

# Concerning the Administration of the Sacrament of the Altar

Since concerns and questions regarding some aspects of the administration of the Lord's Supper have been forwarded to the doctrine committee for discussion, the synod president has directed the doctrine committee to prepare guidance on these matters for the pastors and congregations of the synod.



## 1. Concerning the elements in the Lord's Supper

In cases of recovering alcoholics and those with gluten intolerance or other such ailments, may substitutions for wine and bread be used?

**See the ELS Lord's Supper Statement (1989):**

<https://els.org/beliefs/doctrinal-statements/>

The Christian Church has not been given authority to alter what our Lord has commanded and instituted. The supper is not based on the Passover, but on what Jesus has commanded. The word "bread" has a clear meaning, but since bread has been made of grains other than wheat (then and now), use of other grains for the bread of the supper is not excluded. Neither is it required to be unleavened. The words of institution refer only to bread, not the baking method. The same is not the case with the other element of the Lord's Supper, the contents of the cup. While the New Testament accounts of the institution use "This cup," Jesus, in Matthew 26:29, referring to the contents of the cup, says "I will not drink of THIS fruit of the vine until that day..." "Fruit of the vine" states clearly that the content of the cup was grape wine (fermented), though it does not mandate its color. On account of what Jesus says, we know that the cup contained "fruit of the vine," which can only be the fermented liquid from grapes. The ancient Christian

church (with few exceptions, mostly gnostic) has held that the content of the cup is to be grape wine, the fruit of the vine. See Martin Chemnitz, *Enchiridion*, "to the essence of this Sacrament belongs the outward elements of bread and wine, for in the cup that Christ took there was the fruit of the vine, Matthew 26, 29" (p. 120). This view is repeated by Walther and others in concluding from Matthew 26:29 that "fruit of the vine" in the cup is grape wine. While they knew that the Jewish celebration of Passover in Jesus' day strictly adhered to the use of grape wine in the Supper Jesus instituted, they depended only on Jesus' word. J. T. Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics*, 525 says: "That he used wine is proved by the expression 'this fruit of the vine,'" without further explanation. (See also Franz Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III, 354f., footnote 94; Chemnitz, *Lord's Supper*, 98 f.; Augsburg Confession X; Smalcald Articles III, 6; and Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VII, 14, all of which simply take it for granted that the content of the cup was wine.)

## 2. Are the elements consecrated by the Distribution Formula?

When St. Paul writes "the cup of blessing which we bless" (1 Corinthians 10:16), he speaks of a blessing or consecration. This blessing is included in the "Do this" found in the four accounts of the institution of the Supper. The words commonly

spoken in the distribution cannot be considered the consecration since they say “This is the true body of Christ” and not “This is my body.” The confessions of our church (Book of Concord) uphold this understanding of the words of institution (*Verba*): that the speaking of the *Verba* belongs to Jesus’ “*Do this*” and that Jesus’ words, not our adaptations, are the blessing.

Concerning the consecration, the ELS *Lord’s Supper Theses* quote The Formula of Concord–Solid Declaration, §75–77:

For wherever we observe his institution and speak his words over the bread and cup and distribute the blessed [consecrated, gesegnete, benedictum], bread and cup, Christ himself is still active through the spoken words by virtue of the first institution, which he wants to be repeated ... No human being, but only Christ himself who was crucified for us, can make of the bread and wine set before us the body and blood of Christ. The words are spoken by the mouth of the priest, but by God’s power and grace through the words that he speaks, “this is my body,” the elements set before us in the supper are blessed.’ ... ‘This his command and institution can and does bring it about that we do not distribute and receive ordinary bread and wine but his body and blood, as his words read, “this is my body,” etc., “this is my blood,” etc. Thus it is not our work or speaking but the command and ordinance of Christ that, from the beginning of the first Communion until the end of the world, make the bread the body and the wine the blood that are daily distributed through our ministry and office.

Thus we hold that if the elements are not “blessed” (i.e. consecrated) with Jesus’ own words, they are not to be distributed as the body and blood of Christ. The words by which the elements are blessed or consecrated are not the priest’s words, but Christ’s, for only Christ can say, “This is my body.”

So that “This is my body,” etc., retain their true meaning, they are kept in the context of the narratives of the supper from the sacred accounts of the evangelists and St. Paul, and we refer to the entire context as the Words of Institution, which emphasizes that they are the Word of God, not the word of men.

It is customary in our churches to use a distribution formula, though that is not required by the “This do.” In some early Lutheran liturgies (e.g. the church of Norway and Denmark prior to 1685), the distribution was silent. The statement often used in the distribution, “This is the true blood of Christ,” or a longer form, “This is the true body of Christ given for you for the remission of sins” is not the same as “Drink of it all of you, this cup is the New Testament of my blood which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins.” It should be noted that what we say in the distribution is our confession of faith

concerning the elements, but they are not the words of Jesus consecrating or blessing the elements.

### 3. Is it necessary to repeat the consecration when additional elements are brought to the altar to complete the distribution?

Many Lutheran Church Altar Books have required that if additional elements not present when the elements were consecrated are later brought to the altar, they must be consecrated by the portion of the Words of Institution that applies to them. Arguments about whether or not God’s Word can pass through the wall between the sacristy and the chancel are akin to arguments about a mouse eating the wafers. The “this” of “This is my body” refers to the elements which have been prepared for the particular celebration and are on the altar before the communicants, not in the sacristy or in the parsonage. In this matter, too, “This” means “this,” referring to what is before the communicants. The statement quoted before also holds: “For wherever we observe his institution and speak his words over the bread and cup and distribute the blessed bread and cup....” Note that the distributed bread and cup are those which have been “blessed,” i.e. “consecrated.”

In a letter to Georg of Anhalt, Martin Luther wrote (Monday after St. John’s day 1542) that “if not enough of the hosts or wine were consecrated and more must be consecrated, we do not elevate again as is done in the papacy” (*Martin Luthers Samtliche Schriften*, Old Walch edition, 1746, vol. XIX, columns 1632–33).

The *Lutheran Hymnary* used in the ELS from 1918 until the publication of *The Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* in 1996 included the following rubric in the service of the Lord’s Supper as printed in the full edition: “If the consecrated bread or wine be spent before all have communed, the Minister shall consecrate more, saying aloud so much of the words of institution as pertaineth to the elements to be consecrated (*The Lutheran Hymnary*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1913 and 1935; p. 32). In order to avoid such a situation, *Danmarks og Norges Kirke-Ritual of 1685* (Christiania, 1863 edition, 71): “The pastor must diligently see to it that he knows the number of those to be communed, so that he does not have to repeat the words of the prescribed consecration; for neither the bread nor the wine should be distributed before they are consecrated by the Word.”