FAMILY COMMUNION?  
INTERNET COMMUNION?

Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic of 2020 has resulted in unprecedented alterations in the liturgical life of Lutheran congregations all around the world. Because the “social distancing” regulations and “stay at home” orders that have been issued by the civil authorities generally apply also to Christian churches, regular public worship services in most places are no longer being held; and Christians in many places are no longer able to receive the Lord’s Supper in the usual way, if at all. Lutheran pastors are encouraging individual households to be diligent in cultivating their family devotional life during these difficult times. And Lutheran pastors are themselves also making diligent use of the Internet for preaching and teaching, for the benefit of those who are able to go online and listen to the digital services and classes they are preparing and conducting. These are good and proper responses to the unusual circumstances in which we find ourselves. Family devotions, and online sermons and Bible studies, will help to meet many of the spiritual needs of God’s people.

But some of the proposals that are being made for how the church and its members can continue to receive the blessings of the gospel in these difficult days, are not good and proper. Especially for Lutherans, the suggestion that families can observe their own communion services in their homes, without the pastor, is not good and proper. Especially for Lutherans, the suggestion that pastors can remotely consecrate bread and wine for a sacramental use in their members’ homes through an Internet connection or some similar electronic means, is not good and proper.

Family Communion?

In his commentary on the Fourth Commandment in the Large Catechism, Martin Luther speaks at length of the authority of literal fathers and mothers over their children in the home. He also explains that “all other authority is derived and developed out of the authority of parents.”¹ According to Luther, there are actually four “kinds of fathers in this commandment: fathers by blood, fathers of a household, and fathers of the nation. In addition, there are also spiritual fathers.”² In describing that fourth kind of father – which he equates with the church’s “preachers”³ – Luther writes that

the name of spiritual father belongs...to those who govern and guide us by the Word of God. St. Paul boasts that he is such a father in 1 Corinthians 4:15, where he says, “In Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.” Because they are fathers, they are entitled to honor, even above all others. ...it is necessary to impress upon the common people that they who would bear the name of Christian owe it to God to show “double honor” [1 Timothy 5:17] to
those who watch over their souls and to treat them well and make provision for them.\textsuperscript{4}

For as long as there have been fathers in general, there have been \textit{spiritual} fathers. The ancient patriarchs, in their multifaceted primeval paternal office, exercised the domestic duties of a literal father; the civil duties of a political father, and the religious duties of a spiritual father. All of these fatherly offices were at first bundled together, and were exercised by one and the same person in God’s name and by God’s authority.

In his Large Catechism explanation of the Fifth Commandment, which forbids murder, Luther notes that

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neither God nor the government is included in this commandment, nor is their right to take human life abrogated. God has delegated his authority to punish evildoers to the civil authorities \textit{in the parents’ place}; in former times, as we read in Moses [Deut. 21:18-20], parents had to judge their children themselves and sentence them to death. Therefore what is forbidden here applies to individuals, not to the governmental officials.\textsuperscript{5}
\end{quote}

Similarly, we would say that God has also vocationally delegated his authority to govern and guide us by his Word to \textit{the pastors and preachers of the church} in the father’s place. And because it is \textit{God} who extracted this ministry of spiritual oversight from the original patriarchal office, and who perpetuates the ministry of spiritual oversight now as an office that is separate and distinct from the office of a modern-day literal father, a modern-day father may not, \textit{by virtue of his office as housefather}, exercise in his domestic realm the distinctive oversight duties of an ecclesiastical \textit{spiritual} father – just as a modern-day father may not judge and execute his children for capital crimes.

A housefather certainly does have God’s vocational permission to instruct his wife and children, and any other members of his household, in God’s Word. This instruction may and should include catechesis on the nature and purpose of the sacraments. But a housefather \textit{as such} does \textit{not} have God’s vocational permission to \textit{administer} the sacraments to his wife and children. According to the divine order that is now in effect, this would be one of the duties of the family’s pastor or pastors. Martin Chemnitz asks and answers these pertinent questions:

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\textit{But all believers are called priests, Ro 1:6; 5:10; 1 Ptr 2:9. Have all, therefore, a general call to the ministry?} All we who believe are indeed spiritual priests, but we are not all teachers. 1 Co 12:29-30; Eph 4:11-12. And Peter explains himself: All Christians are priests – not that all should function without difference in the ministry of the Word and of the Sacraments, without a special call, but that they should offer spiritual sacrifices. Ro 12:1; Heb 13:15-16. \textit{Yet all Christians have a general call to proclaim the virtues of God, 1 Ptr 2:9, and especially family heads, to instruct their households, Dt 6:7; 1 Co 14:35. It is true that all Christians have a general call to proclaim the Gospel of God, Ro 10:9, to speak the Word of God}
\end{quote}
among themselves, Eph 5:19; to admonish each other from the Word of God, Cl 3:16; to reprove, Eph 5:11 [and] Mt 19:15; [and] to comfort, 1 Th 4:18. And family heads are enjoined [to do] this with the special command that they give their households the instruction of the Lord. Eph 6:4. But the public ministry of the Word and of the Sacraments in the church is not entrusted to all Christians in general, ... 1 Co 12:28; Eph 4:12. For a special or particular call is required for this, Ro 10:15.\textsuperscript{6}

St. Paul states in his First Epistle to Timothy that a bishop is required to be “able to teach” in such a way as to be competent to “care for God’s church” with responsible pastoral oversight (1 Timothy 3:2, 5, ESV). In his Epistle to Titus, Paul adds that a bishop or presbyter ( overseer or elder), “as God’s steward,” 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,” and so that he may be able to deal properly with those “who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers” (Titus 1:7, 9-10, ESV). We do not expect Christians in general to be able to rebuke the erring and refute falsehood in the way that a trained pastor would be expected to do. Exercising general spiritual oversight in the church also involves preaching and teaching “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27, ESV), and properly applying law and gospel to the lives and consciences of individuals. This obviously requires a level of theological knowledge and pastoral skill that is not to be found in most Christians. St. James also warns that “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness” (James 3:1, ESV).

God certainly does apply his Word to all aspects of the life of a Christian: not only in the church, but also in the home and in the larger society. God’s Word may also be taught to people in various settings, and at varying levels of depth and thoroughness: by catechists in church-sponsored courses of instruction, by religion teachers in church-related schools, or by fathers and mothers in their family circle. It is not necessary that God’s Word be taught, always and at every level, only by the church’s pastors. But the Word of God in general is not to be equated with the sacraments in particular. The sacraments are special manifestations of God’s Word, and of the power of God’s Word, that God applies to the church as the church, and that are among the unique marks of the church.

The Large Catechism accordingly confesses that through the sacrament of Baptism “we are initially received into the Christian community.”\textsuperscript{8} Even when it is administered in a private setting, Baptism always has the whole church in view, since the Holy Spirit, through this sacrament, unites the person being baptized to the “one body” of Christ: “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and all were made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:13, ESV).

The Lord’s Supper, too – in the words of the Smalcald Articles – is “the common sacrament of the church,” which is not to be played with “apart from God’s Word and outside the church community.”\textsuperscript{9} And this is why we confess in the Large Catechism that “the whole gospel and the article of the Creed, I believe in one holy Christian
church...the forgiveness of sins,’ are embodied in this sacrament and offered to us through the Word’ – that is, through the instituting and consecrating Word of Christ. The Lord’s Supper is therefore also a sacrament of and for the “one body” of Christ: “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Corinthians 10:17, ESV).

For these reasons, in all ordinary circumstances, the church’s sacraments are to be administered by men who have been trained and called to “care for God’s church,” through a ministry of spiritual oversight that is carried out for and on behalf of “the church community.” St. Paul’s statement to Titus that a presbyter or bishop is “God’s steward” hearkens back to what he had previously said in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, where he had spoken of the “stewards of the mysteries of God,” and had described these stewards as “servants of Christ” (4:1, ESV). The Apology of the Augsburg Confession explains what this means for Lutherans, when it confesses that a “minister who consecrates gives the body and blood of the Lord to the rest of the people, just as a minister who preaches sets 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 [sacramentorum Dei],’ that is, of the gospel and the sacraments.”

In its teaching about this public ministry of Word and Sacrament, the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope explains that “The gospel” – that is, the New Testament revelation –

bestows upon those who preside over the churches the commission to proclaim the gospel, forgive sins, and administer the sacraments. In addition, it bestows legal authority, that is, the charge to excommunicate those whose crimes are public knowledge and to absolve those who repent. It is universally acknowledged, even by our opponents, that this power is shared by divine right by all who preside in the churches, whether they are called pastors, presbyters, or bishops. For that reason Jerome plainly teaches that in the apostolic letters all who preside over churches are both bishops and presbyters. He quotes Titus [1:5-6]: “I left you behind in Crete for this reason, so that you should...appoint presbyters in every town,” which then continues, “It is necessary for a bishop to be the husband of one wife” [v. 6]. Again, Peter and John call themselves presbyters [1 Peter 5:1; 2 John 1; 3 John 1].

The Augsburg Confession identifies the defining features of this enduring ministry of spiritual oversight when it points out that according to the gospel, the power of the keys or the power of the bishops is the power of God’s mandate to preach the gospel, to forgive and retain sins, and to administer the sacraments. For Christ sent out the apostles with this command [John 20:21-23]: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you. ... Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” And Mark 16:15: “Go...and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. ...” This power is exercised only by teaching or preaching...
the gospel and by administering the sacraments either to many or to individuals, depending on one’s calling.\textsuperscript{14}

A little further on in the Augsburg Confession we read that, “according to the gospel, or, as they say, by divine right, this jurisdiction belongs to the bishops as bishops (that is, to those to whom the ministry of Word and sacraments has been committed): to forgive sins, to reject teaching that opposes the gospel, and to exclude from the communion of the church the ungodly whose ungodliness is known.”\textsuperscript{15} And the Apology affirms that “priests” or pastors are indeed “called to preach the gospel and to administer the sacraments to the people” in the Lutheran Church, because “the church has the mandate to appoint ministers, which ought to please us greatly because we know that God approves this ministry and is present in it.”\textsuperscript{16}

In regard to the Sacrament of the Altar in particular – as it is administered according to the Lord’s institution by the church’s called ministers – the Formula of Concord quotes this statement from Luther’s treatise on “The Private Mass and the Consecration of Priests”:

“This command and institution of his have the power to accomplish this, that we do not distribute and receive simply bread and wine but his body and blood, as his words indicate: ‘This is my body, this is my blood.’ So it is not our work or speaking but the command and ordinance of Christ that make the bread the body and the wine the blood, beginning with the first Lord’s Supper and continuing to the end of the world, and it is administered daily through our ministry or office.”\textsuperscript{17}

Elsewhere in the treatise from which the Formula of Concord quotes these words, Luther more precisely defines this “ministry or office” when he explains that the Lord’s Supper is “a common meal, which God ordained should be administered to Christians through the clerical office.”\textsuperscript{18} And Luther more fully describes this “ministry or office” when he writes in this treatise that

in our churches we can show a Christian a true Christian mass according to the ordinance and institution of Christ, as well as according to the true intention of Christ and the church. There our pastor, bishop, or minister in the pastoral office, rightly and honorably and publicly called, ...goes before the altar. Publicly and plainly he sings what Christ has ordained and instituted in the Lord’s Supper. He takes the bread and wine, gives thanks, distributes and gives them to the rest of us who are there and want to receive them, on the strength of the words of Christ: “This is my body, this is my blood. Do this,” etc.\textsuperscript{19}

A part of what it means for the Lord’s Supper to be administered through the “ministry or office” of a “pastor, bishop, or minister in the pastoral office, rightly and honorably and publicly called,” is also touched on in the Large Catechism, where Luther speaks on behalf of all faithful Lutheran pastors in his declaration that “we do not intend to admit to the sacrament, and administer it to, those who do not know what
they seek or why they come.”20 Officiating at the administration of this sacrament is not simply a matter of speaking the Words and distributing the elements. It is an exercising of pastoral authority and the pastoral care of souls, wherein the officiant reserves the right to examine would-be communicants and guide them in their preparation for receiving the body and blood of Christ – always remembering St. Paul’s special warning that whoever “eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 11:27, ESV).

Proper and orderly soul-care for communicants is, therefore, an especially important component of the administration of the Lord’s Supper. Admitting communicants to the altar, or declining to admit them, is a very serious responsibility. It is a pastoral responsibility. John F. Brug reflects the classic Lutheran understanding of these matters when he writes:

It is clear that the Lord’s Supper should be administered by the pastor. It is not our practice to have a layman officiate at the Lord’s Supper. Even when congregations were quite isolated and some did not have a pastor present every Sunday, the Lord’s Supper was celebrated only when the pastor was present. Proper administration of the Lord’s Supper involves more than being able to read the right words. It involves pastoral responsibility for the souls of those who attend.21

That classic Lutheran understanding and practice was articulated and described in the seventeenth century by Jesper Rasmussen Brochmand: “The only administrators of the Holy Communion are the ministers of the Word, who have been legitimately called, like Aaron, Heb. 5:4; also because those alone should administer this Sacrament who are able to examine the faith of the men using this Sacrament.”22

The standards of pastoral care that apply in a public Divine Service are the same standards of pastoral care that apply in private administrations of the sacrament. In addressing the Roman practice of priests celebrating private masses without communicants, Luther writes that

If the papists were to argue on behalf of the retention of their private Masses: that a priest might well communicate his own self or give himself communion, just as one communicates individuals who are sick in their homes, ...then one must answer: First, it is not enough to speak thus or to undertake [such a thing], but they ought to have a clear Word and command of God, that this is proper and should be done; for without God’s Word one ought not undertake anything in God’s service and in the things of God. Secondly, it is a perversion of the priestly office which God has instituted, for the Sacraments are to be distributed through a common public office in the stead of Christ and of Christendom. Now a single individual cannot have or exercise a common public office all by himself in opposition to Christendom. However, when one gives the Sacrament to the sick, this comes from the instituted office, just as if one took the Sacrament from the altar.
otherwise and brought it to someone in a corner or behind the church door; and so the office should remain unperverted here in its function.23

It is the same “common public office” – namely “the priestly office which God has instituted” – that is responsible for the administration of the Lord’s Supper both in the public services of the church and in the homes of the sick. Brug writes:

The power of the sacraments is not dependent on ordination or on the person of the administrator, but the pastor is responsible for how the sacraments are administered. The administration of the Lord’s Supper involves spiritual judgment. Decisions commonly need to be made by the administrator about who is properly prepared to receive the Sacrament, both in public worship services and in the visitation of shut-ins. At times, there is a responsibility to exclude some from receiving the Sacrament. This requires a shepherd’s knowledge of the sheep, and it is definitely the work of spiritual oversight. This means that administration of the Lord’s Supper will normally remain with the pastor, even if others are trained to assist him with the distribution. The kind of disorder that arose in the Lord’s Supper at Corinth is most easily prevented if the administration is in the hands of properly prepared pastors.24

When Brug states that the “administration of the Lord’s Supper will normally remain with the pastor,” he does envision the possibility of abnormal circumstances in which a layman might be called to serve as a “temporary pastor,” and to administer the Lord’s Supper to a gathering of Christians in the absence of a regularly-ordained pastor. But according to Brug, the kind of exceptional cases in which such a thing might be contemplated, would be “Cases of war and extreme isolation,”25 and similar times of extraordinary need.

The Lutheran Church does teach that in the case of an emergency, when a necessary public ministration of the means of grace cannot be carried out by a regular public minister, the normal arrangement is temporarily suspended, and “the order yields to the need.” A conscience’s need for the hope and comfort of the gospel is always paramount. Therefore, the ecclesiastical “order” of vocation, and (if need be) the “order” of creation, properly “yield” in a situation where an inflexible adherence to these divine orders would result in a harmful silencing and deprivation of that gospel. With reference to examples from both the Old and New Testaments, Johann Gerhard teaches:

Assuming that there is no regular minister of the Church, the administration of Baptism should still not be omitted, since for the essential parts of Baptism it is not at all required that he who administers this Sacrament should be a minister of the Church; therefore, in this case the order yields to the need. ... Circumcision was commanded to Abraham (Genesis 17:11), who was a prophet of the Lord (Genesis 20:7), and from this we conclude that very probably the administration of this sacrament, together with other functions of the ecclesiastical office, was later transferred to the Levitical priesthood. There can be no doubt that this sacrament ordinarily was administered by men. But since in an emergency more
consideration was given there to the sacrament than to the order, the same must be observed regarding Baptism...

The “emergency” circumcision that Gerhard has in mind is the circumcision that Moses’ wife Zipporah performed on their son, as described in Exodus 4:25. According to Gerhard, this principle applies also to “absolution, which any layman may announce to a dying person from the Gospel, ...when no ordered minister of the Church can be obtained.” And Gerhard similarly concedes that Laymen act properly when they instruct or comfort a congregation that is without a regular shepherd or sick people or those who in any way are afflicted, as in times of a siege, pestilence, persecution, etc. Here belong in a certain way also the examples of the prophetesses in the Old Testament, such as Deborah (Judges 4), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14), Anna (Luke 2:36), as well as Priscilla, whom Paul calls his helper (Romans 16:3) and who expounded to Apollos the way of God more perfectly (Acts 18:26), and Lois and Eunice, who taught their grandson and son Timothy from a child the Holy Scriptures (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15).

In regard to the possibility of an emergency administration of the Sacrament of the Altar, however, C. F. W. Walther observes in his American-Lutheran Pastoral Theology that,

Starting with Luther, the vast majority of our theologians maintain that the Holy Supper should never be administered privately by a person not holding the public preaching office or by a so-called layman – partly because, unlike with Baptism or Absolution, there cannot be an emergency regarding Holy Communion which would justify straying from God’s order (1 Cor. 4:1; Rom. 10:15; Heb. 5:4); partly because the Holy Supper “is a manifest confession and should thus have manifest ministers”; partly because divisions can easily be caused by such private [acts of] Communion.

What Johann Wilhelm Baier wrote can serve as an example of the majority view: “When there is a lack of ordinary ministers, and a faithful man anxiously desires this Sacrament, it is better for him to be persuaded that spiritual eating is sufficient and to show the danger of other temptations which could arise if the Sacrament were administered by another without a legitimate call and therefore with a dubious mind and result.”

Walther nevertheless does make use of a quotation from the sixteenth-century Lutheran theologian Tilemann Heshusius, who taught that

In a case of necessity – when a rightly called minister of the Church is unavailable – there is no doubt that every Christian has the authority from God’s Word and is authorized in accordance with Christian love to carry out the ministry of the Church by proclaiming God’s Word and distributing the Sacraments. ... But here we are talking about a case of necessity when righteous and true ministers of the Church are unavailable, which is then permitted for
[any] Christian. As, [for example], if some Christians were in a place where there is no called pastor [Seelsorger]; if some Christians were imprisoned on account of the truth or were in danger at sea; or if some Christians lived among Muslims or in Roman Catholic lands, where there are no real pastors; if some Christians lived among the Calvinists or Schwenkfeldians or Adiaphorists or Majorists, from whom they would have to separate themselves as from false teachers in accord with God’s command; or if some Christians lived among pastors and ministers of the Church who publicly acted as tyrants and cruelly persecuted the proper confessors of truth, so that they clearly demonstrated that they were not members of the true Church, and devout Christians were therefore obligated to avoid their fellowship so as not to bolster their tyranny and help condemn innocent Christians. In such and similar cases of necessity (which occur very frequently), in which true ministers of the Church whose teaching and confession is righteous and coincides with God’s Word are unavailable, then an individual private person and believing Christian is also permitted to absolve repentant sinners of their sins, to encourage the weak with God’s Word, to baptize little children, and to distribute the Lord’s Supper.

Walther also includes Heshusius’s contextual clarification:

I am not saying that two or three should separate themselves from the true Church, flee from the called, proper preachers, and form their own sects. Rather, [I am saying] that in a case of necessity – if either no preachers are available [or] they are spouting false teaching and should therefore be avoided, [and] in addition the hardship of being unable to seek the use of the Sacraments in other places befalls one – then with the consent of one or two, any Christian is empowered and authorized to distribute the Sacraments and to strengthen those who are weak in the throes of death.30

And Walther quotes this statement from “the staunch champion of Lutheran orthodoxy” Johannes Fecht, who took a somewhat more conservative approach:

If it were to happen that someone in extreme mortal danger, in a case in which a pastor was not at all available, with the good intention of strengthening his faith, appealing to the fact that the Sacrament was instituted to be added to the Word and to confirm it for cases of weakness – [if that person] were to plead with someone knowledgeable about the proper administration of the Sacrament to give it to him and would not be appeased after that [person’s] admonition, then I would not wish to accuse someone like that of disturbing the order. Since the Sacraments have been conferred on the Church from its roots, but this [church] baptizes, teaches, and absolves through a layman by general consent in a case of necessity, and although a case of necessity occurs extremely rarely – also with respect to the Lord’s Supper, more often with respect to the other acts – I thus confess that I can reach no other conclusion, should the case occur as just described.31
According to Adolf Hoenecke,

The administration...of the Lord’s Supper is the responsibility of none but the ordained servants of the church. [1.] According to Scripture, in the regular course of events, the regularly called servants of the church are the administrators of the mysteries of God, and only in real emergency cases may the lay people also administer them. [2.] According to Scripture, there is no such emergency case in regard to the Lord’s Supper as there is in regard to Baptism. Our dogmaticians, therefore, have decided that if a sick person desires the Lord’s Supper and a pastor cannot be reached, we should convince him that spiritual partaking is enough for him and that more anxiety than comfort must come from a partaking of the Lord’s Supper that departs from the order of God. More on this point is to be found in discussions of casuistry. There are also differing views among the Lutheran dogmaticians.32

Confessional Lutherans might sometimes come to different casuistic conclusions in regard to what Christians may or should do in extraordinary situations. But this does not alter our common Biblically-based understanding of God’s will for the properly-ordered life of his church in all ordinary situations.

The administration of a sacrament is always a churchly act, always a public act,33 and always a pastoral act – involving the exercise of spiritual care and oversight in regard to the sacramental recipient. This remains the case also in an emergency, when, for example, a layman, in the absence of a regularly-called pastor, temporarily steps into the pastoral office in order to administer Baptism to a person who is in mortal danger. Such an act is not a “lay baptism” strictly speaking, but is a baptism administered by an “emergency pastor.” The Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope accordingly states that “in an emergency even a layperson grants absolution and becomes the minister or pastor of another. So Augustine tells the story of two Christians in a boat, one of whom baptized the other (a catechumen) and then the latter, having been baptized, absolved the former.”34 And as Brug also writes:

There is no doubt that laypeople can perform valid baptisms in cases of emergency. But since Baptism is the sacrament of initiation through which people enter the church, under normal circumstances it is administered by the called ministers of the church in the name of the church.35

It is the duty of Christian parents to teach God’s Word to their children. This is not just as an emergency measure, when there is no ecclesiastical minister to do it, but it is an ordinary part of their domestic vocation as fathers and mothers. Luther once said:

Every father of a family is a bishop in his house and the wife a bishopess. Therefore remember that you in your homes are to help us carry on the ministry [Predigtamt] as we do in the church. If we do this we shall have a gracious God, who will defend us from all evil and in all evil. In the Ps. [78:5-8] it is written: “He appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach their
children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments; and that they should not be like their fathers.”

But in response to a query on whether a father may, under certain circumstances, administer the Lord’s Supper to the members of his household, Luther spoke in a very different way:

Kindly tell your dear sir and friend that he is not in duty bound to go ahead in this matter and commune himself and his household. Nor is this necessary, since he has neither call nor command to do so. And if the tyrannical ministers of the church will not administer it to him and his family, though they are in duty bound to do so, he can still be saved by his faith through the Word. It would also give great offense to administer the Sacrament here and there in the homes, and in the end no good would come of it, for there will be factions and sects, as now the people are strange and the devil is raging. The first Christians, mentioned in Acts, did not administer the Sacrament individually [in sonderheit] in the houses, but they came together. ... But if a father wishes to teach the Word of God to his family, that is right and should be done, for it is God’s mandate that we should teach and bring up our children and household; that is commanded to everyone. But the Sacrament is a public confession and should have public ministers, because, as Christ says, we should do it in remembrance of Him; that is, as St. Paul explains it, we should show forth or preach the Lord’s death till He comes [cf. 1 Corinthians 11:26]. And here [Paul] also says that we should come together, and he severely rebukes those who, each in his own way, use the Lord’s Supper individually. On the other hand, it is not forbidden but rather commanded that everyone individually should instruct his household in God’s Word, as well as himself, though no one should baptize himself, etc. For there is a great difference between a public office in the church and [the office of] a father in his household. Hence the two must neither be mingled into each other nor be separated from each other. Since there is neither an emergency nor a call here, we must do nothing out of our own devotion without God’s definite mandate, for no good will come from it.

In his statement that a housefather as such “has neither call nor command” to commune himself and the members of his family, Luther is certainly thinking of what the Augsburg Confession declares “Concerning church order”: that “no one should teach publicly in the church or administer the sacraments unless properly called.” Chemnitz reports that the defenders of the Roman ecclesiastical system “shout loudly that those who do not approve the priesthood of the papalists take away all order out of the church, that with infinite confusion they prostitute the ministry to any one of the common people and (something which Tertullian ascribes to the heretics) make laymen out of priests and enjoin priestly functions to laymen, with the result that there is neither any authority nor dignity of the ministry, etc.” Chemnitz concedes that, with respect to certain non-Lutheran sectarian groups, there is some truth in this accusation.
He agrees, therefore, that “the Anabaptists and Enthusiasts are rightly disapproved” because of their disorders. But as far as the Lutherans are concerned, his response is that this Roman criticism is a “slander” that must be “removed.” In describing what the Lutheran understanding of vocation and order in the church has always been, Chemnitz explains that

Luther taught from the Word of God that Christ has given and committed the keys, that is, the ministry of the Word and of the sacraments, to the whole church, not however in such a way that everyone might usurp and appropriate this ministry to himself by his own will and personal rashness, without a legitimate call, but that...God sends ministers of the Word and of the sacraments through the call and choosing of the church, if it is done according to the command of His Word, so that the highest power of the Word and of the sacraments is with God; then, that the ministry belongs to the church, so that God calls, chooses, and sends ministers through it. Thirdly, then, it is with those who are legitimately chosen and called by God through the church, therefore with the ministers to whom the use or administration of the ministry of the Word and the sacraments has been committed.

On one occasion, when commenting on the subject of “private Communion” in the homes of the sick, Luther opined that as long as a Christian has the opportunity to receive the sacrament at least three or four times per year in the usual manner – from the pastor, at church – he should not feel the need to make unusual arrangements with his pastor to receive it more often than that. Luther wrote:

With reference to your question concerning the communication of the sick, ...the people should be told in sermons to receive Communion three or four times a year in order that, strengthened by the Word, they may afterward fall asleep, no matter what the cause of death may be. For private Communion will increasingly impose an intolerable and impossible burden, especially in time of pestilence.

Modern methods of transportation make it easier for a pastor to visit the sick and shut-in members of his church than was the case in Luther’s time, in order to administer Holy Communion to them when this is requested. We would therefore probably not consider Luther’s advice about the frequency (or infrequency) of such pastoral calls to be ordinarily applicable to a minister in the twenty-first century who owns an automobile.

But perhaps Luther’s practical advice can be adapted to contemporary situations in which lay Christians cannot attend public worship often or easily, either because they live in relative isolation from an established congregation, or because they are prevented from leaving their homes due to infirmity, quarantine, or other health issues. If a Christian family is able to make arrangements for receiving the sacrament from the hand of a regularly-ordained pastor at least three or four times per year – by travelling to visit such a pastor, by having such a pastor travel to visit them, or by waiting for a temporary health-related impediment to pass – then that family would seem not to be
in an “emergency” situation by any traditional understanding of the term. That family should therefore not consider devising irregular or extraordinary methods for receiving the Lord’s Supper more often than three or four times per year.

The father or husband in such a family need not become, or be appointed to be, an “emergency pastor” or a “temporary pastor” for his household. He can, however, continue to fulfill the duties that have already been entrusted to him – through his divine vocation as the head of his household – by instructing the other members of his family in the Word of God, by leading them in prayer to God, and by comforting them with the promises of God.

If the situation in which Christians find themselves is so difficult that the sacrament cannot be received from a pastor at least three or four times per year, there is still no obligation that something irregular or extraordinary must be done. The Lord’s Supper is indeed a great comfort to Christians, since they are able to receive God’s gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation in a very vivid, personal, and tangible way through this sacrament. But the Lord’s Supper is not the only means, or even the chief means, through which these divine gifts can be received. Luther writes that “the word of God is the greatest, most necessary, and most sublime part in Christendom (for the sacraments cannot exist without the word, but indeed the word can exist without the sacraments, and in an emergency one could be saved without the sacraments – as for example, those who die before receiving the desired baptism – but not without the word).”

On one occasion Luther’s advice was sought by some Bohemian Hussites who had been deceiving the pope with a pretense that they were still Romanists, in order to obtain episcopal ordination for their pastors. They believed that receiving the Lord’s Supper was necessary for their faith and salvation, and they furthermore believed that such a subterfuge was necessary in order to receive the Lord’s Supper. Luther admonished them not to do this anymore, and wrote that

if misfortune and need are so great that they can secure ministers in no other way [than by subterfuge], I would confidently advise that you have no ministers at all. For it would be safer and more wholesome for the father of the household to read the gospel and, since the universal custom and use allows it to the laity, to baptize those who are born in his home, and so to govern himself and his according to the doctrine of Christ, even if throughout life they did not dare or could not receive the Eucharist. For the Eucharist is not so necessary that salvation depends on it. The gospel and baptism are sufficient, since faith alone justifies and love alone lives rightly. ...

The father in the home...can provide his own with the necessities through the Word and in pious humility do without the nonessentials as long as he is in captivity. In this regard we follow the custom and law of the Jewish captives [in Babylon] who were not able to be in Jerusalem or to make offering there. Upheld in their faith alone by the Word of God they passed their lives among enemies while yearning for Jerusalem. So in this case the head of the household suffering under the tyranny of the pope would act most appropriately and safely if while
longing for the Eucharist, which he neither would dare nor could receive, in the meantime zealously and faithfully propagated faith in his home through the Word of God until God on high in his mercy either brought the captivity to an end or sent a true minister of the Word.\footnote{43}

We would still acknowledge, however, that a community of confessing Christians which – through no fault of its own – is genuinely cut off from the normal channels of ecclesiastical oversight, does retain, \textit{in itself}, the full ecclesiastical authority to call ministers in the name of Christ. And there may very well be circumstances in this world where that authority would be validly exercised in a way that is similar to Luther’s well-known hypothetical scenario:

...suppose a group of earnest Christian laymen were taken prisoner and set down in a desert without an episcopally ordained priest among them. And suppose they were to come to a common mind there and then in the desert and elect one of their number, whether he were married or not, and charge him to baptize, say mass, pronounce absolution, and preach the Gospel. Such a man would be as truly a priest as though he had been ordained by all the bishops and popes in the world. That is why in cases of necessity anyone can baptize and give absolution.\footnote{44}

\section*{Internet Communion?}

The Internet provides the church of our time with some new ways of bringing the Word of God to people at a distance. But from the perspective of our Biblical, Lutheran theology, there are some things that simply cannot be done over the Internet. The Internet and other forms of remote electronic communication – such as television, radio, and the telephone – may indeed be used for church activities that are the equivalent of what Jesus did when he preached publicly and out in the open, for the benefit of anyone who was there to listen. But the Internet and other forms of remote electronic communication may not be used for the equivalent of what Jesus did when he gathered in person with the closed circle of his disciples in the upper room, to give them – bodily, by his own hand – the sacrament of his body and blood.

At this first Lord’s Supper Jesus solemnly told his disciples – and through them he tells us – “Do this.” The orthodox church of all times and places has honored this command, and has done what Jesus did in its celebrations of the sacrament that he has left for us. But a pastor speaking the Words of Jesus into a microphone or a telephone handset in one place, while people in another place are eating bread and drinking wine, is not doing what Jesus did. The elements that someone in a distant location might place in front of his computer monitor or television set, or next to his radio or telephone, are not in the physical presence of the pastor and under the pastor’s control. And the pastor is not personally present with such communicants, to supervise their reception of the sacrament. The pastor in such a scenario is therefore not doing, and indeed cannot be doing, what Jesus did, and what Jesus tells sacramental celebrants to do. In the original institution, Jesus said, \textit{“this is my body”} – that is, \textit{this} bread, which is under my control, and which I am offering to you to eat, is my body. Jesus did not say, \textit{“that is my body”} –
that bread which is distant from me and not under my control, in another room, in another building, in another city.

The Formula of Concord confesses, on the basis of Holy Scripture, that “wherever what Christ instituted is observed and his words are spoken over the bread and cup and wherever the consecrated bread and cup are distributed, Christ himself exercises his power through the spoken words, which are still his Word, by virtue of the power of the first institution.”45 The lack of physical and communal “connectedness” between pastor, elements, and communicants that is inherent in electronic communication makes this impossible. A pastor who is supposedly consecrating elements through the Internet or over the telephone is not speaking the Words of Christ “over” the bread and wine, because the bread and wine are miles away from where he is. And he is not carrying out or supervising the distribution of these elements to would-be communicants, as they are gathered around their televisions or radios. They are distributing the elements to themselves.

The Formula of Concord teaches that “in the administration of the Holy Supper the Words of Institution are to be clearly and plainly spoken or sung publicly in the congregation” – that is, in the presence of those people who are gathered for the reception of the sacrament. The Formula goes on to explain that

This is done, first, so that Christ’s command, “Do this,” may be obeyed. Second, it is done so that Christ’s words will arouse, strengthen, and confirm the hearers’ faith in the nature and benefits of this sacrament... Third, it is done so that the elements of bread and wine are sanctified and consecrated in this holy practice, whereby Christ’s body and blood are offered to us to eat and to drink, as Paul says [1 Cor. 10:16], “The cup of blessing that we bless...”46

Lutherans who think that the Words of Institution can be brought efficaciously to sacramental elements via an online connection or something similar, and who are of the opinion that such an unconventional way of celebrating Holy Communion can still somehow work, need to consider that it is faithfulness to the Word and institution of Christ that allows us to be confident that our Savior’s Holy Supper is indeed being celebrated among us. They need to remember that the divinely-instituted sacramental action (as the Formula of Concord describes it) involves not merely the speaking of Christ’s Words and the distribution of bread and wine, but that it involves the speaking of Christ’s Words over bread and wine, and the distribution of that consecrated bread and wine. And advocates for digital consecrations and electronic communion services also need to face up to the “open communion” monstrosity that would be set in motion by the practice of consecrating elements remotely – through the Internet, television, or the radio – if such a practice was actually valid.

Consider, for example, that in all places in the world where an Internet connection is available, people unbeknownst to an online “celebrant” could decide on their own to place bread and wine in front of their computer monitors while viewing his webcast, so that this online “celebrant” could become responsible for an untold
number of unworthy receptions of the body and blood of Christ, by an untold number of people he has never met. The “gatekeeper” role of the presiding minister that the church catholic has always recognized, was recognized also by the Lutheran Reformers. The Augsburg Confession observes, with approval, that “Chrysostom says that the priest stands daily at the altar, inviting some to Communion and keeping others away.” But how can an Internet “celebrant” keep people away from their own computers?

As the Augsburg Confession describes the reforms in sacramental practice that the Lutherans had instituted, it states that

The people have grown accustomed to receiving the sacrament together – all who are fit to do so. ... For people are admitted only if they first had an opportunity to be examined and heard.

In his Shorter Preface to the Large Catechism, Luther also states that anyone who does not know the basic content of the catechism “should not be numbered among Christians nor admitted to any sacrament,” and that “those who come to the sacrament certainly should know more and have a deeper understanding of all Christian teaching than children and beginners in school.” These are the classic standards of pastoral catechesis and sacramental oversight to which Confessional Lutheran ministers have always held themselves.

But how could any of this be enforced and implemented by a pastor, if his Internet consecrations are valid? How could he control who receives the sacrament, and how could he exercise any pastoral oversight with respect to the recipients, if it is in fact the case that his online consecrations are efficacious for any bread and wine that are in proximity to the monitor of any computer anywhere in the world, that happens to have its browser set to the webpage where his live feed can be viewed?

And would these Internet consecrations be valid and efficacious also when people watch archived recordings of his online communion services, or a DVD of a communion service? If not, why not? If someone places bread and wine in front of the speakers of his boombox while playing a Paul McCreesh liturgical reconstruction CD, would the chanted Verba on that CD serve as a consecration for this bread and wine? If not, why not? Once people start going down the road of accepting, as valid, consecrations that are performed through digital media, and not in person, where will it stop?

Confessional Lutherans believe, in the words of Chemnitz, that “fellowship at the Lord’s table is a testimony of consensus, harmony, and unity in doctrine and faith, as Paul says: ‘We who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread’ (1 Cor. 10:17).” But if remote consecrations through the Internet, through television, or through the radio are recognized as valid, then altar fellowship as a concept can simply no longer exist. A pastor might be able to control who receives communion in a real gathering of worshipers in his congregation, but he cannot control who receives
communion in the virtual “gathering” of all those who are watching his webcasts or listening to his broadcasts. The “fellowship” of these disparate and distant individuals can and probably will include a myriad of anonymous persons who have no personal connection to the consecrating pastor or to his ministry, and no personal connection to the other people – of whatever faith any of them may be – who are also watching these webcasts or broadcasts, and who are also presuming to commune themselves in conjunction with these webcasts or broadcasts.

As a remedy to this problem, some might suggest that a pastor’s speaking of the Words of Institution through electronic media is not sacramentally effective when he does not intend it to be (such as with a public and unrestricted webcast of a communion service at his church), but that it is sacramentally effective when he does intend it to be (such as with a private video conference or a telephone call that involves only one household). But we would then have to point out that the idea that priestly “intention” contributes to the validity of a sacrament is a Tridentine Catholic concept, and is not an orthodox Lutheran concept. Chemnitz writes:

...when in the action or administration of the sacraments the institution itself is changed, mutilated, or corrupted, it is certain that then it is not a true sacrament. For it is the word of institution, coming to the element, which makes a sacrament. This opinion is simple, true, and certain, offering to consciences useful, firm, and necessary comfort which we shall not allow to be taken away from us, and it serves the glory of God that His truth should not be measured by the intention of a human minister, which can neither be known to us nor certain, and that faith should not depend on the human minister but should rest on the truth and power of God, who instituted the sacrament and gave the promise.51

We are not denying the inherent efficacy of God’s Word in general. But we are expressing grave doubts concerning the sacramental effectiveness of the Words of Institution in particular, when those Words are spoken in a setting and context that differ from what the Lord has prescribed for the celebration of his Holy Supper. As a general principle, Lutherans believe that if the Lord’s sacramental institution is "changed, mutilated, or corrupted," then the presence of the Lord’s body and blood – which depends on that institution – is made doubtful at best, and is nullified at worst.

We can consider another scenario, which does not involve the use of digital media, but which does illustrate the Lutheran teaching about what portions of bread and wine are actually being consecrated and set aside for a sacramental use, when the Words of Institution are spoken by a pastor within a valid service of Holy Communion. An impenitent congregational member is under church discipline and has been suspended from the Lord’s Supper, so that he would be refused if he were to approach the altar during the distribution. He thinks that he can circumvent this discipline by bringing his own bread and wine to church and having it with him in the pew – with the idea that when the elements on the altar are consecrated, his bread and wine will also be consecrated, since he is sitting within earshot of the pastor’s speaking of the Words of Institution. And he would then eat and drink the bread and wine he had
brought. Would we grant that such a man had successfully tricked the pastor into communing him? Or would we rightly point out that since the Words of Institution were not “spoken over” the bread and wine that the man had with him in the pew, and since that bread and wine were not “distributed” to him by the pastor (or by a liturgical assistant under the pastor’s direction), his bread and wine were not included in the consecration, and were not a part of the unified sacramental action on this occasion?

This whole question is similar to the Reformation-era question of whether a private mass celebrated without communicants – in which the priest alone communes – is actually the sacrament that Jesus instituted. Even though the priest in such a case would recite the Words of Christ over bread and wine, the Reformers still rejected the legitimacy of this practice. In the Smalcald Articles Luther states that if a priest “really desires to commune, he can do so most fittingly and properly in the sacrament administered according to Christ’s institution.” A priest who celebrates mass privately, without communicants, “does not know what he is doing because he follows a false human opinion and imagination without the sanction of God’s Word.” 52

It is a departure from the institution of Christ to presume to hold a “communion service” without communicants being physically present, to receive what is supposed to be blessed, and offered to them, by the celebrant. This was the mistake of the Roman priests, with their private masses. It is also a departure from the institution of Christ to presume to hold a “communion service” without a celebrant being physically present, to bless, and offer to the communicants, what is supposed to be received by them. This is the mistake of those who advocate, or allow for, remote digital “consecrations.”

Lutherans confess in the Formula of Concord that in any proper celebration of the Lord’s Supper,

Christ’s command, “Do this,” must be observed without division or confusion. For it includes the entire action or administration of this sacrament: that in a Christian assembly bread and wine are taken, consecrated, distributed, received, eaten, and drunk, and that thereby the Lord’s death is proclaimed, as St. Paul presents the entire action of the breaking of the bread or its distribution and reception in 1 Corinthians 10[:16]. 53

An Internet “consecration” divides and confuses the institution of Christ. An Internet “communion service” that has its basis in such a consecration does not comport with the sacramental action commanded by Christ. With a practice that departs so far from what Jesus did, and from what Jesus tells us to do, there is no proper foundation of certainty on which the conscience of a communicant can rest, which would enable him to believe that such a “consecration” is really efficacious, and which would enable him to believe that the true body and blood of the Lord are really present in such a “communion service.”

We must conclude, in all honesty, that anyone who presumes to “consecrate” far-distant portions of bread and wine in this way and for this purpose “does not know
what he is doing because he follows a false human opinion and imagination without the
sanction of God’s Word.” We would therefore counsel a misguided Christian who
thinks it is possible to receive the sacrament according to such an arrangement, that if
he “really desires to commune, he can do so most fittingly and properly in the
sacrament administered according to Christ’s institution.” If it is not possible for a
Christian to commune in an observance of the sacrament that is conducted according to
Christ’s institution, then it is simply not possible for him to commune at all.

Conclusion

Lutherans who remain personally unpersuaded that “family communion” is
disorderly and dangerous, or that “Internet communion” is illegitimate and invalid,
should still not introduce such innovations, and do what is right in their own eyes while
ignoring the objections of their brethren. This would be very divisive. Lutherans take
something like the proper administration of the sacraments very seriously, in light of
their principled conviction, with respect to the doctrines of the church and of church
fellowship, that

The church is the assembly of saints in which the gospel is taught purely and the
sacraments are administered rightly. And it is enough for the true unity of the
church to agree concerning the teaching of the gospel and the administration of
the sacraments.54

As they are restrained by love for the church and its unity, Lutheran pastors and
congregations are not free to press forward with controversial, disruptive, and ill-
considered innovations, especially when these innovations involve something as
fundamentally important as the sacrament of Holy Communion. They should instead,
in whatever way they can, be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of
peace” (Ephesians 4:3, ESV).

Sadly, Christians in troubled and fearful times may occasionally be cut off, at
least temporarily, from the Lord’s Supper. And sometimes there is nothing that can be
done about this. But even if that is the case, Christians in troubled and fearful times are
not cut off from Christ and from the comfort of the gospel, because they are not cut off
from God’s Word. Luther gives us this encouragement in the Longer Preface of his
Large Catechism:

Nothing is so powerfully effective against the devil, the world, the flesh, and all
evil thoughts as to occupy one’s self with God’s Word, to speak about it and
meditate upon it, in the way that Psalm 1[:2] calls those blessed who “meditate
on God’s law day and night.” Without doubt, you will offer up no more
powerful incense or savor against the devil than to occupy yourself with God’s
commandments and words and to speak, sing, or think about them.55
As Christians in difficult circumstances await better times, and as they await an opportunity in the future to receive the blessed sacrament of their Savior’s body and blood in an orderly way, and with a clear conscience, they can pray and sing:

In Thee, Lord, have I put my trust;  
Leave me not helpless in the dust;  
   Let me not be confounded.  
Let in Thy Word my faith, O Lord,  
   Be always firmly grounded.

Bow down Thy gracious ear to me  
And hear my cries and prayers to Thee;  
   Haste Thee for my protection,  
For woes and fear surround me here.  
   Help me in mine affliction.56

David Jay Webber  
Phoenix, Arizona  
April 28, 2020


2Large Catechism I:158, Kolb/Wengert p. 408.

3Large Catechism I:162-63, Kolb/Wengert pp. 408-09.

4Large Catechism I:158-61, Kolb/Wengert p. 408.

5Large Catechism I:180-81, Kolb/Wengert p. 410; emphases added.


7Scripture quotations marked “ESV” are from the Holy Bible, English Standard Version®, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

8Large Catechism IV:2, Kolb/Wengert p. 456.

9Smalcald Articles II, II:9, Kolb/Wengert p. 303.

10Large Catechism V:32, Kolb/Wengert p. 470; emphasis added.
11 Apology of the Augsburg Confession XXIV:80-81, Kolb/Wengert p. 272. In the original Latin of this section of the Apology, St. Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 4:1 appear as follows: *Sic nos existimet homo tamquam ministros Christi dispensatores sacramentorum Dei* (Concordia Triglotta [Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921], p. 410). This was Philip Melanchthon’s own rendering from the Greek. He did not here employ the standard Vulgate translation of this verse: *sic nos existimet homo ut ministros Christi et dispensatores mysteriorum Dei*. The primary difference between Melanchthon’s rendering and the Vulgate rendering is that the Vulgate had simply transliterated the Greek term μυστηρίων [μυστηρίων] or “mysteries,” while Melanchthon translated that term, as sacramentorum or “sacraments.” In view of this deliberate added precision in translation, the Apology would seem to be presenting this verse to us as an inspired statement specifically concerning the administration of the New Testament means of grace, with the understanding that this is the definitive task that God entrusts to his called “stewards.”

12 Elsewhere in the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, we read: “let us show from the gospel that the Roman bishop is not superior by divine right to other bishops and pastors.” This is then followed by an exegetical discussion of several passages from Luke, Matthew, John, Galatians, 1 Corinthians, and 1 Peter (Treatise 7-11, Kolb/Wengert pp. 331-32). The “gospel” in its narrower meaning – that is, the message of God’s grace in Christ – bestows the forgiveness of sins, and does not bestow “legal authority.” See also the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, IV:5, where “in the gospel” in the Latin version (Kolb/Wengert p. 121) becomes “in the New Testament” in the German version (Concordia Triglotta, p. 121).


14 Augsburg Confession XXVIII:5-8 (Latin), Kolb/Wengert p. 93.

15 Augsburg Confession XXVIII:21 (Latin), Kolb/Wengert p. 95.

16 Apology of the Augsburg Confession XIII:9,12, Kolb/Wengert p. 220.

17 Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VII:77, Kolb/Wengert p. 607; emphasis added.


20 Large Catechism V:2, Kolb/Wengert p. 467; punctuation slightly revised.


26In his treatise “On the Councils and the Church” – after mentioning Baptism, the Sacrament of the Altar, the Word of God, and the Keys – Martin Luther states that “There must be bishops, pastors [Pfarrher], or preachers, who publicly and privately give, administer, and use the aforementioned four things or holy possessions in behalf of and in the name of the church, or rather by reason of their institution by Christ...” According to Luther, “The people as a whole cannot do these things, but must entrust or have them entrusted to one person,” and “he alone should be allowed to preach, to baptize, to absolve, and to administer the sacraments.” Luther then adds this Scriptural restriction: “It is, however, true that the Holy Spirit has excepted women, children, and incompetent people from this function, but chooses (except in emergencies) only competent males to fill this office, as one reads here and there in the epistles of St. Paul [I Tim. 3:2, Tit. 1:6] that a bishop must be pious, able to teach, and the husband of one wife – and in I Corinthians 14[:34] he says, ‘The women should keep silence in the churches.’ In summary, it must be a competent and chosen man. Children, women, and other persons are not qualified for this office, even though they are able to hear God’s Word, to receive Baptism, the Sacrament, absolution, and are also true, holy Christians, as St. Peter says [I Pet. 3:7]. Even nature and God’s creation makes this distinction, implying that women (much less children or fools) cannot and shall not occupy positions of sovereignty, as experience also suggests and as Moses says in Genesis 3[:16], ‘You shall be subject to man.’ The Gospel, however, does not abrogate this natural law, but confirms it as the ordinance and creation of God” (Luther’s Works, Vol. 41 [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966], pp. 154-55).


29Johann Wilhelm Baier; quoted in “Lay Celebration of the Sacrament of the Altar,” p. 55.


Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope 67, Kolb/Wengert p. 341; emphasis added.


On one occasion, in later years, “The faculty in Leipzig was asked the following question: If a pastor faints while he is consecrating the bread, can the sacristan or some other Christian consecrate the chalice and commune the congregation? The faculty answers that since Luther was of the opinion that the head of a household cannot celebrate the Sacrament in his home, it would be improper for a layman to do the same in this case, since he has neither the call nor the command to do so. According to the Holy Scriptures, in First Corinthians, chapter four, verse one, and also in chapter three, verse nine, the administration of the Sacraments is assigned to pastors. Furthermore, one cannot use the excuse that this is an emergency, since the Sacrament of the Altar is not an absolute necessity in the sense that Baptism is. Therefore, the congregation should either wait until the pastor has been revived and can continue the consecration, or should call in a neighboring pastor [Dedekennus, Appendix, p. 408]” (Edward Frederick Peters, The Origin and meaning of the Axiom: “Nothing Has the Character of a Sacrament Outside of the Use,” in Sixteenth-Century and Seventeenth-Century Lutheran Theology, pp. 531-32).

Augsburg Confession XIV (Latin), Kolb/Wengert p. 47.


Martin Chemnitz, Examination of the Council of Trent, Part II, p. 97.

42 Martin Luther, “The Private Mass and the Consecration of Priests,” p. 189; emphasis added.


45 Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VII:75, Kolb/Wengert p. 606; emphases added.


47 Augsburg Confession XXIV:36 (Latin), Kolb/Wengert p. 71.

48 Augsburg Confession XXIV:5-6 (Latin), Kolb/Wengert p. 69.

49 Large Catechism, Shorter Preface: 2,5, Kolb/Wengert p. 383.

50 Martin Chemnitz, _Examination of the Council of Trent, Part II_, p. 302.

51 Martin Chemnitz, _Examination of the Council of Trent, Part II_, p. 106; emphases added.


53 Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VII:84, Kolb/Wengert p. 607; emphases added.

54 Augsburg Confession VII:1-2 (Latin), Kolb/Wengert p. 43; emphasis added.

55 Large Catechism, Longer Preface: 10, Kolb/Wengert p. 381.