

Who Presides at Holy Communion? ELCA and Indiana-Kentucky Synod Policy and Practice

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has strong historical, theological, and confessional commitments that assert that an ordained minister of Word and Sacrament presides in the service of Holy Communion and proclaims the Great Thanksgiving. In the Indiana-Kentucky Synod, requests for exceptions to these policies and understandings, described below, should be directed in writing to Bishop Bill Gafkjen by way of his Administrative Assistant, April Lynch (alynch@iksynod.org). **The request should come from the pastor, vacancy pastor, interim pastor, or an officer of the Congregation Council.**

Such requests must be made as far ahead of time as possible with the understanding that authorization for someone other than an ordained minister of Word and Sacrament (pastor) to preside will not necessarily be granted. The request should include the following information:

- Specific date(s) for the authorization, including the worship services involved, as well as the name and location of the congregation.
- The name of the person for whom authorization is requested and information about this person (e.g. congregational membership, whether they have presided before, what, if any, training they have had for preaching and worship leadership).
- Acknowledgement that the following possibilities have been explored before making this request:
 - ELCA pastors on the pulpit supply list (available through the synod's web site)
 - Retired ELCA pastors
 - A pastor, active or retired, from one of our full communion partner denominations: Episcopal Church, United Methodist Church, Reformed Church of America, Presbyterian Church (USA), United Church of Christ, Moravian Church
 - Someone else from the synod pulpit supply list who is listed as eligible to preside at Holy Communion
 - Lay leadership of a liturgy that does not include Holy Communion. There are many such liturgies available in LBW, Evangelical Lutheran Worship, and other resources that would also serve the congregation well. It is, of course, important to celebrate and participate in Holy Communion as frequently as possible, at least monthly and, preferably weekly. However, especially in cases of one-time or sporadic need, like a pastor being on vacation or otherwise away for a particular Sunday, it is desirable to use other non-Eucharistic liturgical options and, in those times, continue to develop a hunger for the Eucharist.

From **The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament**, adopted for guidance and practice, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, © 1997:

- *In witness that this sacrament is a celebration of the Church, serving its unity, an ordained minister presides in the service of Holy Communion and proclaims the Great Thanksgiving. Where it is not possible for an extended period of time to provide ordained pastoral leadership, a synodical bishop may authorize a properly trained lay person to preside for a specified period of time and in a given location only (Principle 40, page 45).*
- *"In the celebration of the Eucharist, Christ gathers, teaches and nourishes the church. It is Christ who invites to the meal and who presides at it. He is the shepherd who leads the people of God, the prophet who announces the Word of God, the priest who celebrates the mystery of God. In most churches, this presidency is signified by an ordained minister. The one who presides at the Eucharistic celebration in the name of Christ makes clear that the rite is not the assembly's own creation or possession; the Eucharist is received as a gift from Christ living in his church. The minister of the Eucharist is the ambassador who represents the divine initiative and expresses the connection of the local community with other local communities in the universal Church" (Background 40a, page 45, quoting Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry).*

From **The Constitution of the ELCA (“Licensure and Synodically Authorized Ministry,” 7.31.09)**

When need exists to render Word and Sacrament ministry for a congregation or ministry of this church where it is not possible to provide appropriate pastoral leadership, the synod bishop—acting with the consent of the congregation or ministry, in consultation with the Synod Council, and in accord with standards and qualifications developed by the appropriate churchwide unit, reviewed by the Conference of Bishops, and approved by the Church Council—may authorize a person who is a member of a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to offer this ministry. Such an individual shall be supervised by a minister of Word and Sacrament appointed by the synod bishop; such service shall be rendered during its duration under the sacramental authority of the bishop as the synod’s pastor. Such an individual will be trained and licensed to fulfill this ministry for a specified period of time and in a given location only. Authorization, remuneration, direct supervision, and accountability are to be determined by the appropriate synodical leadership according to churchwide standards and qualifications for this type of ministry. Authorization for such service shall be reviewed annually and renewed only when a demonstrated need remains for its continuation.

From **A Statement of Understanding Concerning Synodically Authorized Ministry of Word and Sacrament (Conference of Bishops, March 2005)**

- *When addressing the need for Word and Sacrament ministry in a congregation or other ministry where an ordained minister of this church is not available, [it is affirmed] that synods will seek the utilization of an ordained minister of a full-communion partner church, under the guidelines related to the orderly exchange of ordained ministers.*
- *Synodically authorized ministry of Word and Sacrament is normally intended for a specific congregation or other ministry where appropriate ordained ministry is not available for an extended period of time.*
- *In keeping with the policies of this church, synodically authorized ministry of Word and Sacrament is not intended for and should not be used to authorize an individual to provide for short-term, intermittent absences of a specific congregation’s called pastor. However, we acknowledge that there is often a need to provide for the celebration of the sacrament for such circumstances, and we acknowledge that in some areas and at sometimes neither an ELCA nor a full-communion partner church ordained minister is available to meet such a need. Such situations highlight a tension between a bishop’s authority to provide for “appropriate ordained pastoral leadership” (7.61.01.) and the guideline that authorization is only to be used when the need for such leadership is “for an extended period of time” (Use of the Means of Grace, Principle 40).*
- *We agree that for congregations in such areas, the inability to provide “appropriate ordained pastoral leadership” may require flexibility in interpreting “for an extended period of time.” This flexibility may be accomplished for a transitional period by the authorization of a person or persons to be available to provide Word and Sacrament ministry in congregations in the area where ordained leadership is chronically unavailable. Authorization would be for a renewable term not to exceed one year and for the specific area. Like all synodically authorized ministers, such persons would be appropriately prepared and supervised. Though authorized for an area and for a term, such persons would only serve in specific ministry settings with the approval of the bishop. The synod should continue to seek ways to make available ordained ministers to serve in that area.*