who assist’ (laity) between 1979 and 1982 reflects the differing views of the LCMS and the LCA and ALC. At this point in time the LCA understood deacons to be assistant pastors (see Luther Reed)<sup>138</sup>, while the LCMS viewed deacons as assisting laity (see C.F.W. Walther<sup>139</sup> and Hermann Sasse<sup>140</sup>).

It was not until 1982 that the LCMS printed a hymnal that declared Lay Distribution to be the common liturgical practice. However, this was just the common liturgical practice that reflected a growing change in the LCMS.

The earliest reference that I could find to Lay Distribution in the LCMS appears in John Fritz’s *Pastoral Theology*, written in 1932. In the section on *The Sacrament of the Altar* Fritz includes a section titled “*Administration of the Sacrament by a Layman*”. Here Fritz wrote, “*Rather than give Communion to himself (which he might legitimately do; of course, only in the regular 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.*”<sup>141</sup>

Here Fritz permits the distribution of the Lord’s Supper by a layman. However, the practice that Fritz refers to is very different to how Lay Distribution is practiced today.

Firstly, the layman is not said to have assisted in distributing the Sacrament to other laity but only to the pastor in the absence of an assisting pastor.

Secondly, Fritz does not consider this to be a common practice but only something done instead of Self-Communion.

Thirdly, Fritz does not reject the practice of Self-Communion but merely prefers the practice of Lay Distribution to a pastor rather than the pastor self-communicating.

Fourthly, Fritz only considers this option in special cases in which a pastor would otherwise go without Holy Communion. Fritz mentions that in ordinary circumstances the pastor could receive Holy Communion from another pastor during a pastors’ conference. What Fritz is referring to is the practice where the pastor distributes the elements to the laity, but since there is no other pastor present to commune him, the pastor then refrains from Holy Communion and receives it from another pastor at a later date. This has been a common practice among Lutherans in the past<sup>142</sup>, when Holy

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<sup>136</sup> Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Worship*, pages 151, 172 and 191.

<sup>137</sup> Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Service Book*, pages 164, 181, 199, 210 and 217.

<sup>138</sup> Luther Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy: A Study of the Common Liturgy of the Lutheran Church in America*, pages 372-375.

<sup>139</sup> C.F.W. Walther, *Pastoral Theology*, page 44.

<sup>140</sup> Hermann Sasse, *Ministry and Ordination*, from *We Confess: The Church*, page 71.

<sup>141</sup> John Fritz, *Pastoral Theology*, page 146.

<sup>142</sup> See Luther Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy: A Study of the Common Liturgy of the Lutheran Church in America*, pages 372-373.

Communion was celebrated seldom or even rarely. References to this practice will emerge again in our discussion, therefore, for shorthand I will refer to this practice simply as ‘Refraining’.

Fifthly, Fritz considered Lay Distribution to be something done only in special circumstances and that either Refraining or calling a second pastor to assist should be the regular practice.

Fritz mentions four separation practices connected to the distribution of the Lord’s Supper. The ordinary practice is the use of an assisting pastor. However, in cases of necessity Fritz believed three alternative practices to be permissible (in order of Fritz’s preference): Refraining, Lay Distribution and Self-Communion.

In the 1930s John Fritz allowed for Lay Distribution to take place in special cases of necessity. However this was not the view held by everyone (see below the section on *Walther*).

Luther Reed, of the *Lutheran Church in America*, in his 1947 book *The Lutheran Liturgy* discussed the topic of distribution. He begins the section by quoting the *Common Service Book of the Lutheran Church*, “When the Minister giveth the Bread he shall say... When he giveth the Cup he shall says...After he hath given the Bread and the Cup, the Minister shall say...”<sup>143</sup>

He begins and ends his section on distribution by stating that the common practice is that the officiating pastor is assisted by an assistant pastor (deacon).<sup>144</sup>

In between these statements, however, he discusses what should happen in the absence of an assisting pastor. He cites Luther’s view of Self-Communion<sup>145</sup>, and Chemnitz’s view that a pastor may either self-commune or refrain.<sup>146</sup>

He then proceeds to discuss the ongoing argument among Lutherans concerning Self-Communion verses Refraining. Nowhere in this writing does Reed even ponder the practice of Lay Distribution.

The next reference to lay distributors appears in volume 3 of *The Abiding Word*. This volume was published in 1960 but contains articles written in 1954-1955. Two of these articles contain a reference to Lay Distribution. The first article is *The Lord’s Supper* by Ottomar Krueger.

Krueger takes a very similar position to Fritz (even directly quoting Fritz). He states that a congregation may authorize a layman “to assist the pastor in distribution, or even to commune the pastor.”<sup>147</sup>

Here Krueger permits laymen to not only distribute Holy Communion to the pastor but also to other laypeople. He then adds, however, that “these are exceptional and unusual cases and should not become the common practice, for the Lord is a God of order and wants everything to be done decently and in order in His church on earth.”<sup>148</sup> While Krueger permitted the use of lay distributors he believed that they should only be used in exceptional and unusual cases and never as the common practice, for “God has very definitely established the public ministry in His church (1 Cor. 4:1, Acts 20:28, the pastoral epistles to Timothy and Titus), and we should not deliberately allow all kinds of confusion to be introduced into our congregations which disturb the consciences of men.”<sup>149</sup>

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See Ottomar Krueger, *The Lord’s Supper*, in *The Abiding Word*, volume 3, page 460. See C.F.W. Walther, *Pastoral Theology*, page 151.

See Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, quoted in Luther Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy: A Study of the Common Liturgy of the Lutheran Church in America*, pages 372.

<sup>143</sup> The General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States of America, the General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America and the United Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the South, *Common Service Book of the Lutheran Church*, pages 26 and 63. See Luther Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy: A Study of the Common Liturgy of the Lutheran Church in America*, pages 371.

<sup>144</sup> Luther Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy: A Study of the Common Liturgy of the Lutheran Church in America*, pages 372 and 375.

<sup>145</sup> Martin Luther, *An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church of Wittenberg*, LW 53, page 30.

<sup>146</sup> Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, quoted in Luther Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy: A Study of the Common Liturgy of the Lutheran Church in America*, pages 372.

<sup>147</sup> Ottomar Krueger, *The Lord’s Supper*, in *The Abiding Word*, volume 3, page 460.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid. page 461.

Referring to Self-Communion, Krueger takes the same stance as Fritz, stating that there is no absolute necessity that would require a pastor to self-commune, since he can easily receive it from another pastor at a pastoral conference.<sup>150</sup> Here Krueger shows his preference for the practice of Refraining. He also mentions that the reason why he disfavours Self-Communion is that it may lead to confusion amongst the laity and that some laity may get the idea that they can commune themselves at home.

What we can learn from Krueger is that he permitted Lay Distribution but that his preferred option was Refraining. He also believed that Lay Distribution was for exceptional cases and that it should not become the common practice.

The second article in *The Abiding Word* to mention Lay Distribution is *Proper Use of Holy Communion* by A.E. Krause. Krause states that pastors, as the Stewards of the Mysteries of God, are to administer the Lord's Supper, but that "*they may be assisted by other ordained ministers, or even by laymen.*"<sup>151</sup> Here Krause makes a separation between administration and distribution, demonstrating the modern understanding of 'administration' as merely 'officiating' the Lord's Supper.

Krause also notes that the Roman Catholics only allow ordained ministers to distribute the Lord's Supper (showing us that historically the Church did not permit Lay Distribution in the period prior to the Reformation). He also states that laymen are never to officiate (consecrate) the Lord's Supper.

Krause's reasoning for the use of lay distributors is confusing. He states that, "*we must admit that if it is proper for another ordained minister to assist the called pastor in a congregation, then it is just as proper for a layman to assist the called pastor under certain conditions.*"<sup>152</sup> His argument doesn't make sense, "if a second pastor can assist in the distribution then a layman can assist in the distribution."

The thing to note is that Krause says that "*under certain conditions*" a layman can assist in the distribution. Thus, Krause also believed that Lay Distribution was not to become a common practice. He finishes this section by stating, "*Here, of course, wisdom must again dictate. It would be unwise for a church to plot a course which would ultimately lead to the indiscriminate use of laymen in assisting at Communion.*"<sup>153</sup>

Both Krueger and Krause in the 1950s permitted Lay Distribution to take place in exceptional cases, however, both of them believed that Lay Distribution should never become a common practice in the Church. Krause called this an unwise decision, and the 1980s would demonstrate just how 'unwise' this decision was.

As the LCMS entered the 1980s it went against the wishes of Krueger and Krause and made Lay Distribution a common liturgical practice.<sup>154</sup> Lay Distribution was no longer only used in exceptional cases, but now the LCMS indiscriminately used laymen in assisting at Holy Communion.

This is not only evident in the 1982 *Lutheran Worship*, but in the LCMS's 1983 statement on the *Theology and Practice of the Lord's Supper*. In part three of this paper the *Commission on Theology and Church Relations* (CTCR) seeks to answer a series of questions regarding the Lord's Supper. Question 13 asks "*Can a qualified male assist with the distribution of the elements in the service of Holy Communion?*" to which the CTCR replies "*Yes. A pastor and congregation can mutually designate that a qualified male(s) member of the congregation assist the pastor.*"<sup>155</sup>

The term 'layman' is not explicitly used, but the contrast of the assistant with the pastor implies that they are a layman. Also, the fact that this question was asked in the first place would imply that the intended male assistant is a layman, since it is common sense that another pastor may assist.

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid. page 460.

<sup>151</sup> A.E. Krause, *Proper Use of Holy Communion*, in *The Abiding Word*, volume 3, page 501.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Worship*, pages 151, 172 and 191.

<sup>155</sup> Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, *Theology and Practice of the Lord's Supper: Part 1*, page 31.

This statement of the LCMS, publically declares the use of lay distributors as the official position of the LCMS.

The answer to the question also contains an endnote. The endnote makes reference to General Rubrics of the altar edition of *Lutheran Worship*. Which reads “*Since the administration of the Lord’s body is the decisive act of admission to the Sacrament, the presiding minister, as the responsible minister of the Sacrament, distributes the body of the Lord. The assisting minister(s) may distribute the blood.*”<sup>156</sup>

This quote is very significant, for *Lutheran Worship* in the Order of Holy Communion refers to the lay distributors as ‘*those who assist*’ while the General Rubrics of *Lutheran Worship* refer to the lay distributors as ‘*assisting ministers*’. This gives us an insight into how the LCMS viewed the phrase ‘*assisting ministers*’ in the 1979 *Lutheran Book of Worship*. While the LCA (and maybe ALC) used the phrase to refer to assisting pastors, the LCMS used the phrase to refer to assisting laity.

In the 1980s the LCMS made Lay Distribution into a common practice. Krause in the 1950s said that this would be an unwise thing to do. The late 1980s showed us exactly how unwise this decision was.

For in 1989, the LCMS synodical convention passed Resolution 3-05B, which permitted the use of Licensed Lay Deacons to administer of the Lord’s Supper in difficult circumstances; or in other words the LCMS permitted the practice of Lay Consecration.<sup>157</sup>

It was not until the 2007 LCMS synodical convention that the synod passed Resolution 5-01B, which established the office of Specific Ministry Pastors (SMP), who would administer the Sacrament, as ordained pastors, in difficult circumstances.<sup>158</sup>

Compare this with the *Lutheran Church of Australia*, who in 1981 stated, “*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.*”<sup>159</sup>

In 1981 the *Lutheran Church of Australia* already opposed Lay Consecration, and instead promoted the use of specialized pastors in difficult circumstances. (Note that the above mentioned ‘*authorized elder*’ was to serve as a specialized pastor and not as a layman).

As for the LCMS in 1989 they endorsed Lay Consecration in difficult circumstances, and didn’t endorse the use of specialized pastors until 2007.

In addition to this the LCMS continued the practice of License Lay Deacons (Lay Consecration) until 2016. At the 2016 LCMS synodical conference the synod endorsed Resolution 13-02A, “*to regularize status of Licensed Lay Deacons involved in Word and Sacrament Ministry.*”<sup>160</sup>

Resolution 13-02A resolved that by January 1<sup>st</sup> 2018 all Licensed Lay Deacons were to be regularised by either joining a seminary to become a regular pastor or by joining the Specific Ministry Pastors program.<sup>161</sup>

As for the mean time, “*until January 1, 2018, district presidents may train and annually license lay deacons to preach publicly and to administer the Sacraments.*”<sup>162</sup>

And as for the period after January 1<sup>st</sup> 2018, district presidents may continue to grant licensure in exceptional cases, with the consent of the plenary of the *Council of Presidents* and the *Colloquy*

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<sup>156</sup> Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, Altar edition of the *Lutheran Worship*, pages 31-32. Quoted in Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, *Theology and Practice of the Lord’s Supper: Part 1*, page 42, endnote 35.

<sup>157</sup> Cf. Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, *66<sup>th</sup> Regular Convention*, page 374.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> The Lutheran Church of Australia, *Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinion Volume 1. Section E: The Sacraments, Concerning the Sacrament of the Altar*, page E8.

<sup>160</sup> Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, *66<sup>th</sup> Regular Convention*, page 373.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.* pages 375-376.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.* page 375.

*Committee for the Pastoral Ministry*.<sup>163</sup> Or in other words the LCMS has sought to minimize Licensed Lay Deacons (Lay Consecration) but hasn't actually condemned the practice or removed it entirely.

Historically the LCMS did not use lay distributors at all. During the early to mid 1900s the practice of lay distributors was permitted, but only in exceptional cases of need. As we enter the 1980s the LCMS makes Lay Distribution a regular common practice. By the end of the 1980s the LCMS introduced Lay Consecration for exceptional cases of need.

As we enter the 2000s the LCMS has seen a revival in those who hold to the Confessional Lutheran view that only those who are rightly called may consecrate and distribute the Lord's Supper.

In 2007, the LCMS endorsed the Specific Ministry Pastors program, so that men called into the Office of the Ministry would consecrate the elements in exceptional cases of need instead of laymen. And in 2016 the LCMS began the removal of Licensed Lay Deacons.

Also, as of the 2000s a number of LCMS members have begun to speak out against the practice of Lay Distribution.<sup>164</sup>

## Excursus: Deacons – What Are They?

The office of deacon is an often disputed issue these days, as there are two entirely different understandings of what a deacon is.

One view teaches that in Acts 6 the office of deacon was a lay office established to distribute charity to widows (Acts 6:1-2) so that the Apostles (clergy) could dedicate themselves to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament (Acts 6:2,4). For those who follow this interpretation the mention of deacons alongside bishops in Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3, is done to contrast the two offices, one being the Office of Word and Sacrament and the other being a lay auxiliary office.

However, this is not the only interpretation of Acts 6, Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3.

There is an interpretation of Acts 6 that believes the deacons were called into an assisting Office of the Ministry of Word and Sacrament. This view is held by the Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, a majority of Anglicans and even a large number of Lutherans.

When holders of this view are asked to justify their point from the Bible they often claim that the daily distribution in Acts 6:1 is not referring to charity but to the daily distribution of Holy Communion, for Acts 2:46 tells us that the early Christians met daily for the breaking of bread. Therefore, the widows who were missing out on the daily distribution were actually missing out on Holy Communion; similar to 1 Corinthians 11:21 where Paul mentions that some were missing out on Holy Communion at Corinth.

This view similarly then holds that in Acts 6:2 the distinction between Ministry of the Word and the serving of tables was referring to the dividing up of the pastoral functions. In other words the Apostles were going to continue in the Ministry of the Word (preaching), while the deacons would serve tables (administer Holy Communion). The connection that is made here is that 1 Corinthians 10:21 refers to Holy Communion as the Lord's Table, and thus this view believes that the deacons were to serve the Lord's Table.

This view holds that the deacons were assisting pastors, who would take care of the daily distribution of Holy Communion while the Apostles devoted themselves to preaching and prayer. (Acts 6:2,4) This is expanded upon by Acts 2:42 and 5:42. In Acts 2:42 it mentions that the Christians devoted themselves to the Apostles' teachings and to Communion, to breaking of bread and to the prayers. However, in Acts 5:42 it only mentions the Apostles preaching and teaching. Thus the Apostles focused on the teaching and the prayers while the deacons focused on the breaking of bread.

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Jeffrey Radt, *Article 14 and LCMS Lay Deacons*, [www.lutheranlayman.com/2013/10/article-xiv-and-lcms-lay-deacons.html](http://www.lutheranlayman.com/2013/10/article-xiv-and-lcms-lay-deacons.html) (See Appendix 1).

Pastor Heath Curtis, *Lay Assistance in Communing the People and Something About Deacons*, [www.gottesdienstonline.blogspot.com.au/2011/01/lay-assistance-in-communing-people-and.html](http://www.gottesdienstonline.blogspot.com.au/2011/01/lay-assistance-in-communing-people-and.html) (See Appendix 2).

This view holds that both bishops and deacons are pastors, and therefore the pairings in Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3 are not a contrast of two different offices (clergy and lay) but a distinction of two expressions of the same Office of the Ministry. This is further added to by the fact that in 1 Timothy 3:2 bishops are required to teach, while in 1 Timothy 3:13 deacons are only required to serve. Those who hold to this view would explain this by saying that the Office of Bishop was a teaching Office of the Ministry while the Office of Deacon was an assisting Office of the Ministry.

This view holds that the Office of Pastor is the divinely instituted Office of Word and Sacrament (Eph. 4:11-12), but that the Office of Bishop and the Office of Deacon are two manmade offices within the one Office of Pastor. For all who have been called into the Office of the Ministry possess the full office and are equal by divine right (Matt. 18:1-4, 23:8-12, Mark 9:34-35, 1 Cor. 3:5,21-22, 12:5-6), but the Church possesses the right to make distinctions among the pastors according to human right (1 Cor. 1:17, 12:5-6).

This view draws on the fact that the seven deacons were chosen and received the laying on of hands (Acts 6:5-6), thus called and ordained. And since the laying on of hands is only mentioned elsewhere in Scripture in connection with the Office of the Ministry (Acts 13:3, 1 Tim. 4:14, 5:22, 2 Tim. 1:6), then logically the deacons must belong to the Office of the Ministry because they received the laying on of hands. This point is especially important to the Roman Catholics who hold that the Apostolic Succession and Indelible Character are passed on through the laying on of hands and therefore, the deacons received the Indelible Character in Acts 6:6.

This view also holds to the fact that the Greek for deacon is *diakonos*, which means ‘servant’ or ‘serving one’. The term *diakonos* appears in Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13 in refers to the Office of Deacon. But in Scripture *diakonos* is also used to refer to the Office of the Ministry (e.g. Luke 1:2, Acts 1:17, 2 Cor. 5:18, Col 1:23, 1 Tim. 4:6, etc.), especially since the word *minister* is Latin for *diakonos*.

This view of the Office of Deacon is the view held by the majority of Christianity, for the majority of its history, mainly because this view is held by both the Roman Catholics and Greek Orthodox which make up the majority of Christianity. However, this view is not without its holes.

Firstly, if the ‘daily distribution’ was a reference to Holy Communion and not charity then why are only the widows missing out? Not only that, why are only a select group of widows missing out? You’d think that if the missing out was referring to Holy Communion, as it does in 1 Corinthians 11:21, that more people than just the widows would be missing out. One answer could be that since the Christians were gathering together in their own homes for daily Holy Communion (Acts 2:26), and that Apostles were distributing Holy Communion on their daily visits (Acts 5:42), that the Hellenistic widows were simply being forgotten and their homes not visited.

However, this raises a second question. If the Apostles were going from house to house teaching why couldn’t they also distribute Holy Communion while there? Why would they preach and teach and then leave the deacons to do Holy Communion?

Thirdly, the term Ministry of the Word, doesn’t refer to only preaching but to the whole Ministry of Word and Sacrament. The word ‘Sacrament’, meaning ‘holy things’, doesn’t appear anywhere in Scripture. Like the word ‘Trinity’, ‘Sacrament’ is an ecclesiastical term used to describe what the Scriptures teach. Also, the Sacraments are the physical Word of God. The term Ministry of the Word refers to both Word and Sacraments, therefore, when the Apostles dedicate themselves to the Ministry of the Word (Acts 6:2,4), they are dedicating themselves to both Word and Sacrament. Thus, the deacons, who were not part of the Ministry of the Word, did not handle the Word or Sacraments.

Fourthly, the argument that *diakonos* is used for the Office of the Ministry, doesn’t prove anything, as Paul also uses the term *diakonos* to refer to the secular government (Rom. 13:4). And the verb form of *diakonos*, *diakonia*, used in Acts 6:1 to refer to the daily distribution, is also not used solely for the work of the Ministry. For, in Luke 10:40, the word *diakonia* is used to refer to Martha’s housework.

The word *diakonos*/minister/servant, is a very broad term. Therefore, when reading Scripture a distinction needs to be made between the broad use of *diakonos* to simply mean servant and the

narrow use of *diakonos* which refers to the Office of Deacon. As Kurt Marquart said, “*the mere word “deacon” by itself settles nothing.*”<sup>165</sup>

Fifthly, the idea that deacons were members of the Office of the Ministry of Word and Sacrament, raises some issues surrounding deaconesses and Women’s Ordinations. In Romans 16:1 Phoebe is called a deaconess and it is also commonly believed that Priscilla was a deaconess. If deacons were pastors, then logically deaconesses would be female pastors? One could argue that since deacons didn’t teach (Acts 6:2,4, 1 Timothy 3:13), this wouldn’t contradict the Scriptures which prohibit women teaching in the public worship (1 Cor. 14:34-35, 1 Timothy 2:11-12). If deacons were only to serve in the administration of the Sacraments, technically a woman could do this, as long as she only distributed them to women. Which does appear to have happened in some places in the Early Church. For example, in some places in the Early Church deaconesses distributed Holy Communion to sick women at home<sup>166</sup>, and in some places deaconesses baptized the women. The latter example was due to the fact that in some places the custom was to be completely naked during Baptism and thus the men and women were baptized separately, the women being baptized by other women (deaconesses).

The point is that there are currently two different views of the Office of Deacon: one believes that deacons belong to the Office of the Ministry of Word and Sacrament but only exercises the Office in assisting roles, while the other view is that deacons are a lay office that serves the physical needs of the congregation and does not handle the Word or Sacraments.

Within modern Lutheranism there does not appear to be a consensus regarding the Office of Deacon, deacons are either a pastor or a layperson. However, this was not the historical Lutheran view; at least it wasn’t the view of Martin Luther. For Luther, the argument was not an either/or but merely a quarrel over terminology.

I would argue that it is clear, that the Seven “Deacons”<sup>167</sup> of Acts 6:1-6 are laymen and thus lay deacons. I would argue that the same goes for the Office of Deacon mentioned in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 (see the above discussion in my section *Is It Biblical?*)<sup>168</sup>. Therefore, the Biblical office of Deacon refers to the office of lay workers. In his book, *Christ’s Church: Her Biblical Roots, Her Dramatic History, Her Saving Presence, Her Glorious Future*, Bo Giertz said, that in the Early Church “*presbyters and bishops [pastors] proclaimed the Word and generally handled the administration of the Church,*” while the deacons “*primarily did work of mercy.*”<sup>169</sup>

However, already by the time of Ignatius of Antioch (35-107AD), who is believed to have been a student of St. John the Apostle, we find the three-fold division of the Office of the Ministry into Bishop, Presbyter and Deacon.<sup>170</sup>

In at least four different letters of Ignatius he refers to deacons as part of the three-fold Office of the ministry, “*I exhort you to seek to do all things in divine concord under the direction of the bishop, [who serves] in God’s place, and of the elders, [who serve] in place of the apostolic council, and of the deacons, who are to me most precious as those to whom the ministry of Jesus Christ has been entrusted.*”<sup>171</sup>

“*(The congregation at Philadelphia) is my everlasting and perpetual joy, especially if it agrees with the bishop, its elders, and its deacons, who have been appointed according to God’s will.*”<sup>172</sup>

“*Follow the bishop as Jesus Christ [follows] the Father and the elders as the apostles, and to the deacons show due respect as commanded by God.*”<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Kurt Marquart, *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance*, page 141, footnote 63.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid. page 165, footnote 50.

<sup>167</sup> The term ‘deacon’ does not appear in text, but has historically been attributed to these seven men.

<sup>168</sup> Regarding the use of the term ‘deacon’ in Philippians 1:1, there is not enough information in the text to clearly indicate whether it refers to laity or clergy.

<sup>169</sup> Bo Giertz, *Christ’s Church: Her Biblical Roots, Her Dramatic History, Her Saving Presence, Her Glorious Future*, page 154.

<sup>170</sup> Hermann Sasse, *Ministry and Ordination*, from *We Confess: The Church*, page 75.

<sup>171</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Magnesians*, quoted in C.F.W. Walther, *Church and Ministry*, page 190.

<sup>172</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Philadelphians*, quoted in C.F.W. Walther, *Church and Ministry*, page 190.

“Again, it is the duty of the deacons, who are [the ministers of]<sup>174</sup> the mystery of Jesus Christ, in every way to please all. For they are not servants of food and drink but ministers of the Church.”<sup>175</sup>

In the last quote from Ignatius, he explicitly states his view that the deacons are Ministers of the Mysteries of Christ (1 Cor. 4:1) and not servants of food and drink, thus, rejecting the view that deacons merely distributed charitable food.

Also Cyprian of Carthage (200-258AD) wrote, “The election of deacons was done carefully and cautiously by the whole assembled congregation in order that someone unworthy might not be consecrated to the ministry of the altar and the office of pastor.”<sup>176</sup>

Also at the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451AD it was resolved, “No one should be absolutely ordained as a presbyter or a deacon or in general as an incumbent of any ecclesiastical office if the person to be ordained has not specially been designated for a congregation in a city or village or for the chapel of a martyr or for a monastery.”<sup>177</sup>

Since the time of Ignatius the Early Church had held the view that the Office of Deacon was an assisting role within the one Office of the Ministry. This view continued into the medieval Church, “the administration of the sacraments was often left to deacons or chaplains, who were assistants of pastors or rectors.”<sup>178</sup>

However, many of the Lutheran Reformers held a different view.

Martin Luther held that the original Office of Deacon only served aid to the poor but was later changed into an extension of the Pastoral Office. As he said, “The priesthood [office of pastor] is properly nothing but the Ministry of the Word – the Word, I say; not the Law, but the Gospel. And the diaconate is the ministry, not of reading the Gospel or the Epistle, as is the present practice, but of distributing the church’s aid to the poor, so that the priests may be relieved of the burden of temporal matters and may give themselves more freely to prayer and the Word. For this was the purpose of the institution of the diaconate, as we read in Acts 5 [Acts 6:1-6].”<sup>179</sup> And on another occasion Luther also wrote, “From this story (Acts 6) we learn in the first place how a Christian congregation should be constituted. In addition, we have a true pattern of spiritual government that the apostles here provide. They care for souls, occupy themselves with preaching and prayer, and yet also see to it that the body is cared for; for they suggest several men who are to distribute the goods, as you have heard.”<sup>180</sup> And also, “Thus St. Stephen did [preaching publically to non-Christians], as we are told in Acts 7:1-53; though the apostles had not entrusted him with the office of preaching, yet he preached and performed great miracles among the people (Acts 6:8). So also did Philip, the deacon, Stephen’s partner (8:5), though also to him the ministry had not been entrusted.”<sup>181</sup> And also, “Again, in Acts 6:3,6 we are told that the apostles themselves could not appoint deacons to a far inferior office without the knowledge and consent of the congregation.”<sup>182</sup>

As we can see from these four texts of Luther, he believed that the “deacons” of Acts 6 were merely laymen, who did not preach or teach as holders of the pastoral office, but who served the

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<sup>173</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Smyrnæans*, quoted in C.F.W. Walther, *Church and Ministry*, page 196.

<sup>174</sup> See, Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Trallians*, chapter 2, New Advent, [www.newadvent.org/fathers/0106.htm](http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0106.htm)

<sup>175</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Trallians*, quoted in C.F.W. Walther, *Church and Ministry*, page 196.

<sup>176</sup> Cyprian of Carthage, quoted in C.F.W. Walther, *Church and Ministry*, page 245.

<sup>177</sup> Council of Chalcedon, quoted in C.F.W. Walther, *Church and Ministry*, page 267.

<sup>178</sup> Theodore Tappert, *Table Talk*, LW 54, page 460, footnote 124.

<sup>179</sup> Martin Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, LW 36, page 116.

<sup>180</sup> Martin Luther, *Church Postil: Gospel Portion*, quoted in C.F.W. Walther, *Church and Ministry*, pages 292-293.

<sup>181</sup> Martin Luther, *Reason and Proof from Scripture that a Christian Assembly or Congregation Has the Right and Power to Judge Doctrine and to Call, Install, and Dismiss Teachers*, quoted in C.F.W. Walther, *Church and Ministry*, page 164.

<sup>182</sup> Martin Luther, *Reason and Proof from Scripture that a Christian Assembly or Congregation Has the Right and Power to Judge Doctrine and to Call, Install, and Dismiss Teachers*, quoted in C.F.W. Walther, *Church and Ministry*, page 224.

physical needs (burden of temporal matters) of the Church through works of charity, and who witnessed as laymen.

We see a similar view held by Martin Chemnitz. Chemnitz believed that the Biblical deacons were not originally Ministers of the Word and Sacrament, but that “*the apostles afterwards accepted into the ministry of teaching those from among the deacons who were approved,*”<sup>183</sup> just as Philip later became an evangelist (Acts 21:8). In his *Examination of the Council of Trent* Chemnitz “*traces the deterioration of the diaconate from the service of the poor to ceremonial duties (Examination, II:687).*”<sup>184</sup> Chemnitz believed that the original purpose of the deacons was to merely distribute alms, as he said, “*in the beginning the apostles administered the office of the Word and the sacraments as well as that of distributing and managing alms. Later, when the number of disciples increased, they entrusted the part of their ministry dealing with alms to others, whom they called deacons or servants. They did this in order that they might give themselves “continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word” (Acts 6:4).*”<sup>185</sup>

We can learn from Chemnitz that in the beginning the Apostles served the Church through both the spiritual needs of Word and Sacrament and the physical needs of alms giving. But that as the Church grew and it became more difficult for the pastors to serve both the spiritual and physical needs of the Church, the Apostles instituted a lay office to handle the physical needs of the Church while they continued the work of Word and Sacrament (Acts 6:2-4). For, anyone can serve the physical needs of the Church, but only the clergy, as those who have been instituted by God (Ps. 68:11, Isa. 41:27, Jer. 3:15, 23:4, John 20:21-23, Acts 20:28, 1 Cor. 1:17, 12:28-29, 2 Cor. 2:18-19, Eph. 3:2, 4:11-12, Col. 1:25, 1 Pet. 5:2), and called into this office (John 20:21, Acts 14:23, Rom. 10:15, 1 Tim. 1:3, 2 Tim. 2:2, Tit. 1:5, Heb. 5:4), are to serve the Church’s spiritual needs through Word and Sacrament ( 1 Cor. 4:1, 12:29, Eph. 4:12, Tit. 1:7).

Luther and the other Reformers (such as Chemnitz) believed that the Biblical office of Deacon, particularly the deacons of Acts 6, 1 Timothy 3 and possible also Philippians 1, referred to a lay office, but over time the Church on Earth had changed the meaning of ‘deacon’ to refer only to assisting pastors. For Luther it was not an issue of either/or, that deacons were either laity or clergy, but rather a both/and. Not to say that Luther believed the deacons were some special midway office which was both lay and clerical, but that Luther believed the term ‘deacon’ was a broad term which could be used either to refer to lay assistants or to assistant pastors. This is evident in how Luther uses the term deacon. On a number of occasions Luther continued to use the term ‘deacon’ to refer to assisting pastors, as the Roman Catholics had done. For example, in 1525 Luther ordained a deacon by the name of Georg Rörer, who served in this role as an assistant pastor<sup>186</sup>, who had been added, with equal rights, to the ranks of the other clergy of Wittenberg<sup>187</sup>. And in 1546, Luther wrote to Nicholas von Amsdorf concerning Adam Besserer, a deacon (assistant pastor) who had been administering the Lord’s Supper<sup>188</sup>.

In the *Book of Concord* Melancthon uses the term ‘deacon’ as an official title for an assistant minister. In the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, it says, “*for the Church has the command to appoint ministers.*”<sup>189</sup> The English here is based on the Latin text which uses the single word *ministris*, meaning ‘ministers’. However, in the original German text Melancthon used two words, *prediger* and *diakonos*, meaning ‘preacher’ and ‘deacon’. The fact that Melancthon combined these

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<sup>183</sup> Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, page 683, quoted in Kurt Marquart, *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance*, page 140.

<sup>184</sup> Kurt Marquart, *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance*, page 140, footnote 60.

<sup>185</sup> Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, quoted in C.F.W. Walther, *Church and Ministry*, pages 296-297.

<sup>186</sup> Pastor Heath Curtis, *Lay Assistance in Communing the People and Something About Deacons*

<sup>187</sup> Kurt Marquart, *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance*, page 141, footnote 63.

<sup>188</sup> John Stephenson, *The Lord’s Supper*, page 94.

<sup>189</sup> *Concordia Triglotta: The Symbolical Books the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Apology of the Augsburg Confession* Article 13.12, page 311.

two words into one word in the Latin, shows that he considered both preachers and deacons to be two different offices belonging of the one Office of the Ministry, one regular and the other assistant.

But the Reformers were not merely following a Roman Catholic tradition. Luther truly believed that the Bible used the term deacon to refer lay workers on some occasions (Rom. 16:1, Phil. 1:1, 1 Tim. 3:8-13) and on other occasions to refer to the Office of the Ministry (Luke 1:2, Acts 1:17, 2 Cor. 5:18, Col 1:23, 1 Tim. 4:6, etc.). As Luther wrote, “*Now I judge from all this that it is certain that they who preside over the people with the sacraments and the Word neither may nor should be called priests...but according to the evangelical Scriptures, they should rather be called ministers, deacons, bishops, stewards.*”<sup>190</sup> Here Luther clearly states that the Scriptures use the term ‘deacon’ in reference to the clergy. And the fact that he separated ministers and deacons into two separate titles shows that he isn’t using deacon in the generic sense of ‘servant’, but as an official name and title for the Office of the Ministry.

For Luther the word ‘deacon’ was merely a term, and Scripture teaches us not to quarrel over terminology (2 Tim. 2:14). The term could be used to refer to laity or to clergy. St. Paul even uses the term ‘deacon’ to refer the government as servants of God (Rom. 13:4).

For Luther the issue was not that the Roman Catholics had been using the word ‘deacon’ to refer to assistant pastors, but that the Roman Catholics taught that the word ‘deacon’ referred only to the office of assistant pastor, and that the seven men of Acts 6 were not laity but clergy. As shown above, Luther strongly believed that the seven men of Acts 6 were laity. Luther also held that the Biblical word ‘deacon’ was used in a twofold way in the Scriptures. In a more generalized way when talking about all the different ‘servants of God’ and in a more specific way when referring to the lay Office of Deacon. A similar case occurs with the term ‘elder’. Throughout the New Testament the word ‘elder’ is predominately used to refer to the Office of the Ministry (Acts 14:23, 15:2,6, 18:17,28, Tit. 1:5, 1 Pet. 5:1-3, 2 John 1, 3 John 1), except in those cases where the word elder is used to refer to elderly men (Tit. 2:2, 1 Pet. 5:5). Yet in 1 Timothy 5:17 Paul says “*Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching.*” The use of the Word ‘especially’ means that there were some elders who did not labour in preaching and teaching. Therefore, there were two offices of elder in the Apostolic Church (1<sup>st</sup> Century Church), those who preached and taught and those who did not. Does this mean that there were called and ordained elders (pastors) who did not preach and teach but only handled the Sacraments? One could argue that case. However, that is not the Lutheran understanding of this text. As Gerhard wrote, “*In the apostolic and original church there were two types of presbyters, which are called **seniores** in the Latin, as is concluded from 1 Timothy 5:17. For some administered the teaching office, or, as the apostle speaks there, worked in Word and doctrine, who were called bishops, pastors, etc.; but others were set up for censuring morals and preserving church discipline... Both types bore in common the name elders (1 Tim. 5:17).*”<sup>191</sup> Chemnitz also, in his *Examination on the Council of Trent*, “*calls lay presbytery [elders] an official level [office]... this is the constant doctrine of the teachers of our church.*”<sup>192</sup> And in his *Enchiridion* Chemnitz mentions that, “*With the name elders are meant not only ministers of the Word, but included in the presbytery are also those who were appointed by the whole church to administer the work of the church, as Tertullian and Ambrose testify.*”<sup>193</sup>

Just as the Bible refers to two offices called ‘elder’ (1 Tim. 5:17), so too does the Bible refer to two offices called ‘deacon’, one clerical (Luke 1:2, Acts 1:17, 2 Cor. 5:18, Col 1:23, 1 Tim. 4:6) and one lay (Acts 6:1-6, Phil. 1:1, 1 Tim. 3:8-13). Just as Marquart said, “*the mere word “deacon” by itself settles nothing. One needs to know whether in a given case “deacon” is meant strictly in the sense of charitable diaconate (“tables”) or in the later liturgical sense of assistant minister.*”<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Martin Luther, *How One Should Choose and Install Pastors*, quoted in C.F.W. Walther, *Church and Ministry*, pages 208-209, and also quoted in Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* volume 3, page 457.

<sup>191</sup> Johann Gerhard, *Loci de Ministerio*, quoted in C.F.W. Walther, *Pastoral Theology*, page 255.

<sup>192</sup> C.F.W. Walther, *Pastoral Theology*, page 254.

<sup>193</sup> Martin Chemnitz, *Ministry, Word and Sacraments: An Enchiridion*, page 33.

<sup>194</sup> Kurt Marquart, *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance*, page 141, footnote 63.

The important part is not whether a deacon refers to a layperson or to a pastor, but that people are able to clearly distinguish between the lay workers and the clergy.

Luther believed that the Biblical term ‘deacon’ was used for both clergy and laity, on different occasions. However, later Lutherans have not generally held this same view. Instead, later Lutherans believed that the Biblical term ‘deacon’ referred either to laity or to clergy. And this would then impact on how they understood the Office of Ministry.

Such an either/or view of the Biblical term ‘deacon’ can already be seen in Johann Gerhard.

While Luther and Chemnitz held that the 7 “deacons” of Acts 6 were laity Gerhard, on the other hand, believed that the deacons were not excluded from the Ministry of Word and Sacrament, but that they were principally put in charge of tables<sup>195</sup>, as in Tables of Holy Communion. Gerhard said that the deacons were, “*conjoined with presbyters, preached the Word together with them, administered the sacraments, visited the sick, etc...and were made teachers of a lower order in the Church (Phil. 1:1, 1 Tim. 3:8).*”<sup>196</sup> He also rejected the view of the Jesuit Cardinal Robert Bellarmine<sup>197</sup> that, “[the deacons] were to serve tables and not of the election of pastors,” instead Gerhard taught that, “*it is wrong to say that the deacons were merely to serve tables; for as we have shown above from the examples of Stephen and Philip, they also attended to the office of teaching.*”<sup>198</sup>

Also in his *Commentary on 1 and 2 Timothy* Gerhard said concerning 1 Timothy 3:8, “*“Likewise.” The Vulgate rendered this similitur, “in the same way”, and based on this some conclude that deacons should not be inferior to bishops with respect to their powers.*”<sup>199</sup> Based on the use of ‘likewise’ in 1 Timothy 3:8 Gerhard believed that deacons shared in the same Office of the Ministry as bishops.

Also in the *Evangelienharmonie* (Gospel Harmony), started by Martin Chemnitz, added to by Polykarpus Leyser, and finished by Johann Gerhard, Gerhard wrote, “*for the sake of good order they elect certain persons to whom they transfer the administration of the keys of the kingdom of heaven, as there are with us deacons, pastors, doctors, bishops, or superintendents and the like in order that everything with us may according to the teaching of Paul (1 Cor. 14), be done decently and in order.*”<sup>200</sup>

This statement from Gerhard had previously been stated in the *Evangelienharmonie* by his contemporary Leyser, who said, “*nevertheless they elect certain persons for the sake of good order, to whom they commit the administration of the keys of the kingdom of heaven, such as deacons, pastors. Doctors, bishops or superintendents and the like, in order that everything among us may be done decently and in order according to Paul’s teaching.*”<sup>201</sup>

Then in the 1800’s C.F.W. Walther held that the Office of Deacon was a lay auxiliary office that branched off from the preaching office.<sup>202</sup> He also taught that, “*When the Apostle [Paul] says of deacons, “And let these first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless” (1 Tim. 3:10), that obviously holds true to an even greater extent for the elders to whom the office of the Word is to be entrusted.*”<sup>203</sup> He also taught that the office of lay elder was the same as the office of deacon, who were not set apart (Acts 13:2) for the Office of the Ministry.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Kurt Marquart, *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance*, page 140.

<sup>196</sup> Johann Gerhard, *Loci Theologici*, quoted in Kurt Marquart, *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance*, page 141.

<sup>197</sup> Note that Bellarmine is a Catholic Cardinal, who rejected the majority view of the Roman Catholics that deacons were assisting pastors.

<sup>198</sup> Johann Gerhard, *Loci Theologici*, quoted in C.F.W. Walther, *Church and Ministry*, page 238.

<sup>199</sup> Johann Gerhard, *Commentary on 1 and 2 Timothy*, page 46.

<sup>200</sup> Johann Gerhard, *Evangelienharmonie*, quoted in C.F.W. Walther, *The Congregation’s Right to Choose Its Pastor*, page 58.

<sup>201</sup> Polykarpus Leyser, *Evangelienharmonie*, quoted in C.F.W. Walther, *The Congregation’s Right to Choose Its Pastor*, page 135.

<sup>202</sup> C.F.W. Walther, *Pastoral Theology*, page 254.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.* page 44.

<sup>204</sup> C.F.W. Walther, *Pastoral Theology*, page 255.

It is interesting to see that both Gerhard and Walther, believed that there were two Biblical offices of elder (one lay and one clerical), and yet only one office of deacon (Gerhard=clerical, Walther=lay).

As we enter the 1900's the divide becomes clearer with some Lutherans holding that deacons were assistant pastors and others believing that deacons were only laypeople.

Some Churches such as the *Lutheran Church of America*, believed that deacons were called and ordained assistant pastors. They believed that deacons belonged to the Office of the Ministry and were not lay workers. As seen in their hymnal<sup>205</sup>, and their pastor Luther Reed who made a clear distinction between the assisting ministers (deacons) and the lay church officers<sup>206</sup>.

Also, Pastor A.G. Voigt of the *United Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the South* (which merged into the *United Lutheran Church in America* in 1917, and then later into the *Lutheran Church of America* in 1962), wrote in his 1916 *Biblical Dogmatics*, "there were diversities of ministrations," and that "in the pastoral epistles the offices of bishop or elders and deacons are fully developed. The ministry of the word did not belong exclusively to the elders."<sup>207</sup> Voigt did believe that the seven deacons in Acts 6 were installed to "care for the poor"<sup>208</sup> but he also believed that all Church offices, including, pastor, missionary, teacher, superintendent, bishop and deacon shared in the "one office of the means of grace."<sup>209</sup>

However, pastors of the *Synodical Conference*, particularly the *Lutheran Church Missouri Synod*, held that the Office of Deacon was solely a lay office.

As P. F. Koehneke said, "when the need arose in the congregation at Jerusalem to establish the office of deacon, the Apostles presented the situation to the people and suggested the election of seven men to provide for the poor in the congregation."<sup>210</sup>

As Hermann Sasse said, "The apostles came to recognize that it would be helpful for their ministry if they were relieved of the work of caring for the poor and attending to money matters. So the office of deacons was created as an auxiliary office."<sup>211</sup> And also, "one of the deepest reasons why a woman may become a deacon, but not a bishop or ordained elder (1 Timothy 5:17) seems to be that in the office of the pastor there are functions which the minister performs as the representative of Christ."<sup>212</sup>

As Kurt Marquart said, "The other relevant sense of the *διακονία*-group of words is the very specific one of "deacon" and "diaconate", which no doubt grows out of the word-group's main sense of "service", especially food service, and therefore also provision of bodily support generally."<sup>213</sup> And also, "This is the origin of the diaconate, whose special responsibility is the care of the needy. In this technical sense we find deacons contrasted with bishops (Phil. 1:1, 1 Tim. 3:8)."<sup>214</sup> And also "what is clear is that the church's diaconic sharing at "tables" is not as such the ministry of the Word, from which it is expressly distinguished (Acts 6:2,4)."<sup>215</sup>

As John Stephenson said, "He [Jesus] later moved His apostles to institute the auxiliary office of the diaconate (Acts 6:1-6)."<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship, *Lutheran Book of Worship*, pages 71, 92, and 114.

<sup>206</sup> Luther Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy: A Study of the Common Liturgy of the Lutheran Church in America*, pages 372-375.

<sup>207</sup> A.G. Voigt, *Biblical Dogmatics*, page 203.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid. page 204.

<sup>210</sup> P.F. Koehneke, *The Call into the Holy Ministry*, from *The Abiding Word* volume 1, page 371.

<sup>211</sup> Hermann Sasse, *Ministry and Ordination*, from *We Confess: The Church*, page 71.

<sup>212</sup> Hermann Sasse, *Ordination of Women?*, quoted in John Stephenson, *The Lord's Supper*, page 84, footnote 7.

<sup>213</sup> Kurt Marquart, *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance*, page 106.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid. page 140.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid. page 141.

<sup>216</sup> John Stephenson, *The Lord's Supper*, page 85.

To this day Lutherans continued to debate the topic of whether deacons are pastors or lay workers. As Pastor Heath Curtis said in 2011, “*The Deacon is a clergyman, he is ordained, he is not a layman, he receives communion from the Celebrant after the presbyters are communed, and then he distributes the Cup to the Laity.*”<sup>217</sup>

But as Jeffrey Radt said in 2013, “*If we look at the Bible again, isn’t our understanding of a Deacon’s role, as found in Acts 6, that it was a new office created for the sole purpose of taking care of other menial tasks (Acts 6:1-4) so that they could enable the Apostles more time for preaching God’s Word and administering God’s Sacrament, which is what the Pastor is uniquely called to do today according to AC XIV? Even 1 Timothy 3 doesn’t indicate that deacons teach the Word or administer the Sacraments.*”<sup>218</sup>

The ongoing debate of whether deacons are lay workers or members of the Office of the Ministry creates confusions surrounding what a deacon is and what they can do. The whole point of this section was to demonstrate the confusion surrounding the term ‘assisting minister’ that appeared in the 1979 *Lutheran Book of Worship*<sup>219</sup>, which was released by the *Lutheran Church in American, American Lutheran Church, Lutheran Church of Canada* and the *Lutheran Church Missouri Synod*. When it was released, the LCA believed ‘assisting minister’ to refer to an ordained assisting pastor, while the LCMS understood it to refer to an assisting layman, which the LCMS sought to make clear in their release of the 1982 *Lutheran Worship*.

For Luther the term ‘deacon’ could be used to refer either to a pastor (particularly an assistant pastor) or to a lay worker. However ever you intend to use the term ‘deacon’ there is two principles that must be accepted:

1. The Church reserves the right to establish lay offices in the congregation to assist with the physical needs of the congregation. (Acts 6:1-6, Rom. 16:1,3-5, 1 Cor. 1:11, 16:19, Col. 4:15).
2. The Church reserves the right to establish different and specialized ranks and orders within the Office of the Ministry (e.g. Bishop, Assisting Pastor, Vicar, Rector, Curate) for the sake of good order and organisation. (1 Cor. 1:17, 3:6, 14:40, Tit. 1:5). However, these distinctions in the Office of the Ministry are by human right only and not by divine right (Acts 19:5, 1 Cor. 1:16-17). For, all Ministers of Word and Sacrament are of equal status (Matt. 18:1-4, 23:8-12, Mark 9:34-35, 1 Cor. 3:5,21-22).

The important point is not what we call our offices, but that we make a clear distinction between the roles and functions of these offices. As I stated above in the section *Is It Biblical?* the role of the clergy, whether they be a fulltime pastor or an assistant pastor or clerical deacon, is to serve the spiritual needs of the Church through Word and Sacrament (Ps. 68:11, Isa. 41:27, Jer. 3:15, 23:4, John 20:21-23, Acts 6:2,4, 20:28, 1 Cor. 1:17, 4:1, 12:28-29, 2 Cor. 5:18-19, Eph. 3:2, 4:11-12, Col. 1:25, 1 Pet. 5:2), while the job of the lay workers or lay deacons is to serve the physical needs of the Church, such as charity, property and finances (Acts 6:1-6, Rom. 16:1,3-5, 1 Cor. 1:11, 16:19, Col. 4:15).

## Walther

Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther was the first president of the *Lutheran Church Missouri Synod* and also its most influential theologian.

In the above section *America* we discussed the emergence of Lay Distribution in the LCMS. In the early to mid 1900s the common liturgical practice of the LCMS was that pastors only were to distribute the Lord’s Supper. During this same period many theologians began to permit Lay Distribution in exceptional cases of need.

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<sup>217</sup> Pastor Heath Curtis, *Lay Assistance in Communing the People and Something About Deacons*, [www.gottesdienstonline.blogspot.com.au/2011/01/lay-assistance-in-communing-people-and.html](http://www.gottesdienstonline.blogspot.com.au/2011/01/lay-assistance-in-communing-people-and.html) (See Appendix 2)

<sup>218</sup> Jeffrey Radt, *Article 14 and LCMS Lay Deacons*, [www.lutheranlayman.com/2013/10/article-xiv-and-lcms-lay-deacons.html](http://www.lutheranlayman.com/2013/10/article-xiv-and-lcms-lay-deacons.html) (See Appendix 1)

<sup>219</sup> Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship, *Lutheran Book of Worship*, pages 71, 92, and 114.

In this section we will study the views of Walther surrounding the distribution of the Lord's Supper and determine what the original views of the LCMS were.

As previously mentioned, the first hymnal of the LCMS was the *Kirchengesangbuch für Evangelisch-Lutherische Gemeinden ungeänderter Augsburgischer Confession* (the *Church Hymnbook for Evangelical Lutheran Congregation of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession*), colloquially referred to as *Walther's Hymnal*, released in 1847. However, this was merely a hymnal and did not contain an Order of Service.<sup>220</sup>

At this point in time the LCMS used Löhe's *Agende für Christliche Gemeinden des Lutherischen Bekenntnisses* (*Agenda for Christian Congregations of the Lutheran Confessions*), which says concerning the distribution of the bread, "*the Pastor gives out the bread to the whole row.*"<sup>221</sup> And concerning the distribution of the wine, "*hereafter he gives out the chalice to the same row.*"<sup>222</sup>

In 1856 the LCMS produced its own *Kirchen-Agende* (Church-Agenda), which said regarding the distribution of Holy Communion, "*Then a Communion hymn is sung while the communicants approach. The minister gives them at first the Bread, three at a time, and says...Having thus given the Bread to a number of communicants, who either kneel around the altar or pass around from the left to right behind around the Altar, he now gives them the Cup also in the same manner, and says...*"<sup>223</sup>

Here it is clear that in the days of Walther the common liturgical practice was that only called and ordained ministers were to distribute the bread and the cup of Holy Communion.

If we look at Walther's *Pastoral Theology*, whenever he mentions the distribution of the Lord's Supper, he always mentions that the pastor distributes the bread and the wine.<sup>224</sup> And like the Church Agendas, Walther's *Pastoral Theology* always refers to distribution of both bread and wine by the same pastor. Except, in the one case, where he talks about what to do when two preachers are distributing the Holy Supper at the same time; one gives the bread, the other gives the cup.<sup>225</sup>

But of course this is all in reference to the regular practice of Holy Communion. What about those cases where there is only one pastor and no assistant?

Firstly, as mentioned above, all of Walther's references to distribution refer to a single pastor distributing the Lord's Supper, no use of an assistant, clergy or lay, is ever mentioned (except for the one reference).

Secondly, regarding Self-Communion Walther taught that "*the consensus of Lutheran theologians is that he may not do so privately, apart from the congregation, which is the meaning of the Smalcald Articles II,2. But he may commune himself in the public service.*"<sup>226</sup>

Walther endorsed the practice of Self-Communion, for many pastors of the 1800s were isolated and if they did not commune themselves, then they would have gone without Holy Communion for a long time.<sup>227</sup>

Walther believed that pastors should either self commune or refrain from receiving Holy Communion until they were able to receive it from the hands of another pastor. The practice of a layman communing a pastor never even crossed his mind.

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<sup>220</sup> The service order provided in the 2012 English Translation of *Walther's Hymnal* is the 1881 English translation of the 1856 *The Morning Service on Sundays and Festivals with Communion* found in the *Church Liturgy for Evangelical Lutheran Congregations of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession*. See C.F.W. Walther, *Walther's Hymnal: Church Hymnbook for Evangelical Lutheran Congregations of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession*, page 389, footnote 64.

<sup>221</sup> Wilhelm Löhe, *Agende für Christliche Gemeinden des Lutherischen Bekenntnisses*, page 30.

[www.books.google.com.au/books?id=S-BIAAAAcAAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://www.books.google.com.au/books?id=S-BIAAAAcAAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false)

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.* page 31.

<sup>223</sup> Quoted in the 2012 *Walther's Hymnal: Church Hymnbook for Evangelical Lutheran Congregations of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession*, page 393.

<sup>224</sup> C.F.W. Walther, *Pastoral Theology*, pages 140, 141, 142, 143, and 151.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.* page 151.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*

In fact, in Walther's *Pastoral Theology* he provides us with a list of things that the Orthodox Lutheran theologians considered to be adiaphora in the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Under Baptism, Walther includes "*Baptism by lay people in emergencies*" but under administration of the Holy Supper Walther says, "*unleavened bread in the form of wafers, the distribution of the bread without breaking it, placing the element into the mouth, kneeling at the reception, the private Communion of the sick.*"<sup>228</sup> Walther considers Baptism by lay people in emergencies to be an adiaphoron, but in regards to the administration of the Lord's Supper Walther doesn't consider the use of laypeople as an adiaphoron, even in cases of emergency (thus rejecting both Lay Consecration and Lay Distribution).<sup>229</sup>

## Luther and the Early Lutherans

It is clear that prior to the Reformation the Western Church did not use laymen during the distribution of the Lord's Supper.<sup>230</sup> However, what was the view of the Reformers and the Early Lutherans who followed them?

Luther, Chemnitz and Gerhard all held that Christ's command "*do this*" was given to the Apostles (clergy) to do likewise. All three believed that the 'this' referred to the entire action of Christ, including both consecration and distribution. Therefore, the pastors, as the ambassadors for Christ, are to 'do this' just as Christ did.

As Luther said, "*Christ's order and institution are clear: 'This do in remembrance of Me.' What should we do? And what is meant by 'this'?* Nothing else than what He indicated by action and word when He took the bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to His disciples, saying: Take, eat; this is My body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me. After the same manner also He took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying: Drink ye all of it; this is the cup of the new testament in My blood. This do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me. If then Christ's institution is to be observed (as He Himself says: 'This do'), we [pastors] must not only take the bread and wine with the words of Christ but also give and impart it to others."<sup>231</sup>

As Chemnitz said, "*For what He Himself did in the Supper, that He commanded the apostles to do thereafter... Now Paul is the most reliable interpreter that the pronoun "this" in the command of Christ: "Do this," is to be referred to the whole preceding action: "This (namely, what was done at the first Supper) you are to do hereafter."* Therefore the command of Christ: "Do this," means nothing other than that the ministers of the church in the administration of the Lord's Supper ought to do that of which it is established and certain that Christ did at the institution of the Supper."<sup>232</sup>

As Gerhard said, "*Since at the Institution of the Holy Supper, Christ explicitly commands that we do what He did when we administer it, it follows that the ministers of the church, when they want to celebrate the Holy Supper, must repeat the Words of Institution, consecrate the bread and wine in this way, and distribute them to the communicants. So when the minister repeats the Lord's Words of Institution, consecrates the bread and wine with them, and distributes them to the communicants, that is not merely a historic repetition of what Christ did, as when those words are customarily repeated to the people in sermons to be presented to them.*"<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid. page 35.

<sup>229</sup> Walther's *Pastoral Theology* was written in 1872. In 1894 Henry Eyster Jacobs produced a similar list of adiaphora. Concerning the Lord's Supper he wrote, "*whether the bread be of wheat or of rice, leavened or unleavened, broken in or before the distribution, in the form of wafers or not, whether it be given into the hands or into the mouth of communicants.*" (Henry Eyster Jacobs, *Elements of Religion*, page 163). We can see here that Jacobs also did not consider Lay Distribution to be an adiaphoron.

<sup>230</sup> A.E. Krause, *Proper Use of Holy Communion*, in *The Abiding Word*, volume 3, page 501.

<sup>231</sup> Martin Luther, *On the Private Mass and Holy Orders*, quoted in C.F.W. Walther, *Church and Ministry*, page 260.

<sup>232</sup> Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, volume 2, page 465. Quoted in John Stephenson, *The Lord's Supper*, page 84.

<sup>233</sup> Johann Gerhard quoted by C.F.W. Walther, *Pastoral Theology*, page 131.

Luther also stated that, “*thank God, in our churches we can show a Christian the true Christian Mass according to the order and institution of Christ as well as according to the right and true intention of Christ and the church. There our pastor, bishop or minister steps before the altar, rightly, duly and publicly called. But before that he was consecrated, anointed, and born as a priest of Christ regardless of private chrism. He publicly and clearly chants the formula instituted at the Lord’s Supper [Words of Institution]. Then he takes the bread and wine, gives thanks, and distributes them, giving them by virtue of Christ’s word, “This is My body; this is My blood; this do’, etc., to us and the others who are present and desire to receive Holy Communion. And we, especially those who desire to receive the Sacrament, kneel down beside, behind or around him.*”<sup>234</sup> Here Luther states how Holy Communion was celebrated in the Lutheran Churches; the pastor chants the Words of Institution, then takes the bread and wine, consecrates them and then distributes them to the congregation. Here the pastor (notice the singular) consecrates and distributes both the bread and the wine. Luther states that it is the pastor’s role to distribute the bread and wine while the role of the congregation is to kneel down and receive.

From this we learn that the Communion practice of the Lutheran churches was that the pastor (one pastor) consecrated the bread and the wine and then distributed both the bread and the wine to the kneeling congregation. This was the practice of the Lutheran churches which Luther called “*the true Christian Mass according to the order and institution of Christ.*” Note also that Luther said the pastor distributes the elements by virtue of Christ’s Words “*this is My body; this is My blood; this do’.*” Therefore, in accordance with the order and institution of Christ and by virtue of Christ’s command to “*do this*” it is the pastor, and not laymen, who distributes both the bread and the wine to the congregation.

As mentioned above the Faculty of Theology in Leipzig were asked the question in 1671, “*When a priest in a village during the distribution (of the Lord’s supper) is overtaken by fainting, can the churchwarden or another Christian continue the distribution?*”<sup>235</sup>

The response of the Faculty was “No!” Stating that, “*Those who do not have a public call in this regard shall not allow themselves to do this and it does not matter that the consecration has already been performed by the preacher.*”<sup>236</sup>

The Faculty taught that, “*As now consecratio (consecration) shall not be done by the churchwarden or any other Christian (layman) but by the priest, so it must also happen with the distribution. For the Lord Christ has preceded us with his example as the evangelists say: He took the bread, thanked and broke and gave it to his disciples. What the Lord Christ has done here the preachers should also do, since they are called to distribute the very high sacrament.*”<sup>237</sup>

In regards to pastors self communing in the absence of an assisting pastor, Luther himself approved the practice of Self-Communion and repeatedly defended it.<sup>238</sup>

As Luther said, “*The bishop should also be free to decide on the order in which he will receive and administer both species [bread and wine]. He may choose to bless both bread and wine before he takes the bread. Or else he may, between the blessing of the bread and of the wine, give bread both to himself and to as many as desire it, then bless the wine and administer it to all. This is the order Christ seems to have observed.*”<sup>239</sup> Notice that Luther refers to a single bishop (pastor) distributing the elements of Holy Communion to both himself and all of those who desired to receive it.

Walther commented on this statement of Luther saying, “*Luther said that one may consecrate both elements and then distribute both – or consecrate and distribute the bread, then consecrate and*

<sup>234</sup> Martin Luther, *On the Private Mass and Holy Orders*, quoted in C.F.W. Walther, page 279.

<sup>235</sup> Faculty of Theology in Leipzig, quoted by Tom Hardt in *Lay Distribution of the Lord’s Supper is Impossible for Orthodox Lutheranism*, page 3. (See Appendix 4)

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> Luther Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, page 372.

<sup>239</sup> Martin Luther, *An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church of Wittenberg*, LW 53, page 30.

*distribute the wine.*”<sup>240</sup> Notice how Walther mentions only ‘one’ pastor both consecrating and distributing the elements without any assistant.

Chemnitz also supported the practice of Self-Communion. He even supported the practice of Refraining. In his *Examination of the Council of Trent* Chemnitz stated that the pastor may include himself in the Holy Communion, although he should not be required to participate at all times.<sup>241</sup>

It seemed that for a generation or so the Lutheran theologians all followed Luther and Chemnitz and accepted the practice of Self-Communion. However, as we enter the Seventeenth Century (1600s) many service orders forbade Self-Communion, although the Luther Dogmaticians generally allowed it in cases where only one pastor was present.<sup>242</sup>

However, as we enter the age of Lutheran Pietism in the Eighteenth Century (1700s), there emerges a bigger emphasis on the individual Christian. This subjective individualism led to a great rejection of Self-Communion. In cases where only one pastor was present, the Pietists tended to promote the practice of Refraining, in which the pastor would not commune during the service but would receive it from another pastor at another time.<sup>243</sup>

As we enter the Nineteenth Century (1800s), Self-Communion returns with most theologians permitting it.<sup>244</sup> Those who believed that, when no other minister was present, the officiating pastor should commune himself believed that the participation of the minister in the reception was essential for the fellowship (communion) of the Lord’s Supper. They believed that the pastor should always receive the Sacrament, if not from the hands of another pastor, then from his own.<sup>245</sup>

During the 1600-1800s the Lutheran theologians differed on whether a pastor should self-commune or refrain from communing when no other pastor was present to commune him. None of them even suggested the use of laymen for the distribution, demonstrating how seriously the early Lutherans took AC 14.

The post-Reformation Lutherans disputed over exactly what to do when only one pastor was administering Holy Communion, but it was not until the 1900s that the use of laity was even suggested.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> C.F.W. Walther, *Pastoral Theology*, page 140.

<sup>241</sup> Luther Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy: A Study of the Common Liturgy of the Lutheran Church in America*, pages 372.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.* pages 372-373.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.* page 372.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.* page 373.

<sup>246</sup> John Fritz, *Pastoral Theology*, page 146.

## Timeline

Since this section on *Is It Historical?* is so long, I have provided a timeline summarising the history of Lay Distribution:

- 33AD – Jesus Christ on the night He was betrayed Instituted the Lord’s Supper, He gave thanks (consecration) and gave (distribution) the bread and wine to the Apostles (clergy) and commanded them to “do this” just as He had done.
- 33AD-100 – The clergy, as the Stewards of the Mysteries of God and the Ambassadors of Christ administered (consecrated and distributed) the Lord’s Supper. The Office of Deacon was established to deal with the physical needs of the church (or to administer the Lord’s Supper as assisting Ministers of Word and Sacrament).
- 100-1500 – The Early Church established a three-fold order to the Ministry (Bishop-Presbyter-Deacon). At this time deacons assist in the administration of the Sacraments as assisting pastors.
- 1500s – The Lutheran Reformers teach that only those called into the Office of the Ministry are to administer (consecrate and distribute) the Sacraments. The Reformers teach that Christ’s command to “do this” was given to the Ministers of Word and Sacrament to do what Christ had done at the Last Supper. The Reformers endorsed the practice of Self-Communion. The practice of Refraining is deemed permissible.
- 1600s – Self-Communion is opposed but allowed in cases where only one pastor administers the Sacrament.
- 1700s – Self-Communion is opposed and the practice of Refraining is promoted instead.
- 1800s – Self-Communion re-emerges and Refraining is opposed instead.
- 1600-1800s – During this period some Lutherans debate over what to do when there is only one pastor and no other pastor to assist in Holy Communion. The Lutherans debate over Self-Communion or Refraining, neither side suggests Lay Distribution.
- Late 1800s – In Australia Lutherans from the *Prussian Union* begin to promote Lay Preaching, and to allow the laity to perform the functions of a pastor. This was condemned by the confessional *Old Lutherans* in Australia.
- 1930-1960s – Lay Distribution is introduced as a practice for exceptional cases of alleged necessity when a pastor has no assisting pastor. Many still prefer the practices of Self-Communion or Refraining. Lay Distribution was to be used only in necessity and was never to become a common practice. During this time the common liturgical practice was that only pastors distributed the Lord’s Supper.
- 1981 – The *Lutheran Church of Australia* officially states that Lay Distribution is to be done only in cases of necessity.
- 1982 – The *Lutheran Church Missouri Synod* makes Lay Distribution a common liturgical practice.
- 1983 - The *Lutheran Church Missouri Synod’s* statement on the Lord’s Supper declares Lay Distribution to be perfectly acceptable.
- 1987 – The *Lutheran Church of Australia* makes Lay Distribution a common liturgical practice.
- 1995 – The *Lutheran Church of Australia* officially declares Lay Distribution to a perfectly acceptable practice, acknowledging Lay Distribution as a ‘recent development’.
- 2000-2018 – Lutherans in Australia and America begin to speak out against Lay Distribution.

Therefore, in regards to the question, “is Lay Distribution historical?” The answer is, “No, Lay Distribution is not historical, at least not for the first 1900 years of Christianity.” Even the *Lutheran Church of Australia* admits that Lay Distribution is a ‘recent development’.<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> The Lutheran Church of Australia, *Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinion* Volume 2. Section E: The Sacraments, *The Distribution of the Sacrament of the Altar*, page E16.

## Is it Necessary?

The final section that needs to be discussed in our study of Lay Distribution is the question of “is it necessary?”

In 1995<sup>248</sup> the *Lutheran Church of Australia* prepared a statement on the distribution of the Lord’s Supper, in this paper the LCA stated that, “*The use of lay assistants as servers for the distribution of the sacrament is a recent development in the church. Factors which have contributed to this development include: 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.*”<sup>249</sup>

The LCA believed that this recently developed practice of Lay Distribution was ‘necessary’ for four reasons:

1. The frequency of Communion
2. The desire for lay leadership during worship
3. The demand for shorter services
4. A shortage of pastors

Points two and three are generally the two main reasons given for the use of lay distributors during Holy Communion, but for this section I will address all four of these reasons.

Number one, the frequency of Communion. This point by itself is not a reason for Lay Distribution, but is more so connected with point four, the shortage of pastors. The argument of the frequency of Communion generally goes along the lines of, “If we only celebrated Holy Communion occasionally then maybe we could manage to have two pastors present but we can’t have two pastors present every week, and if we want to have Holy Communion every week we need to have lay distributors.” As I said this reason is strongly connected with the lack of pastors argument. However, this reason is flawed, because it already assumes that we must have at least two people distributing. However, pastors are more than capable of distributing the Lord’s Supper by themselves. Therefore, whether you have Holy Communion weekly, monthly or only once a year, the pastor is capable of distributing the Sacrament without the help of a layman.

Number two, the desire for lay leadership during worship. As Pastor Heath Curtis said, the use of lay distributors exists “*to make the point that “there is nothing special about the pastor” or that the pastor is “only doing things that every Christian could do.*”<sup>250</sup> He goes on to say that not everyone views Lay Distribution in this manner, but there are certainly some who do; “*what else could be behind lay distribution in so many places with two, three, or more pastors?*”<sup>251</sup> The argument that the laymen are only assisting because there are not enough pastors goes out the window when a layman distributes the Sacrament even though there are two or more pastors present.<sup>252</sup>

This desire for laypeople to somehow be involved in the worship service comes from a low view of the Office of the Ministry and from a misunderstanding of the Priesthood of All Believers, and seeks to promote the false teaching of “Everyone is a Minister”.

Just because all Christians are priests (1 Pet. 2:9, Rev. 1:6, 5:10) does not make everyone a Minister of Word and Sacrament. Walther’s first thesis on the Ministry is that “*the holy ministry or pastoral office is an office distinct from the priesthood of all believers,*” he goes on to say, “*although*

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<sup>248</sup> Adopted in 1998.

<sup>249</sup> The Lutheran Church of Australia, *Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinion* Volume 2. Section E: The Sacraments, *The Distribution of the Sacrament of the Altar*, page E16.

<sup>250</sup> Pastor Heath Curtis, *Lay Assistance in Communing the People and Something About Deacons*, [www.gottesdienstonline.blogspot.com.au/2011/01/lay-assistance-in-communing-people-and.html](http://www.gottesdienstonline.blogspot.com.au/2011/01/lay-assistance-in-communing-people-and.html) (See Appendix 2)

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> See the *Reformation Service 29-10-2017* of the *Australian Evangelical Lutheran Church* (1:33:15-1:34:43) where there are two pastors present to give out Holy Communion (plus a vicar and retired pastor in the congregation) and yet they still get a layman to commune both pastors. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=qrZxzoQmW5s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qrZxzoQmW5s)

*Holy Scripture attests that all believing Christians are priests (1 Peter 2:9, Rev. 1:6, 5:10), it at the same time teaches very expressly that in the church there is an office to teach, feed, and rule, which Christians by virtue of their general calling as Christians do not possess. For thus it is written: "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers?" (1 Cor. 12:29). Again: "How shall they preach unless they are sent?" (Rom. 10:15). Or: "My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgement." (James 3:1)."*<sup>253</sup>

The Scriptures are clear that God gave **pastors** for the work of the ministry of Word and Sacrament (Ps. 68:11, Isa. 41:27, Jer. 3:15, 23:4, John 20:21-23, Acts 20:28, 1 Cor. 1:17, 12:28-29, 2 Cor. 2:18-19, Eph. 3:2, 4:11-12, Col. 1:25, 1 Pet. 5:2)(AC 5.1), and no one is to serve in this position unless they have been rightly called (John 20:21, Acts 14:23, Rom. 10:15, 1 Tim. 1:3, 2 Tim. 2:2, Tit. 1:5, Heb. 5:4)(AC 14). Scriptures gives us very serious warnings about those who serve in this capacity without being rightly called (Num. 16:32, 2 Chron. 26:19, Jer. 23:21,32).

The pastors, and not the laymen, are the Ambassadors of Christ(Luke 10:16, 1 Cor. 3:9, 4:1, 2 Cor. 5:20, 13:3) and the Stewards of the Mysteries of God (1 Cor. 4:1, Tit. 1:7), that is they are the ones who serve in the Ministry of Word and Sacrament (Luke 1:2, Acts 1:17,25, 6:4, 20:24, 2 Cor. 5:18). The pastors are the ones given by God to serve the laity, while the laity are one who are to be served by the clergy (Acts 20:28, 1 Cor. 3:9, Eph. 3:2, Col. 1:25, 1 Pet. 5:2).

As Gerhard said, "[The believers] are called spiritual priests not in view of the ministry of the church... but in view of the spiritual sacrifices that they are to offer to God, as Peter himself explains this (1 Peter 5:2) and also in view of prayer (Ps. 141:1, Rev. 5:8, 8:4), thanksgiving (Heb. 13:15), beneficence toward the poor (Phil. 4:18, Heb. 13:16), the crucifixion of the old Adam (Rom. 12:1), and martyrdom that they endure for Christ's sake (Phil. 2:17, 2 Tim. 4:6). Such sacrifices can be offered by all believers as spiritual priests."<sup>254</sup> These are the functions of the laity as members of the Priesthood of All Believers. However, the functions of the pastors, as members of the Ministry of Word and Sacrament are, "to preach the gospel, to forgive or retain sins, and to administer and distribute the Sacraments."<sup>255</sup>

Those who desire to serve in the Church desire a good thing. As Paul said, "he who desires the office of bishop desires a noble task." (1 Tim. 3:1) However, if anyone desires to serve in the worship service they should desire to do so as a Minister of Word and Sacrament and not a layman.

Pastors are to serve the spiritual needs of the congregation through Word and Sacrament (Luke 1:2, Acts 1:17,25, 6:4, 20:24, 1Cor. 3:9, 4:1, 12:28-29, 2 Cor. 5:18, Eph. 4:11-12), while laymen (such as deacons) are to serve the physical needs of the congregation, such as almsgiving, property and finances (Acts 6:1-6, Rom. 16:1,3-5, 1 Cor. 1:11, 16:19, Col. 4:15).

The demand for lay involvement in the worship service should not be used as a reason or an excuse for Lay Distribution. For, the pastors, not the laymen, have been given the command of Christ to "do this" as Christ did (Luke 22:19, 1 Cor. 11:24-25). Therefore, it should be the pastors, as those who stand in the place and stead of Christ (Luke 10:16, 1 Cor. 3:9, 4:1, 2 Cor. 5:20, 13:3), who distribute both the bread and wine, just as Christ did (Matt. 26:26-27, Mark 14:22-23, Luke 22:19).

The argument that we should have lay distributors because laypeople wish to be involved in the worship service shows a complete disregard for the Office of the Ministry. As pastor Klemet Preus said, "A fourth change is the tendency to involve as many people in worship service leadership roles as possible... People want to participate and be involved, so the church needs to involve them in as many ways as possible. Visitors need to see and believe that they can fit in. If you are part of a church that has involved an increasing number of laypeople in leadership roles during the service, then your congregation has continued the process of reengineering the worship service."<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> C.F.W. Walther, *Church and Ministry*, page 161.

<sup>254</sup> Johann Gerhard, *Loci Theologici*, quoted in C.F.W. Walther, *Church and Ministry*, page 175.

<sup>255</sup> Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Augsburg Confession Article 28.5, page 92.

<sup>256</sup> Klemet Preus, *The Fire and the Staff: Lutheran Theology in Practice*, page 320.

Number three, demand for shorter services. *“In most every place that the practice exists, it exists for the sake of time: a distribution by just the pastor would take too long.”*<sup>257</sup>

The most common argument for the use of lay distributors is that it would take too long for the pastor to distribute the Lord’s Supper all by himself. However, how much time is truly saved in doing this? A few minutes?

During the Reformation it was common practice for only one pastor to distribute both the Body and the Blood, going around once to give out the bread and going around a second time to give out the wine.<sup>258</sup> And this was still the practice in the Lutheran churches of America as of the 1800s.<sup>259</sup>

Also, in the Slovakian Lutheran Church in Melbourne, the practice is that the one pastor goes around to the communicant three times, once to give each individual absolution, a second time to give the bread and a third time to give the wine. He does this for over two hundred members.<sup>260</sup> And of course this takes time, but this is the practice and the people have accepted it.

The demand for shorter services, the desire to have the Divine Service contained to a single hour, shows an irreverence and low view of the Sunday Service.

We should cherish the Sunday Service, as the gift and privilege it is. We should be happy to spend as much time as needed in Church on Sunday. We shouldn’t despise the Sunday Service or see it as a chore that needs to be rushed through. As Martin Luther said concerning the Third Commandment *‘Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy’* (Exo.20:8, Deut. 5:12), *“We should fear and love God so that we may not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred, and gladly hear and learn it.”*<sup>261</sup>

We should not despise the Word and Sacraments and treat them as things that can be rushed through. We should never try to rush the Divine Service, let alone Holy Communion. This is the pinnacle of the Divine Service. This is where we physically receive the forgiveness of sins. (Matt. 26:28) This is the most important reason why we’ve gathered together. (Acts 2:42,46, 20:7, 1 Cor. 11:20)

The hearing of the Word read and preached and the reception of the Lord’s Supper are the most important aspects of the Divine Service. They should be treated with the utmost reverence and should not be rushed through like the drive thru at Macca’s. If we are so desperate to have shorter services, then we should not start by cutting time on the Word and Sacrament, but with the things that are adiaphora, such as hymns. If people demand shorter services then we should remove the hymns, not shorten the preaching or Lord’s Supper.

*“Would a majority of the members here...be willing to preserve our Biblical, Confessional, historical tradition or would we rather get church over with as soon as possible?”*<sup>262</sup>

Number four, the shortage of pastors. This argument is based on the presupposition that we must always have at least two people distributing; even if one pastor were to distribute both the bread and the wine to the laity, who distributes the Lord’s Supper to the pastor?

The answer to this argument is simple; the pastor is more than capable of distributing both the bread and the wine to the communicants, and the historic Lutheran practice has been that the pastor communes himself when there is only one pastor present.<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> Pastor Heath Curtis, *Lay Assistance in Communing the People and Something About Deacons*

<sup>258</sup> See: Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Apology of the Augsburg Confession Article 24.80*, page 272. Also, Martin Luther, *An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church of Wittenberg*, LW 53, page 30. Also, Martin Luther, *On the Private Mass and Holy Orders*, quoted in C.F.W. Walther, page 279.

<sup>259</sup> Wilhelm Löhe, *Agende für Christliche Gemeinden des Lutherischen Bekenntnisses*, page 30-31.

[www.books.google.com.au/books?id=S-BIAAAAcAAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://www.books.google.com.au/books?id=S-BIAAAAcAAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false)

<sup>260</sup> Stephen Van der Hoek, *The Lord’s Supper: Four Sermons preached at St. Mark’s Lutheran Church, Mount Barker, South Australia, Lent 2015*, pages 40. (See Appendix 3)

<sup>261</sup> Paul McCain, *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions, Small Catechism Third Commandment*, page 345.

<sup>262</sup> Jeffrey Radt, *Article 14 and LCMS Lay Deacons*, [www.lutheranlayman.com/2013/10/article-xiv-and-lcms-lay-deacons.html](http://www.lutheranlayman.com/2013/10/article-xiv-and-lcms-lay-deacons.html) (See Appendix 1)

<sup>263</sup> See: Martin Luther, *An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church of Wittenberg*, LW 53, page 30.

Number five, pastoral burn out. The fifth argument, that is not included in the LCA statement, is that we need lay distributors because otherwise “*the pastor would feel overwhelmed,*”<sup>264</sup> and that the pastor will burn out quickly due to overwork.

While it is true that pastors can become overwhelmed and burnt out due to overwork, this is not due to the work done during the Divine Service. The pastor is more than capable of praying the prayers, reading all the lessons and distributing both the bread and the wine by himself. The pastor will not become burnt out because he had to do a second round of Holy Communion. For example, the pastor at the Slovak Lutheran Church in Melbourne does three rounds of Holy Communion (absolution, bread, wine) for each table for over two hundred members<sup>265</sup>, and this does not burn him out.

Pastoral burn out is not caused by the workload on Sunday morning, but by the workload during the week. During the week the pastor has to write the sermon, prepare the prayers, prepare the bulletins, visit members, write and run Bible studies, women’s guild, men’s fellowship, youth group, attend meetings, and on occasion perform Baptisms, weddings and funerals. Pastors become burnt out by being overworked during the week. If the congregation is seriously concerned about assisting the pastor with his work, then they need to assist him during the week and not on Sunday morning.

After studying the main reasons given for Lay Distribution, the answer to the question, “is it necessary?” is “No, Lay Distribution is not necessary.”

The pastor is more than capable of distributing both the bread and the wine to the laity, within a reasonable amount of time. It is also Biblically, Confessionally and historically appropriate for the pastor to Self-Commune when there is only one pastor present to distribute the Lord’s Supper.

## **Conclusion**

On the night when He was betrayed Christ command the Apostles to “*do this*” just as He had done. We have been command by Christ to celebrate the Lord’s Supper just as He celebrated the Last Supper. Therefore, just as Christ took the bread and the wine, gave thanks and gave them to the Disciples, so too pastors, as those who stand in the place and stead of Christ, are to take the bread and the wine, consecrate them and distribute them to the laity.

By studying the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions it would appear that the practice of Lay Distribution is neither Confessional nor Scriptural. And by studying the history of the Church it would appear that Lay Distribution is not the historic practice of the Lutheran Church but is a recent development that has emerged during the 1900s.

As a Church born from the Lutheran Reformation we must be willing to continuously study the practices of our Church, and to reform them when and where needed.

I believe that Lay Distribution is one these practices in need of a reform. Lay Distribution is a practice that should be abandoned.

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Also, C.F.W. Walther, *Pastoral Theology*, page 151.

<sup>264</sup> Jeffrey Radt, *Article 14 and LCMS Lay Deacons*

<sup>265</sup> Stephen Van der Hoek, *The Lord’s Supper: Four Sermons preached at St. Mark’s Lutheran Church, Mount Barker, South Australia, Lent 2015*, pages 40.

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## **Appendix 1: Article 14 and LCMS Lay Deacons**

The following paper is a letter written by Jeffrey Radt, a concerned layman of the *Lutheran Church Missouri Synod* on October 27<sup>th</sup> 2013. The original paper can be found at, [www.lutheranlayman.com/2013/10/article-xiv-and-lcms-lay-deacons.html](http://www.lutheranlayman.com/2013/10/article-xiv-and-lcms-lay-deacons.html)

There's a reason why God gave each one of us a conscience, and there's a reason why Acts 24:16 says what it says, and there's a reason why Martin Luther himself said what he said so famously.

*Acts 24:16 (ESV) So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man.*

*"Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason...my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen." - Martin Luther*

Well, I did what needed to be done this week.

First, there was a job offer I had to turn down.

Next, there was a congregational meeting where I needed to lovingly remind my brothers and sisters in Christ of the importance of remembering our identity in Christ (that we are a church, not a business; that our Pastor is not a CEO).

This is the third and final account of the week I've dubbed *When A Conscience Calls...* due to the *unprecedented* amount of situations I found myself in that demanded I follow my conscience on certain matters even if it meant doing the "unpopular" thing (Acts 24:16).

Now, I'm just waiting to see how my beloved brethren respond to my letter. I've heard from some already and it hasn't been pretty. To be blunt, the responses have been more than a little disturbing, heartbreaking, and surprising to say the least.

Letter? Yes, a *letter*. What? People still write letters these days. Even a 34-year-old guy like me who is tech savvy writes letters when it's needed. There's just something more formal and more personal about letters I think.

Of course, I opened each letter with my stated desire to meet with each individual I sent it to for coffee, breakfast, lunch, or dinner, or to even talk to them by phone, since I preferred to discuss things in person.

However, I'm also a realist and I know that many of them will probably just feel too uncomfortable to do anything of the sort, and so I reasoned that if this was my one and only shot to explain myself fully and completely, and to confess the truth in the process, then I needed to take full advantage of it with the Lord's gracious help.

So, what follows below is the letter I sent to our "Interim Pastor," our Board of Deacons, and our Call Committee in its entirety, which ended up being a full 7 pages long.

I know, that's way too long, right? People don't have that kind of attention span anymore. Truthfully, I could've said what I needed to say in just a single page or two probably. But this is the way that the Lord wired me in my mother's womb and so I just go with it.

Besides, I'm *always* hoping to confess the whole truth in the process (in the hopes that God will use it for His glory) though the challenge is to clearly explain where I'm coming from without sounding "self-righteous" one bit. Anyway, I pray that I was successful in that regard and will simply trust what I read in Isaiah 55:11.

Again, **my intention was to broach the subject with a letter and to, hopefully, follow-up over the next few days with each person one-on-one** in case they have any godly counsel, wisdom, or questions to share with me after reading it.

*October 23, 2013*

*Board of Deacons,*

*Grace and peace to you and yours! I know we haven't had many opportunities to catch-up and chat in recent months beyond small talk here and there so I pray this letter finds you and your family well. By the way, I know I need to make more of an effort to get to know you than I have to this point since meeting you so I hope you can forgive me for that.*

You may be wondering why I am writing you this letter in the first place. **In short, my conscience is convicting me right now about some things, and it has been for several months, which is why I have decided to remove myself from certain roles and from performing certain kinds of “service” at Trinity while continuing to be a humble servant for Him and His people in other ways as needed and as often as I can.** It is important to me that you are aware of the specific reasons why since it affects you personally when it comes to your role as a Deacon. Please know that I am more than happy to discuss things with you and/or anyone else in greater detail either in-person over coffee some time, or one-on-one by phone, upon request. Just say the word!

I want to start by making sure you know that this is nothing personal whatsoever. You are not the only one who I have decided to share this with either. We are all members of the same family at Trinity and so I am writing to you primarily as a concerned brother in Christ in the hopes that this might lead to more in-depth conversations, closer examination, and prayerful consideration within our family at Trinity Lutheran Church (Ephesians 4:11-15). I apologize for the length of this letter too, and I thank you in advance for taking the time to read it, and for taking the content to the Lord in prayer.

As mentioned, I actually reached this decision several months ago, but did not think it was right to share it with you or anyone else in the midst of Pastor Habedank’s retirement. However, I think now is as good a time as any to share my sincere concerns, and to reveal where my heart and mind are as they are informed by His holy Word and our Confessions of faith. At the end of the day, I hope it will be clear that this isn’t about being “pious” or “self-righteous” either, but about being “faithful,” “obedient,” and “true” and consistent with what we Lutherans proclaim to believe and teach.

Ultimately, it’s for His glory, His honor, and His praise since it’s always about our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and never about me or anyone else but Him for that matter (Acts 24:16; Galatians 1:10).

It’s funny because our school’s Memory Verse for last week was Psalm 19:14 **“May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.”** I also heard that the Wednesday Chapel Lesson involved a puppet show about David’s obedience and bravery. It is in the spirit of both that I am writing this to you today. In addition, October is also **“Pastor Appreciation Month”** and when we celebrate **Reformation Day**. Plus, after reading the **Congregational Survey Results** compiled by our Call Committee that we all received at church a couple of weeks ago, and knowing that we’re in the midst of Pastor Belasic’s **“Creating Our Future”** meetings, it seemed as good a time as any to come to you and a few others with my heartfelt concerns for our beloved church since the general theme is the same.

So, again, the purpose of this letter is to merely explain to you why my conscience is convicting me at the moment, to explain where I’m coming from in regards to the decision I’ve made, and to perhaps even start a dialogue between us (let alone within Trinity Lutheran Church itself) on the subject without being argumentative, confrontational, and divisive. Please understand that my intention is not to cause any problems within Trinity whatsoever let alone “attack” our church either. You have been a member there a lot longer than I have and so I pray that my concerns will be viewed as being “helpful” rather than “hurtful” to you and others. Besides, I know fully well what Romans 16:17 says, which is why it’s only out of a sincere desire to speak **“the truth in love”** (Ephesians 4:15) that I have made this decision, and that I am bringing this topic up for discussion at this time, from one Christian who loves the Lord, His Word, His Church, and His people to another. I pray that 1 Corinthians 1:10 will be our guide for the remainder of this letter: **“Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”**

On December 11th, 2013, my family and I will be celebrating our 2-year anniversary as members of Trinity Lutheran Church! I can’t believe it’s going to be 2 years already and we thank God regularly for our church family at Trinity, which includes you and yours. You should know that for those last 2 years (and especially during the past several months), I have been using any spare time graciously given to me by God to learn more about our cherished and shared faith in Christ, and about the Lutheran Church’s beliefs, confessions, heritage, history, and tradition with a particular emphasis on

studying my role of becoming a “Lay Deacon” at Trinity, and what the Lord says about such men, and such a position in His Church. As I’m sure you know, the Bible is absolutely crystal clear in 1 Timothy 3:2-3, James 3:1, Acts 6, and Titus 1:9. It’s that last one (Titus 1:9) that has been at the forefront of my mind for months now, especially once I learned more about what it means to be a Lutheran.

I have learned that, as an LCMS Church, we proclaim to subscribe to the Augsburg Confessions, which is central to our historic Lutheran Confessions as found in the Book of Concord. Contrary to popular belief in many LCMS congregations throughout the country today, subscription to the Confessions is not “optional” or “voluntary” since they communicate our true confession of faith (like the Creeds), and basically help to clarify and summarize what the Bible already tells us. More importantly, they help to strengthen our faith by reinforcing our understanding of who we Lutherans are as a local body of believers at Trinity in Christ Jesus so that we can have unity not just in love, but unity in **“the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints”** (Jude 1:3; Ephesians 4:11-13). The beauty of the Lutheran Confessions is that they authentically communicate **what is, what always has been, and what always will be** the teachings of Holy Scripture as well as the distinctly Lutheran practices and teachings of our church (His church) with an emphasis on the Word and Sacraments, of course.

Earlier, I mentioned that October is **“Pastor Appreciation Month”** and I think it’s worth noting that I also learned that one of the questions asked during a Pastor’s Ordination Vows concerning the Office of the Holy Ministry is, **“Do you promise that you will perform the duties of your office in accordance with these Confessions, and that all your preaching and teaching and your administration of the Sacraments will be in conformity with Holy Scripture and these Confessions?”** Obviously, the Confessions are essential. Sadly, we seem to have lost all remembrance of them, and I fear that we are moving farther and farther away from the very unique things that make us Lutheran (and an LCMS Church) in the first place. I only point this out to help explain where I’m coming from. My heart is heavy, and the more I’ve learned, the more I’ve realized that I cannot continue to serve my dear brothers and sisters in Christ at Trinity in the specific ways that I would be asked to as a Lay Deacon/Reader, without violating my conscience, given what I now know to be true (there’s Titus 1:9 popping up again!).

For instance, the Augsburg Confession, Article XIV is definitely something for all of us to be aware of as it relates to each person’s primary function and role within the church. It reads: **“Concerning the ecclesiastical order, (our churches) teach that no one in the church should publicly teach or administer sacraments unless he is rightly called.”** Supported by Scripture, this **“rightly called”** part of this Article of our Confessions, convicts my conscience. It means, quite clearly I’m afraid, that only a called and ordained Pastor (and no one else in the church unless under “extreme” and/or “emergency” situations) should read God’s Word or administer the Sacraments during the public Divine Service. **So, that means that while there is most definitely a role in the Church for Deacons and the laity that is outlined in the Bible and summarized by our Confessions, those roles do not allow for taking on the exclusive functions of the Pastor – publicly teaching or administering sacraments (a.k.a. reading God’s Word from the pulpit during the Divine Service or administering/distributing Communion).** The key is that AC AXIV is referring to what is done during our formal Worship Services (a.k.a. Divine Services/Divine Liturgies) as opposed to a layperson teaching Wednesday Chapel, Sunday School, or a Small Group Bible Study let’s say. It’s an important distinction to make mainly due to the crossroads that Trinity is at right now since we’re in the midst of searching for a new Pastor, because I think we’d all agree that we want to make sure we obey God and not just worship Him in any old manner that is most “practical,” that “makes sense” to us, or simply because “we’ve always done it that way” (Proverbs 14:12; Proverbs 16:25). Sincerity and good intentions do not automatically get God’s approval. Otherwise, we run the risk of sharing in the same judgment as Uzzah who rashly put his hand on God’s Ark, thinking he was doing something “good” in service and worship for Him, and yet he died for his disobedience (2 Samuel 6:6-7). That is where my heart and mind are at right now.

Interestingly, the Synod’s Council of Presidents (COP), **of which Eastern District President, Chris**

*Wicher, is a member, met from September 20th to September 24th in St. Louis. On its first full day, the COP spent the heart of the morning continuing to refine a paper on the Office of the Public Ministry and agreed that “not everyone has the vocation of publicly preaching, teaching and administering the sacraments. This is clearly the pastor’s role. There is a pastoral office, and not just anybody can fill it.” (SEE: <http://blogs.lcms.org/2013/cop-delves-into-range-of-topics>).*

*Furthermore, this was a major topic for discussion during this past summer’s LCMS Convention to the point where the delegates agreed to create a special Task Force to begin developing a unified statement leading up to the next Convention so that the LCMS could begin to use Deacons more Biblically and in accordance with our Confessions and finally do away with the infamous “Wichita Amendment” to the Augsburg Confessions from the LCMS Convention in 1989. Resolution 4-06a was passed overwhelmingly and it directs the LCMS President to meet with a Committee over the next 3 years to figure out how to handle this situation appropriately.*

*I’ve also found that this isn’t just some “outdated Lutheran tradition” that has since run its course either. There are explicit testimonies from Scripture to back this up too, according to many of our church fathers who wrote on this subject, like C.F.W. Walther, Martin Chemnitz, and Johann Gerhard (Jeremiah 23:21; Jeremiah 23:32; 2 Chronicles 26:19; Numbers 16:32). Sure, our Synod has gotten around this for years, by saying that the Lay Deacon is really just “assisting” the Pastor in his work. **Close, but not quite I’m afraid.** Forgive me for being “snarky” here, but close only counts in horseshoes and hand-grenades, but not when it comes to God’s Word and the Confessions of our faith. If we aren’t willing to confess what we believe and what we have taught since the very beginning, then why do we even call ourselves a Lutheran Church? What would be the point anymore? I’m just asking that we think about that.*

*Still, I’m not naïve. I realize that every church’s practice is never perfect, but we should at least strive to follow these Biblical mandates (and this Confessional principle) as much as we are able to, and my concern is that good-intentioned Christian men who want to serve the Lord in His church at Trinity (like you and me) are being put in compromising situations (perhaps without even realizing it), and it’s happening even when there is really no real “emergency” situation that forces us as a church body to take what have always been “drastic” measures (i.e., some parishes exist in places where “emergency” measures, like having Lay Deacons do what we’ve been doing for quite some time, must be taken, but only temporarily until they have the ability to call and ordain a Pastor, and do things right).*

*By now, I hope that I have your ear and I pray that His Words – not mine – have captured your heart and mind as well. At the same time, yes, I realize that there’s a chance that many people at Trinity (maybe even you yourself) might think this is all “no big deal” since it’s “just the way we’ve always done things” and it does not warrant my reaction. I get that’s a possibility. Yes, I realize that there might not be any cause for concern with some since “a lot of LCMS churches do this sort of thing.” Yes, I realize that our current practices during the Divine Service might be said to have been born out of “necessity” too, or that they’re being done in order to “assist” and “help” the Pastor “like Deacons are supposed to.” **Perhaps that’s all true to some extent, and please forgive me for being so blunt, but I just worry that pragmatism is replacing pure doctrine and Confessional truths that are pretty straightforward.** Besides, if we look at the Bible again, isn’t our understanding of a Deacon’s role, as found in Acts 6, that it was a new office that was created for the sole purpose of taking care of other menial tasks (Acts 6:1-4) so that they could enable the Apostles more time for preaching God’s Word and administering God’s Sacraments, which is what the Pastor is uniquely called to do today according to AC XXIV? Even 1 Timothy 3 doesn’t indicate that Deacons teach the Word or administer the Sacraments in a formal and official capacity though it clearly states that they must be confessional in both doctrine and practice.*

***What I don’t want to do is just explain to you where I’m coming from without attempting to offer some potential solutions for our church family at Trinity.** Ok, so what’s the answer then? First, we should repent and pray for His guidance but recall the abundant forgiveness and grace that is available to us (1 John 1:9; Ephesians 2:8-9), and to each other too “since love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8). After that? Ideally? **Well, for starters, we should return to being distinctly***

*Lutheran again with distinctly Lutheran preaching, teaching, and practices. Second, it probably wouldn't be popular, but it would be the most Biblical and Confessional in practice if we just had one Pastor (or multiple Pastors) who read God's Word throughout the Divine Service, and who single-handedly administered the Lord's Supper by distributing both the Lord's body and blood by himself (by themselves) with perhaps Lay Deacons only standing nearby holding what is needed, but not actually administering it to the congregation. It might take a few more minutes, but there would be less people involved, and less steps involved. The irony is that it's the most pragmatic approach, and certainly the most appropriate, and yet, we have a million excuses why we can't go that route (i.e., "It would take too long!" or "There are too many people in church!" or "The Pastor would feel overwhelmed!"). Yet, once again, based on AC AXIV, having Lay Deacons assist (particularly in the distribution of Communion) is not the ideal practice, and it's a relatively new practice as far as historical Lutheranism is concerned too. Why couldn't we have multiple Pastors helping, or just the sole Pastor doing it all? There are certainly more than enough LCMS Pastors stuck on CRM status who are just waiting for a call; any call to serve. But would a majority of the members here a Trinity be willing to preserve our Biblical, Confessional, historical tradition, or would we rather get church over with as soon as possible, and the idea of having just one Pastor (or multiple Pastors without Lay Deacons) administering both the Lord's body and blood is simply too much? I think these are questions we should not be afraid to ask ourselves honestly and humbly.*

*The solution? We are actually blessed in that we have two Pastors available to preach the Word and administer the Sacraments to preserve our Confessional integrity and help keep from putting laypersons in compromising situations. Why couldn't Pastor Habedank assist Pastor Belasic? Why couldn't one or both assist the new Pastor once we find him? Just a suggestion. This should be our first course of action instead of using Lay Deacons to do what laymen are clearly prohibited from doing and have historically never done until the last couple of decades. Lay Deacons should be doing only the things prescribed by God's Word (and summarized by our Confessions for good reason). Ultimately, the problem is that the use of Lay Deacons for Word and Sacrament ministry violates our own history and Confessions. It represents decisions born of pragmatism (or so-called "emergency" settings) that make regular policy for the church (never a good practice). It provides less than the best we can offer to our parish, in my humble opinion. Worse, it places good Christian men like us with good intentions in unfair and compromising situations. It also reminds me of what another Lutheran, Hermann Sasse, once said when he pointed out that our assurance lies not in finding "the perfect church," but in finding the Word and the Sacraments, purely preached and rightly administered. The Augsburg Confession Article XIV tells us how to do that.*

***For all of these reasons, this is why I have decided that I can no longer serve on the Board of Deacons at this time (or as a "Deacon in Training" for that matter), or volunteer to read Scripture lessons during the Divine Service like I have in the past, and still maintain a clear conscience, because I now believe both acts would be in violation of both God's Word and our Lutheran Confessions. I'm sorry for the inconvenience, but I hope you understand where I'm coming from even if you don't agree with me. For me, it's like Martin Luther said, "Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason...my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen."***

*Again, I'm sorry if such a decision creates an inconvenience since that's certainly not my intention. I also pray that it does not create any animosity or a wedge between you and me personally. I am still your brother in Christ Jesus and still His servant at Trinity.*

*Bottom line, I just always want to be mindful of any service I do in His name due to what we read in Matthew 7:15-27 and Revelation 3:14-22. **Sincerity and good intentions are noble, but they do not always equal Biblical truth (Proverbs 28:26), or receive God's approval, which is why I've arrived at this decision after learning what I've learned, and after prayerfully considering it all in addition to godly counsel from others within the LCMS too.** To remain silent about what I've learned without attempting to broach the subject with you or anyone else who I care about from my Trinity family would make me an hypocrite of the worst kind, and so I hope that you receive this letter with the same spirit with which it was written (2 Corinthians 13:5; Philippians 2:12; Proverbs 27:17).*

*I know that Trinity Lutheran Church is hardly any different than other churches in the LCMS when it comes to this topic, but I don't think that's ever a good excuse for us. Instead, I see it as something we should all address with regret, repentance, and renewal as we look forward to the future. Together, I believe that we all can do our part to restore the truth and recover our Confessions. Lutheran Doctrine, if it is worth anything, confesses the true faith and nothing less. So, whatever may or may not come from this letter, I know that Lutheran Doctrine will endure throughout the world because it is a faithful, mirror image of the very Word of God itself. In other words, it will endure throughout the world because Lutheran Doctrine is just another name for Biblical Doctrine. Still, that's no excuse for us to be indifferent or to ignore the present day situation. If there are to be Lutheran churches, their only cause to remain must be more than simply saying "No!" to error, but should be emphatically saying "Yes!" to what is good, right, and true. Lutheran churches like Trinity Lutheran Church must continually confess and continually address what error has crept in, boldly walked in the front door, or been allowed to exist unchallenged for so long that it is deemed to be truth. Why? Galatians 5:9 gives us the answer: **"A little leaven leavens the whole lump."***

*In my humble opinion, when it comes to doctrine (including Ecclesiastical Order and the Office of the Holy Ministry) there is no place for "reasonable compromise" at all. It is my firm belief that Trinity Lutheran Church needs to return to her First Love (Jesus Christ) and to her roots (her Lutheran Confessions) in order to face and overcome the challenges that confront us at this moment in time. Perhaps this letter will be used by the Lord as the first step in that process. Either way, it's **"Thy will be done"** and not "My will be done." Thanks again for taking the time to read this letter and for prayerfully considering its content.*

*Your Brother In Christ Alone,*

*Jeffrey K. Radt*

For the record, I just want to thank all you faithful Confessional Pastors and laymen out there who have written about this subject a lot over the years.

Not only did your writings in service to Him help solidify my perspective on this, but I will admit that I copied and pasted several salient points from them in constructing this important and urgent letter to my brothers within our congregation, especially during this time of transition.

That decision alone would've made any week "challenging" for me, but as previously mentioned, this was just one reason why I've been referring to this past week as the week *When A Conscience Calls...* because on three separate occasions I found myself in a situation that *demand*ed I obey my conscience regardless of the personal cost to me and my family (Acts 24:16).

I know it sounds dramatic, but this is no hyperbole. Please refer to recent posts for specifics and please pray for me, my family, my friends, and most of all, for our Lord's Church as it is found at Trinity Lutheran Church here in this little corner of His world.

In a Lutheran Layman's terms, Article XIV is *crystal clear* when it comes to who can and who can't publicly preach, teach, and administer the Sacraments, and LCMS Lay Deacons should not be doing either *unless* it's an extremely urgent and "emergency" situation. But even that's supposed to be a "last resort" and only temporary.

***[NOTE: As you know, I am a newly converted Confessional Lutheran who recently escaped American Evangelicalism. That being said, please contact me ASAP if you believe that any of my "old beliefs" seem to have crept their way into any of the material you see published here, and especially if any of the content is not consistent with Lutheran doctrine -- in other words, if it's not consistent with God's Word -- so that I can correct those errors immediately and not lead any of His little ones astray. Thank you in advance for your time and help. Grace and peace to you and yours!]***

## **Appendix 2: Lay Assistance in Communing the People and Something About Deacons**

The following paper is written by Pastor Heath Curtis of the *Lutheran Church Missouri Synod* on January 10<sup>th</sup> 2011. The original paper can be found at, [www.gottesdienstonline.blogspot.com.au/2011/01/lay-assistance-in-communing-people-and.html](http://www.gottesdienstonline.blogspot.com.au/2011/01/lay-assistance-in-communing-people-and.html)

Father Beane's post on children's sermons and the CTS calendar spawned a conversation (world without end, Amen.) that went in several different directions - one of which dealt with lay assistance at distribution and what this had to do with AC XIV, modern Roman practice, modern Lutheran practice, and so forth.

I don't think there can be any argument over the fact that in the minds of those who wrote and originally subscribed to AC XIV it meant that only ordained ministers (whether priest or deacons - the Lutheran understanding of the latter seems rather fluid: see below) would be consecrating and distributing the Lord's Supper to the laity. Never had it been otherwise in the long history of the Church. Indeed, some of the first canons we have from early meetings of bishops deal with who communes whom: and never, ever, is it laity who is distributing the Lord's Supper.

So, anyone reading AC XIV in 1530 would know exactly what it meant: only clergy consecrate and distribute the Lord's Body and Blood. That is the original intent of the article - and I really don't think that this is a point that can be controverted. To try to find wiggle room in there for another practice ("it says administer - not distribute") is to be anachronistic. It's a bit like lawyers trying to argue for new Constitutional "rights" that are beyond the obvious original intent of the US Constitution.

If one does wish to controvert the point: we'll need historical evidence that laity ever distributed the Sacrament before the 16th century or in subsequent Lutheranism in the 16th century. That bit in the Confessions that Fr. Weedon is always so fond of pointing out really is a good key to Confessional Hermeneutics: in doctrine and ceremonies nothing has been received on our part contrary to Scripture or the Church Catholic (Epilogue to AC XXVIII). It is simply a historical fact that at the very least, lay distribution of the Supper is a ceremony contrary to the usage of the Church Catholic up to 1530.

Therefore, I find it hard to view this practice as anything other than an abuse - and a widespread one, at that.

### **Why Lay Assistance at Distribution?**

Why does the practice exist? In my experience, for two reasons. First, in most every place that the practice exists, it exists for the sake of time: a distribution by just the pastor would take too long. A big part of the problem here is the innovation of the individual cups which requires three passes by the pastor for each table.

Second, it exists to make the point that "there is nothing special about the pastor" or that the pastor is "only doing things in public that every Christian could do." I do not think that that is what everybody means by this practice - certainly not everybody does. But I have heard this sentiment more than once - so it is out there. Also - what else could be behind lay distribution existing in so many places with two, three, or more pastors?

What have the fruits of this practice been? For one thing, women distributing the supper. Because, after all, if this lay man can do it, why not this lay woman? I can recite the synodical reasoning about only men doing "specific functions" of the ministry - but that's kind of an odd reasoning, right? I mean, if it is distinctive to the function of the Office, why is any layman of either sex doing it? For another thing - didn't lay distribution pave the way "Word and Sacrament ministry" from a "lay minister"? If you stick him in an alb and he carries around a chalice and he's a layman and the Altar Book calls him an "Assisting Minister" - well, then, he's a lay minister!

The point about the length of time it takes to distribute is a fair one, as far as it goes. Yes, the people should be more pious - so should we clergy. Yes, we should be willing to walk 100 miles for confession - but you are better off making it a bit more convenient for the people.

### **Moving Away from Lay Distribution: One Congregation's Experience**

In the parishes I serve, we moved away from the practice rather quickly in the following manner. First, I sat down with the "elders" - it's Dr. Al Collver, by the way, who did the leg work on digging up the roots of the misuse of that term among us in the [January 2006 issue of \*Concordia Journal\*](#) - and just showed them the rubrics from *The Lutheran Liturgy* about distribution. Your mileage may vary, of course, but my elders got it right away: ministers distribute the Lord's Supper. And it turns out that they had never been comfortable with the practice anyway. Didn't seem to them like it was their job, they said.

After that meeting, we went with the following practice by way of transition: the pastor took the Host, and then came back round to take the Chalice, and the lay elder would follow the pastor with the individual cups, simply carrying them for the pastor. But it was the pastor who would speak to each communicant, "Take, drink, the very Blood of Christ, shed for you."

The lay elders have since stopped doing even that - the catalyst for that was an elder not being able to be there one Sunday and behold: things went smoothly enough with just the pastor communing the people. But this practice is, I think, much less objectionable than what usually happens - namely, the layman bringing the Chalice and saying, "Take, drink,..." etc. - perhaps it will be of benefit to some of our readers.

What was the reaction of the parish to phasing out lay distribution? The elders were universally pleased and exactly one other grumpy old man told me that he was glad we were done with that because he always thought it inappropriate. Again, your mileage will no doubt vary.

But is there a better way still?

### **Deacons: What Are They? Where Can I Get Some?**

Looking at our current practice of lay distribution from a slightly different angle, I think that what we have done is essentially turn certain members of our parish into "lay deacons." There has always been a need in the Church for assistance to parish pastors in their sacred duties - the sort of assistance that, in general, is unpaid or lowly paid, part-time, and yet clerical. This is the historical role of the deacons.

Deacons have a share in the Office of the Ministry - they are trained, called, examined, and ordained - but they are not the same thing, exactly, as presbyters. Where the NT uses the terms presbyter and episcopos interchangeably for the same office, there is an obvious distinction when it comes to deacons (Act 6; 1 Tim 3).

The first Lutheran ordination was of a deacon - Georg Rörer in 1525. It seems that the term in that time and place meant rather what we mean by "assistant pastor." But again, I'm frankly a little foggy on that point of history and would appreciate help. It's clear that the Lutheran confessions reject any essential, *ius divinum* distinction between priest and bishop - and that this fact is foundational to our self-understanding as Church instead of sect (again, see the [seminal essay by Piepkorn](#)). But what about deacons? What is their calling by divine right and what limits are put upon their service only by *ius humanum*? Are they in the one, unified Office of the Holy Ministry, but simply, and by human law, not called upon to perform all the duties thereof? Or do deacons exhibit a divinely instituted second office related to but distinct from the Office of the Ministry? Or do Lutherans believe in a two-fold office of the ministry (presbyter/episcopos and deacon) like unto Rome's view of a three-fold office (episcopos, presbyter, deacon)?

The Biblical evidence, it seems to me, favors the last understanding. However, I have yet to see a good treatment of these questions from a Confessional Lutheran viewpoint - which does not mean it isn't out there, so if it is, please inform me.

All that is just to say this: distributing the Cup is the historical duty of the Deacon in those parishes large enough to need that sort of assistance for their Presbyter/Episcopos. The Deacon is a clergyman,

he is ordained, he is not a layman, he receives communion from the Celebrant after the presbyters are communed, and then he distributes the Cup to the laity. He also does a lot more - very useful, godly work in the parish. I think we would do well to recapture their service.

But we need to understand more, I think. What exactly are deacons? If we understood that, we could provide guidelines for calling and ordaining men in local congregations as deacons where that sort of service is needed. And then the distribution would not only be timely and efficient, but also in accord with the historical meaning of our Confessions.

+Heath Curtis

## Appendix 3: The Lord's Supper

The following paper is an excerpt from *The Lord's Supper: Four sermons preached at St. Mark's Lutheran Church, Mount Barker, South Australia, Lent 2015* by Pastor Stephen Van der Hoek of the Lutheran Church of Australia, pages 38-42

Now one thing that is quite clear in the Book of Concord is that it was always considered the duty of the pastoral ministry not only to *consecrate* but also to *distribute* the sacrament in both kinds<sup>29</sup>.

Until the last couple of years or so, I always thought (like many Lutherans today) that our normal practice was that a pastor distribute the bread and a layperson could distribute the chalice. But I have since learnt that this is not the teaching of the Book of Concord. Now, people might simply dismiss this as a “human law”, but the reason given for this is because St Paul says: **This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God** (1 Corinthians 4:1). Being a steward doesn't mean that we are “delegators” of the mysteries of God.

Most people today would protest that if the pastor distributed both kinds himself, it would take too long. But even though the practice of having lay-assistants is quite common in the Lutheran Church of Australia, it is a relatively recent practice and is not necessarily common all throughout the world. In the Slovakian Lutheran Church in Melbourne, the practice is that communion is celebrated once a month<sup>30</sup>, they are a congregation of 200 of people or more, and the pastor goes around once to lay his hands on each person to give them individual absolution and forgiveness, then he goes around a second time with the body of Christ, and then a third time with the chalice. Of course, it takes a very long time, but this is their practice and it's just accepted that it be done like this.

In the old days in Australia, the pastor would simply do two rounds, one with the plate and then with the chalice. In the 1973 hymnbook, the instructions say: “*When the Minister gives the bread, he says...*” “*When the Minister gives the cup, he says...*”<sup>31</sup> But then only 14 years later in 1987, when the Supplement was published, the words were changed: “*When the minister and his assistants give the bread and the cup, they say...*”<sup>32</sup> The older practice was changed sometime in between. I don't think the change came about because of malice, but just out of ignorance.

However, there is a practice which is used in Scandinavia, where an assistant holds the plate, the pastor takes the chalice, and then the pastor leans over and gives the bread and then the chalice. This is much quicker than the Slovakian way, and only takes a few minutes longer, especially if the pastor communes two or three people with the bread and then doubles back with the wine. People would still have enough time to peel their potatoes or whatever they do before lunch! It can also be a good thing to use retired pastors and visiting pastors to help out when they around.

When a pastor gives both kinds, as I often had to do in some small churches in my previous parish, it can actually bring about a lot of benefits. (For example, let's say someone *is* an alcoholic. They might ask me privately to make sure I only give them a tiny sip. But if we have assistants always giving the chalice, then I have to tell all of them their secret when otherwise I could keep it to myself.) Of course, the body and blood of Christ are still the body and blood of Christ, and if we do make a change to our current practice, it's good for us to talk about it in bible studies and such like and test my opinion to see if it is actually right or not. It seems to me that our church's teaching in the Book of Concord is that the Sacrament should be received in both kinds from the hands of the pastor, because they are set aside as the **steward of God's mysteries** (1 Corinthians 4:1).

<sup>29</sup>In the Augsburg Confession, it states: “So that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted.” (Augsburg Confession V 1. McCain: 33). Here the pastoral ministry is described as doing two things: “teaching the Gospel” and “administering the Sacraments”. In recent times, “administering” has often meant “officiating” at the Lord's Supper—“being in charge of it”—even if others would perform the distribution. However, in the original languages (German and Latin), the word “administrate” (in Latin: *administrandi*) is not used, but a word which means “handing out” or “giving out” (in Latin: *porrigendi*; in German: *Reichen*). If this refers both to the consecration and the distribution, then the same principle applies as discussed in footnote 24: “Our teachers teach than no one should publicly teach in the Church, or administer the Sacraments, without a rightly ordered call.” (Augsburg Confession XIV. McCain: 39). Later, in the Augsburg Confession, it also defines the ministry of bishops (and pastors) like this: “Our teachers assert that according to the Gospel the power of the keys or the power of bishops is a power and command of God to preach the Gospel, to forgive and retain sins, and to administer and distribute the sacraments” (Augsburg Confession XXVIII 5. Tappert: 81). Another passage: “Let us discuss the word *liturgy*. This word does not properly mean a sacrifice, but rather the public ministry. Liturgy agrees well with our belief that one minister who consecrates gives the Lord's body and blood to the rest of the people, just as one minister who preaches

offers the Gospel to the people. As St Paul says, “This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Corinthians 4:1), that is, of the Gospel and the Sacraments.” (Apology of the Augsburg Confession XXIV (XII) 80. McCain: 232). In the *Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions of the Lutheran Church of Australia*, vol 2, on “The Distribution of the Sacrament of the Altar”, it states: “In assisting with the distribution of the sacrament, lay people do not exercise the office of the keys”. It seems that the Book of Concord does not make this conclusion, but rather the opposite.

<sup>30</sup>I was asked after preaching this sermon if our congregation should celebrate the Lord’s Supper once a month rather than weekly, however this was not what I was advocating. In the Book of Concord, it states that the normal practice of Lutheran churches is to have the Lord’s Supper “every Lord’s Day and on other festivals” (Apology XXIV (XII) 1. McCain: 220). Also, could we imagine a Sunday gathering in the New Testament times without the “breaking of the bread”? (Acts 2:42, 20:7).

<sup>31</sup>*Lutheran Hymnal*, Authorized by the Lutheran Church of Australia, Word edition, Lutheran Publishing House, Adelaide, 1973, p14.

<sup>32</sup>*Supplement to Lutheran Hymnal*, Melody line edition, Lutheran Publishing House, Adelaide, 1987, p20.

# **Appendix 4: Lay Distribution of the Lord's Supper is Impossible for Orthodox Lutheranism**

The following paper was written by Pastor Tom Hardt of the *Evangelical Lutheran Church of Sweden* in 1992:

## **A testimony from the 17th century with comment**

### **A testimony from the 17th century**

A famous collection of theological testimonies of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church from the time of Reformation and Orthodoxy about various teaching and moral issues is called "Thesauri Consiliorum", published by Georg Dedekenn<sup>1</sup> and others. In the second part, printed in Hamburg 1671, p. 408, there is the following text, as reproduced here in a translation from German.

#### **"When a priest in a village during the distribution (of the Lord's supper) is overtaken by fainting, can the churchwarden or another Christian continue the distribution?"**

*Opinion of the Faculty of Theology in Leipzig.*

In the Holy Supper there are two kinds of *actiones* (actions) belonging to the essence and form of the sacrament, namely *actiones dispensantis*, actions of those who distribute, and *communicantis*, those who receive. To the first kind belongs the consecration of the elements (bread and wine) and the distribution, to the other kind *acceptio* (reception), *manducatio* (eating) and *bibitio* (drinking).

As now *consecratio* (consecration) shall not be done by the churchwarden or any other Christian (layman) but by the priest, so it must also happen with the distribution. For the Lord Christ has preceded us with his example as the evangelists say: He took the bread, thanked and broke and gave it to his disciples. What the Lord Christ has done here the preachers should also do, since they are called to distribute the very high sacrament.

Those who do not have a public call in this regard shall not allow themselves to do this and it does not matter that the consecration has already been performed by the preacher, which (action) seems to be somewhat more than the distribution.<sup>2</sup> For the institution of the Holy Sacrament connects both together: thanked and gave, which are *actiones necessariae* (necessary acts), one as well as the other, so that to this matter also belongs what we put forward as evidence and interpretation to the previous question.

Another matter would be if the question were put in this way: "If the preacher during the distribution was overtaken by powerlessness, could the communicants, each one by himself, take the consecrated *hostiam* (oblate) and drink from the blessed chalice?" For this seems to be more possible to defend, because the preacher had already performed the consecration and placed the bread and the Lord's cup for reception, and then in *modo distribuendi & accipiendi* (the way of distribution and reception) the Christian liberty prevails, if one himself received it from the altar, though not with the mouth, but with the hand and this not directly from the priest's hand but as put down by him in weakness. However, we are not willing to introduce such a *modum distributionis* (way of distributing). For since not everybody has this knowledge and can easily be offended by it, it is better to omit it and wait for the time when one can get a preacher. This is not a case of need, and the action could therefore be postponed."

### **Historical comment**

The translation is intentionally word-written. In the final advice, "not willing to introduce" a new way of distribution, "not", which apparently has been lost by a printing error, has been completed. The German text calls the officiating clergyman alternatively "Pfarrer", "Priester" (in both cases here: priest) and "Prediger" (here: preacher). The word "pastor" usually belongs to the 18th century and Pietism. The act may be from the mid 1650s; This applies to

the following. The foregoing, cited in the text, prohibits lay consecration of the chalice if the priest has a fainting-fit after the bread's consecration.

The theologically decisive thing here is the clear statement that both the consecration (the recital of the words of institution over the bread and the wine) and the distribution of the body and blood of Christ according to Evangelical-Lutheran teachings are *equally* the task of the special priestly ministry. When it "seems" that the consecration would be "somewhat more", this is an unsustainable view. It presupposes the Roman Catholic teaching that the consecration of the bread and the wine of the Lord's body and blood would emanate from a divine power through the ordination infused in the soul of the priest, and not from the power of the divine word itself.

Only on the basis of this doctrine rejected by the Evangelical-Lutheran confession (Trigl. 1013, 10), the consecration becomes "somewhat more", while the distribution is subdued to an act that can be performed by the non-priest. For evangelical Lutheran church doctrine again, the *whole* mission and authority to administer the sacrament in all its parts, both consecration and distribution, is something that belongs to the Word's called servants. Any intruder in any area of the ministry's authority is a violation of the holy Scripture's clear saying: "Are all teachers?" (1 Cor. 12, 29), a sinful and punishable pursuit of "spiritual power" (Trigl. 85, 12: "the power of the church") which, according to the Augsburg confession, consists in passing forward the sacraments ("*porrigendi sacramenta*", Trigl. 45, art. V: "administering the sacraments").

### **Current comment**

Against the background of the above, it must be seen as a further demolition of the apostolic ministry when, according to Svenska Dagbladet<sup>3</sup>, November 10, 1991, the bishop's meeting of the Swedish Church<sup>4</sup> in connection with the church council's decision in letters to the parishes recommends "increased layman's influence" in the sense among others "That even those who are not ministers may participate in the distribution of the Lord's Supper". According to common evangelical Lutheran definition, "increased layman's influence" can only mean that the laymen increasingly participate in their position, that is to say as diligent listeners and worshipers, and devoted partakers in the sacramental meal, but now the expression is given the completely unreasonable meaning of the laymen's takeover of priestly functions.

Unfortunately, this is not only the view of the bishops in the Church of Sweden, but even still more among the so-called faithful confessionals. Its leader, the former bishop of Gothenburg's diocese, Bertil Gärtner<sup>5</sup>, let female priests wearing ceremonial robes distribute the sacrament at a mass in which he himself performed the consecration. Afterwards he defended this in a letter to the Gothenburg Post (Göteborgsposten) on March 27, 1990 in this way: "According to the order of the Church of Sweden, both priests, female deacons and laymen, men and women, are allowed to participate in such a distribution. This has happened on several occasions in the central church, and in my opinion, it is not contrary to the firm view of the ministry I have."

The "central church" may possibly mean the Dome of Upsala, the Cathedral, where female deacons in the pontifical masses of the church movement "Kyrklig förnyelse" (Church Renewal) are allowed to distribute the sacrament. It is known that within these circles today, they seek to define the extent of the priestly office more precisely in order to clarify what they with a good conscience can allow the female priests to do as legitimate functions. The starting point then is a very narrow definition of the pastoral ministry, where not only the sacramental distribution but, for example, the funeral tends to appear as not "exclusive" priestly. One does not realize that the office of the Word is of course also present in the form of giving the Lord's body and blood uttering the distributional words, and that also the service of the Word in the funeral sermon and ritual is of course included in the foundation of the ministry as well as all other pastoral applications of the Word.

The background is without doubt the widespread practice in the present-day Roman Catholic Church to restrict only the consecration and the absolution to the priests, while more

or less all other priestly functions can be performed by laymen, even women. The priest travels from place to place and consecrates the sacrament, which is then stored in a so-called tabernacle (sakramentshus), where it is then fetched for example by a catholic sister, who is then distributing the sacrament. The same lay woman may be commanded to lead the congregation's worship service, to perform funerals etc. In this way one *de facto* gets a female priesthood.

Even within the conservative Lutheranism in the United States such changes are introduced. In the Wisconsin Synod<sup>6</sup>, the doctrine of the ministry has since a long time back been defective, and the 19th century theologian Höfling<sup>7</sup>, who saw the priesthood as a mere order, has had a certain influence there. Consequently, the Synod's newspaper "The Northwestern Lutheran", October 1, 1988, p. 330, can explain each formal or informal (!) call by a parish to a layman either to preach in the absence of the pastor, or to participate in the distribution of the sacrament, to be right and in Theol.fact, to be identical to the "properly called" according to article XIV of the Augsburg Confession (Trigl, p. 49). Consequently, the Confession has been distorted to its opposite. Only one who even lacks an informal, temporary invitation to perform the pastoral functions, and thus on his own behalf penetrates into the pulpit or behind the altar ring, would be condemned by the words "Of Ecclesiastical Order they teach that no one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called." (Trigl, p. 49) This way of interpreting the Augsburg Confession is the opposite of confessional faithfulness and represents a dissolution of Evangelical-Lutheran Christianity in the direction towards the enthusiasts.

This false interpretation of the confessions, has in this context led to local church decisions, in which the communion to sick people was assigned to the members of the congregation on the same rotation base, as previously applicable to general sick visitations. Consequently, this task has consistently consisted of both consecration and distribution.

When an elderly sick member of the congregation, raised in classical Evangelical-Lutheran reverence for the holy ministry, has been faced with such practices, the person in question has come into difficult conscience trouble. The advice that could then be given has been to reject a sacrament so offered, since no certainty can be gained that such a communion is in accordance with the will of God.

The same advice must be given to everyone who is offered to cooperate as a distributor or recipient of an "increased layman's influence" of this kind. The fact that the sacrament is valid, which means that it really is the true body and blood of Christ, only makes the participation in this action even more serious.

<sup>1</sup> G. Dedekenn (Dedecken, Dedekennus) lived 1564-1628. Because of bold testimony against the local prince and his way of life (with concubines), he had to leave his office in Holstein and was then (1606) called as a priest in Hamburg where he was inaugurated by the famous Philipp Nicolai. Dedekenn was an honourable Lutheran pastor, and the "Thesaurus consiliorum et decisionum" (1623) was his primary work, re-published by the leading orthodox teacher, John Gerhard.

<sup>2</sup> See the historical commentary below.

<sup>3</sup> A conservative daily newspaper in Sweden

<sup>4</sup> Svenska kyrkan (The Swedish Church) has officially about 6.0 million members, about 73% of the population, but only a minority of them are in fact active members. The church is led by 13 bishops with a female archbishop and a church council consisting of 251 delegates. There are about 4500 priests and among them 45% women. The church is now separated from the state, but still the political parties have a great influence on the church.

<sup>5</sup> Theol. dr. Bertil Gärtner (1924-2009), professor in Princeton, USA, bishop in Gothenburg 1970-1991 and one of the leaders in the resistance against women priests in the Swedish established church after 1958, active among others in the movement Church Renewal and the Free Synod of the Swedish Church.

<sup>6</sup> The Wisconsin Synod (WELS) in the United States was founded in 1850 and developed under Adolf Hoenecke in confessional direction. In 1872 it went into church fellowship with the strictly confessional Missouri synod (LCMS) and its leader C.F.W. Walther. Later, Missouri developed in a liberal direction and in 1961 Wisconsin therefore broke church fellowship with them. Wisconsin is the more conservative church of them, but as Hardt shows in this article, they teach partly wrong about

the public ministry. However, lay distribution of the Lord's Supper is also common in Missouri and its many sister churches in the world.

<sup>7</sup>W. F. Höfling (1802-1853), professor of Erlangen and member of the Consistory Council in Munich. Höfling was a Lutheran Confessional but opposed what he meant to be novelizing tendencies among some conservative Lutherans. Both Walther and Hoenecke distanced themselves from his wrong doctrine of the Ministry, but as is shown by Hardt in this article, his influence also extends into the later Wisconsin synod. Here also the so-called "Wauwatosa theology" has had an influence with similar ideas.