



## Worship Formation & Liturgical Resources: Frequently Asked Questions

### Who is a Presiding Minister?

*The worship staff receives a number of similar inquiries on worship-related topics from across the church.*

*These responses should not be considered the final word on the topic, but useful guides that are to be considered in respect to local context with pastoral sensitivity.*

*The response herein may be reproduced for congregational use as long as the web address is cited on each copy.*

Today, the vision of leadership in the assembly of Christians gathered for the worship is a vision of shared leadership. Shared leadership is the goal in many Christian denominations and congregations. It is especially important in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Our constitutions (churchwide, synod, and congregation), as well as our worship resources all describe leadership based on gifts and call.

*Using Evangelical Lutheran Worship: The Sunday Assembly* says of a Presiding Minister: The presiding minister is an ordained pastor who presides at the service of Holy Communion. The presiding minister leads at several points in the service, including confession and forgiveness, and often is also the preacher. When baptism is celebrated, the presiding minister presides at the font. At the communion table the presiding minister leads the assembly in the great thanksgiving, speaks of sings the words of institution, and becomes the principal server for the meal. (p. 76).

The presiding minister will serve with various assisting ministers for the sake of the assembly. The term "presiding minister" makes the best sense in this context of many leaders exercising many gifts in the assembly for worship. S/he will be careful to "lead without dominating, serve without being servile, care about everyone in the room and yet not fill up the room with herself or himself" (*The Sunday Assembly*, p. 82.) The ordained minister does not preside in the sense of "lording it over" the assembly. Rather, the ordained presides (like a good "chairperson" in *Robert's Rules of Order*), encouraging and calling forth leadership gifts, and so enriching and enabling the assembly. This is not an easy task. It is one that is calls for continual renewal and training.

The Presiding Minister is most often an ordained minister. The role of the ordained minister is a confessional commitment in the ELCA. It rests on the insight of Article 14 of the Augsburg Confession: "It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call." That "regular" call comes to expression in the ordination of people to the pastoral office. In this church others may also be called regularly to service as associates in ministry, diaconal ministers or deaconesses. But these calls are carefully distinguished from the call described in the

Augsburg Confession, article 14, to "publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church."

The vision of shared leadership comes to expression when lay assisting ministers, along with the ordained, exercise leadership in the liturgical assembly (see also, ["How can lay people participate in worship leadership?"](#)). Appropriate training and gifts are required for these ministries, just as they are for ordained ministry, though the gifts and training may be different.

What roles traditionally belong to the presiding minister in Holy Communion? (For specific instructions and notes, see the rubrics (instructions in *red italics*) in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* and notes in the *Leaders Desk Edition*.)

#### Gathering

- Confession and Forgiveness or Thanksgiving for Baptism:
- Offering the invocation
- Inviting to confession
- Beginning the confession
- Speaking the word in forgiveness
- Offering the Greeting and speaking the Prayer of the Day

#### Word

- Reading of the Gospel
- Preaching the sermon
- Concluding the Prayers of Intercession
- Greeting the assembly in the peace of the risen Christ.

#### Meal

- Speaking/intoning the Great Thanksgiving  
(whether Eucharistic prayer or Words of Institution)
- Participating and overseeing the distribution of Holy Communion
- Speaking/intoning the blessing

Perhaps the most striking thing about this list is how few items it contains in terms of quantity. Many other people may be and should be used to lead every aspect of the liturgy that is not limited by our confessional commitments to the role of the ordained office in the life of the church. Assigning multiple clergy in a congregation to take on parts of the liturgy designated for laity misses this important opportunity to model an assembly where the spirit calls many to serve.

The leadership of the daily prayer offices of morning prayer and evening prayer and prayer at the close of day, is not restricted to persons who are ordained. Likewise, responsive prayer needs a leader, but that leader need not be ordained. In congregations where a major celebration of morning prayer is a part of the Sunday schedule, the pastor may preside in his or her capacity as the congregation's called leader. However, many congregations that use these offices more frequently often rotate the leadership among those who have the gifts and training to be good leaders of prayer. The church musician/Cantor would be another type of leader that could be called upon for such services.

Holy Baptism and all the services in *Occasional Services* clearly indicate the leadership roles. Anointing of the sick with oil also traditionally has been associated with the pastoral office and so is appropriately done by ordained ministers. The tradition and the constitution of this church also assign a special role to ordained pastors in the ministry of individual confession. This guarantees someone making a confession that the confidentiality of that confession will be protected by the minister. (See ELCA *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions*, 7.45)

In some services related to call, such as installation of bishops, pastors and other rostered leaders, consecration of diaconal ministers, and commissioning of associates in ministry, a bishop is designated by this church as the appropriate presiding minister. On these occasions, too, the vision at work is one of shared leadership with the appropriate called minister presiding among many leaders and ministries.

Note: The documents of this church make allowance for lay people to preside at Holy Communion in certain circumstances. These circumstances are carefully detailed in the constitutions. (See ELCA *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions*, 7.61.01., and *The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament*.)

## RESOURCES

### [Frequently Asked Questions:](#)

- 🔗 [How Can Lay People Participate in Worship Leadership?](#)

### [Resources Available for Download on the ELCA Website:](#)

- 📄 *The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997.
- 📖 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions*. Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1995 et al.

### [Resources Available from Augsburg Fortress:](#)

- 📖 *Evangelical Lutheran Worship, Leaders Desk Edition*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006.
- 📖 *Evangelical Lutheran Worship: Occasional Services for the Assembly*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2009.
- 📖 Brugh, Lorraine S. and Gordon W. Lathrop. *Using Evangelical Lutheran Worship: The Sunday Assembly*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2008.

### [Other Resources](#)

- 📖 Henry M. Robert, revised by Darwin Patnode. [Robert's Rules of Order Modern Edition](#). Thomas Nelson, 1989.

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