



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

THE USE OF THE MEANS OF GRACE
A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament

Adopted for guidance and practice by the Fifth Biennial Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, August 19, 1997.

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Wesley

PREFACE

THE TRIUNE GOD

and the

MEANS *of* GRACE

THE TRIUNE GOD ACTS IN THE MEANS OF GRACE

Principle

1 Jesus Christ is the living and abiding Word of God. By the power of the Spirit, this very Word of God, which is Jesus Christ, is read in the Scriptures, proclaimed in preaching, announced in the forgiveness of sins, eaten and drunk in the Holy Communion, and encountered in the bodily presence of the Christian community. By the power of the Spirit active in Holy Baptism, this Word washes a people to be Christ's own Body in the world. We have called this gift of Word and Sacrament by the name "the means of grace." The living heart of all these means is the presence of Jesus Christ through the power of the Spirit as the gift of the Father.

Background 1A "We believe we have the duty not to neglect any of the rites and ceremonies instituted in Scripture, whatever their number. We do not think it makes much difference if, for purposes of teaching, the enumeration varies, provided what is handed down in Scripture is preserved. For that matter, the Fathers did not always use the same enumeration."¹

Background 1B In Christ's flesh, in his death and resurrection, all people are invited to behold and to receive the fullness of God's grace and truth.²

¹ Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XIII. Note: all citations of confessional material are from the *Book of Concord*, translated and edited by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959).

² John 1:14–16.

THE TRIUNE GOD CREATES THE CHURCH

Principle

2 God gives the Word and the sacraments to the Church and by the power of the Spirit thereby creates and sustains the Church among us.³ God establishes the sacraments “to awaken and confirm faith.”⁴ God calls the Church to exercise care and fidelity in its use of the means of grace, so that all people may hear and believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ and be gathered into God’s own mission for the life of the world.

Background 2A In a world of yearning, brokenness, and sin, the Church’s clarity about the Gospel of Jesus Christ is vital. God has promised to come to all through the means of grace: the Word and the sacraments of Christ’s institution. While the Church defines for itself customary practices that reflect care and fidelity, it is these means of grace that define the Church.

Background 2B Yet even the Church itself is threatened should it fail to claim the great treasures of the Gospel. Either careless practice or rigid uniformity may distort the power of the gift. This statement is one way in which we, in the Church, can give counsel to one another, supporting and sustaining one another in our common mission.

Background 2C We are people whose lives are degraded by sin. This estrangement from God manifests itself in many ways, including false values and a sense of emptiness. Many in our time are deprived or depriving, abusing or abused. All humanity, indeed all creation, is threatened by sin that erupts in greed, violence, and war. In the midst of isolation, lovelessness, and self-absorption, the Church is tempted to turn in on itself, its own needs, and preferences. As a church in this time, we seek to give and receive God’s Word and sacraments as full and reliable signs of Christ.

³ The Small Catechism, The Creed, The Third Article.

⁴ Augsburg Confession, Article XIII.

WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

Principle

3 “It is also taught among us that one holy Christian church will be and remain forever. This is the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel.”⁵

Background 3A The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is committed by its statement of purpose to “worship God in proclamation of the Word and administration of the sacraments and through lives of prayer, praise, thanksgiving, witness, and service.”⁶ The Scriptures and our Confessions establish this purpose. We believe that “through the Word and the sacraments, as through means, the Holy Spirit is given, and the Holy Spirit produces faith, where and when it pleases God, in those who hear the Gospel.”⁷

⁵ Augsburg Confession, Article vii.

⁶ *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, 1995, 4.02.

⁷ Augsburg Confession, Article v.

THIS STATEMENT ENCOURAGES CHURCH UNITY AMID DIVERSITY

Principle

4 The gift of Word and Sacrament is from God. This statement on sacramental practices seeks to encourage unity among us in the administration of the means of grace and to foster common understanding and practice. It does not seek to impose uniformity among us.

Background 4A This statement grows out of this church's concern for healthy pastoral action and strong congregational mission. It does not address our practice of Word and Sacrament out of antiquarian or legalistic interests but rather to ground the practice of our church in the Gospel and to encourage good order within our church.

Application 4B Our congregations receive and administer the means of grace in richly diverse ways. This diversity in practice is well grounded in the Confessions. "It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies of human institution should be observed uniformly in all places."⁸ We are united in one common center: Jesus Christ proclaimed in Word and sacraments amidst participating assemblies of singing, serving, and praying people.

⁸ Augsburg Confession, Article VII.

PART I

PROCLAMATION *of the* WORD
and the CHRISTIAN ASSEMBLY

WHAT IS THE WORD OF GOD?

Principle

5 Jesus Christ is the Word of God incarnate. The proclamation of God's message to us is both Law and Gospel. The canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the written Word of God.⁹ Through this Word in these forms, as through the sacraments, God gives faith, forgiveness of sins, and new life.

Application 5A Proclamation of the Word includes the public reading of Scripture, preaching, teaching, the celebration of the sacraments, confession and absolution, music, arts, prayers, Christian witness, and service. The congregation's entire educational ministry participates in the proclamation of the Word.

⁹ *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, 2.02.

SUNDAY PROVIDES A DAY FOR ASSEMBLY AROUND WORD AND SACRAMENT

Principle

6 Sunday, the day of Christ's resurrection and of the appearances to the disciples by the crucified and risen Christ, is the primary day on which Christians gather to worship. Within this assembly, the Word is read and preached and the sacraments are celebrated.

Application 6A Sunday is the principal festival day of Christians. "The Holy Communion" is one name for the Sunday service of Word and Sacrament in which the congregation assembles in God's presence, hears the word of life, baptizes and remembers Baptism, and celebrates the Holy Supper. The service of Word and Sacrament is also celebrated on other great festivals of the year, according to the common Christian calendar received in our churches. The Christian community may gather for proclamation and the Lord's Supper at other times as well, as, for example, on other days of the week, and when the services of marriage or of the burial of the dead are placed within the context of the Holy Communion.¹⁰

¹⁰ *Lutheran Book of Worship* Ministers Edition (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, and Philadelphia: Board of Publication, Lutheran Church in America, 1978), 36–37.

THE SCRIPTURES ARE READ ALOUD

Principle

7 The public reading of the Holy Scriptures is an indispensable part of worship, constituting the basis for the public proclamation of the Gospel.

Application 7A The use of ELCA-approved lectionaries serves the unity of the Church, the hearing of the breadth of the Scriptures, and the evangelical meaning of the church year. The *Revised Common Lectionary* and the lectionaries in *Lutheran Book of Worship* make three readings and a psalm available for every Sunday and festival.

Application 7B The use of a Bible or lectionary of appropriate size and dignity by those who read the Scriptures aloud, the use of this book in liturgical processions, and its placement on the reading desk or pulpit may bring the centrality of the Word to visible expression.

THE BAPTIZED PEOPLE PROCLAIM GOD'S WORD

Principle

8 All the baptized share responsibility for the proclamation of the Word and the formation of the Christian assembly.

Application 8A One of the ways lay people exercise the public proclamation of the Word is as assisting ministers. Among these assisting ministers will be readers of Scripture and also cantors and leaders of prayer.¹¹

Application 8B Musicians serve the assembly by illuminating the readings and the sacraments, by the congregation's participation in song.

Application 8C There are varieties of ways beyond the assembly in which the public ministry of the Word is exercised. Some of these include the work of catechists, evangelists, and teachers.

¹¹ *Lutheran Book of Worship* Ministers Edition, 25. See also Principle 41.

GOD'S WORD IS PREACHED

Principle

9 The preaching of the Gospel of the crucified and risen Christ is rooted in the readings of the Scriptures in the assemblies for worship. Called and ordained ministers bear responsibility for the preached Word in the Church gathered for public worship.¹²

Application 9A Preaching is the living and contemporary voice of one who interprets in all the Scriptures the things concerning Jesus Christ.¹³ In fidelity to the readings appointed for the day, the preacher proclaims our need of God's grace and freely offers that grace, equipping the community for mission and service in daily life. "Only under extraordinary circumstances would the sermon be omitted" from the Sunday and festival service of Holy Communion.¹⁴

Application 9B While other persons may sometimes preach, the called pastor of a congregation has responsibility for this preaching, ordinarily preparing and delivering the sermon and overseeing all public ministry of the Word in the congregation. In congregations without a called pastor, the synodical bishop assumes this responsibility, often by providing an interim pastor. All Christians, however, bear responsibility to speak and teach the Gospel in daily life.

¹² See *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry. Faith and Order Paper No. 111*, (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), Ministry, 8; Augsburg Confession, Article xiv; also *The Study of Ministry Report to the 1991 Assembly: Study Edition* (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Division for Ministry, 1991).

¹³ Luke 24:27.

¹⁴ *Lutheran Book of Worship* Ministers Edition, 27.

THE COMMON VOICE OF THE ASSEMBLY SPEAKS THE WORD

Principle

10 The assembled congregation participates in proclaiming the Word of God with a common voice. It sings hymns and the texts of the liturgy. It confesses the Nicene or Apostles' Creed.¹⁵

Application 10A Hymns, the liturgy, and the creeds are means for the community itself to proclaim and respond to the Word of God.¹⁶ This witness should be valued, taught, and taken to heart. The treasury of music is ever expanding with new compositions and with songs from the churches of the world.

THE ARTS SERVE THE WORD

Principle

11 Music, the visual arts, and the environment of our worship spaces embody the proclamation of the Word in Lutheran churches.

Application 11A Music is a servant of the Gospel and a principal means of worshipping God in Lutheran churches. Congregational song gathers the whole people to proclaim God's mercy, to worship God, and to pray, in response to the readings of the day and in preparation for the Lord's Supper.

¹⁵ The Athanasian Creed is also a confession of the Church, but is rarely used in public worship.

¹⁶ Colossians 3:16.

Application 11B In similar ways the other arts also are called to serve the purposes of the Christian assembly. The visual arts and the spaces for worship assist the congregation to participate in worship, to focus on the essentials, and to embody the Gospel.

Application 11C In these times of deeper contact among cultures, our congregations do well to make respectful and hospitable use of the music, arts, and furnishings of many peoples. The Spirit of God calls people from every nation, all tribes, peoples, and languages to gather around the Gospel of Jesus Christ.¹⁷

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION PROCLAIM THE WORD

Principle

12 The Gospel also is proclaimed in Confession and Absolution (the Office of the Keys) and in the mutual conversation and consolation of the brothers and sisters.¹⁸ Our congregations are called to make faithful use of corporate and individual confession of sins and holy absolution.

Application 12A Absolution is a speaking and hearing of the Word of God and a return to Baptism. The most important part of confession and forgiveness is the “work which God does, when he absolves me of my sins through a word placed in the mouth” of a human being.¹⁹ Liturgical patterns for corporate and individual confession and forgiveness are given in Lutheran worship books.

¹⁷ Revelation 7:9.

¹⁸ Smalcald Articles, III., 4.

¹⁹ The Large Catechism, A Brief Exhortation to Confession, 15.

ON OTHER OCCASIONS CHRISTIANS ASSEMBLE AROUND THE WORD

Principle

13 Assemblies for worship are not limited to Sunday or to celebrations of Word and Sacrament. Christians gather for worship on other days of the week, for morning or evening prayer, for services of the Word or devotions, to mark local and national festivals, and for important life occasions such as weddings and funerals. Christians also gather in their own homes for prayer, Bible reading, and devotions.

Application 13A Every opportunity for worship is valued and encouraged. The communal observance of morning and evening prayer and the celebration of weddings and funerals within services of Word and Sacrament in the congregation are appropriate traditions. Morning and evening prayers and mealtime blessings in the household are also an extension of corporate worship.

PART 2

HOLY BAPTISM

and the CHRISTIAN ASSEMBLY

WHAT IS BAPTISM?

Principle

14 In Holy Baptism the Triune God delivers us from the forces of evil, puts our sinful self to death, gives us new birth, adopts us as children, and makes us members of the body of Christ, the Church. Holy Baptism is received by faith alone.

Background 14A By water and the Word in Baptism, we are liberated from sin and death by being joined to the death and resurrection of Jesus. In Baptism God seals us by the Holy Spirit and marks us with the cross of Christ forever.²⁰ Baptism inaugurates a life of discipleship in the death and resurrection of Christ. Baptism conforms us to the death and resurrection of Christ precisely so that we repent and receive forgiveness, love our neighbors, suffer for the sake of the Gospel, and witness to Christ.

Application 14B Baptism is for the sake of life in Christ and in the body of Christ, the Church. It also may be given to those who are close to death, and is a strong word of promise in spite of death. Individuals are baptized, yet this Baptism forms a community. It is for children. It is for adults. It is done once, yet it is for all of our life.

²⁰ Cf. *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, and Philadelphia: Board of Publication, Lutheran Church in America, 1978), 121, 124.

JESUS CHRIST HAS GIVEN HOLY BAPTISM

Principle

15 Baptism was given to the Church by Jesus Christ in the “great commission,” but also in his own baptism by John and in the baptism of the cross.

Background 15A One great source of the teaching and practice of the Church regarding Baptism is the “great commission”: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”²¹

Background 15B Other passages are also part of the biblical tradition of the origin and meaning of Baptism. Another source is the account of Jesus’ own baptism at the River Jordan. While Jesus is the eternal Son of God, all who are baptized into him are adopted as beloved children of God. With Jesus all the baptized are anointed by the outpoured Spirit. Because of Jesus we are, through Baptism, gathered and included in the life of the Triune God.

Background 15C In two places in the New Testament where Jesus speaks of his own baptism,²² he refers not to his being washed in the Jordan River, but to his impending death.²³ It is that death to which we are joined in Baptism, according to the witness of Paul.²⁴

²¹ Matthew 28:19–20.

²² Luke 12:50; Mark 10:38.

²³ *The Confirmation Ministry Task Force Report*, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1993, 4.

²⁴ Romans 6:3.

BAPTISM IS ONCE FOR ALL

Principle

16 A person is baptized once. Because of the unfailing nature of God's promise, and because of God's once-for-all action in Christ, Baptism is not repeated.

Background 16A Baptism is a sign and testimony of God's grace, awakening and creating faith. The faith of the one being baptized "does not constitute Baptism but receives it. . . ." "Everything depends upon the Word and commandment of God. . . ."²⁵

Application 16B "Re-baptism" is to be avoided²⁶ since it causes doubt, focusing attention on the always-failing adequacy of our action or our faith. Baptized persons who come to new depth of conviction in faith are invited to an Affirmation of Baptism in the life of the congregation.²⁷

Application 16C There may be occasions when people are uncertain about whether or not they have been baptized. Pastors, after supportive conversation and pastoral discernment, may choose to proceed with the baptism. The practice of this church and its congregations needs to incorporate the person into the community and its ongoing catechesis and to proclaim the sure grace of God in Christ, avoiding any sense of Baptism being repeated.

²⁵ The Large Catechism, Baptism, 53.

²⁶ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Baptism, 13.

²⁷ The Large Catechism, Baptism, 47–63.

BAPTISM INVOLVES DAILY DYING AND RISING

Principle

17 By God's gift and call, all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus are daily put to death so that we might be raised daily to newness of life.²⁸

Background 17A Believers are at the same time sinners and justified. We experience bondage to sin from which we cannot free ourselves and, at the same time, "rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit."²⁹ The baptismal life is expressed each time the baptized confess their sins and receive forgiveness. "Repentance, therefore, is nothing else than a return and approach to Baptism. . . ."³⁰

Application 17B There are many ways to encourage this daily dying to sin and being raised to live before God. They include confession and absolution, the reading of the Scriptures, preaching, the mutual comfort and consolation of the sisters and brothers,³¹ daily prayer and the sign of the cross, the remembrance of the catechism, and the profession of the creed.

Application 17C Christians continue in the covenant God made with them in Baptism by participation in the community of faith, by hearing the Word and receiving Christ's Supper, by proclaiming the good news in word and deed, and by striving for justice and peace in all the world.³²

²⁸ The Small Catechism, The Sacrament of Holy Baptism, part four, 12. See also Romans 6.

²⁹ Titus 3:5.

³⁰ The Large Catechism, Baptism, 75–90.

³¹ Smalcald Articles, III., 4.

³² *Lutheran Book of Worship*, 201.

BAPTISM IS FOR ALL AGES

Principle

18 God, whose grace is for all, is the one who acts in Baptism. Therefore candidates for Baptism are of all ages. Some are adults and older children who have heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ, declare their faith, and desire Holy Baptism. Others are the young or infant children of active members of the congregation or those children for whom members of the congregation assume sponsorship.

Application 18A Since ancient times, the Christian Church has baptized both infants and adults.³³ Our times require great seriousness about evangelization and readiness to welcome unbaptized adults to the reception of the faith and to Baptism into Christ. Our children also need this sign and means of grace and its continued power in their lives. In either case, Baptism is God's gift of overwhelming grace. We baptize infants as if they were adults, addressing them with questions, words, and promises that their parents, sponsors, and congregation are to help them know and believe as they grow in years. We baptize adults as if they were infants, washing them and clothing them with God's love in Christ.

³³ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Baptism, 11–12.

BAPTISM INCLUDES CATECHESIS

Principle

19 Baptism includes instruction and nurture in the faith for a life of discipleship.

Application 19A When infants and young children are baptized, the parents and sponsors receive instruction and the children are taught throughout their development. With adults and older children, the baptismal candidates themselves are given instruction and formation for faith and ministry in the world both prior to and following their baptism. The instruction and formation of sponsors, parents, and candidates prior to Baptism deals especially with faith in the triune God and with prayer. In the case of adults and older children this period of instruction and formation is called “the catechuminate.” *Occasional Services* includes an order for the enrollment of candidates for Baptism.³⁴

Application 19B The parish education of the congregation is part of its baptismal ministry. Indeed, all of the baptized require life-long learning, the daily re-appropriation of the wonderful gifts given in Baptism.

³⁴ *Occasional Services: A Companion to Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House and Philadelphia: Board of Publication, Lutheran Church in America, 1982), 13–15.

SPONSORS ASSIST THOSE BEING BAPTIZED

Principle

20 Both adults and infants benefit from having baptismal sponsors. The primary role of the sponsors is to guide and accompany the candidates and, so far as possible, their families in the process of instruction and Baptism. They help the baptized join in the life and work of the community of believers for the sake of the world.

Application 20A Congregations are encouraged to select at least one sponsor from among the congregational members for each candidate for Baptism.³⁵ Additional sponsors who are involved in the faith and life of a Christian community may also be selected by parents of the candidate or by the candidate. Choosing and preparing sponsors requires thoughtful consideration and includes participation by pastors or other congregational leaders.

Background 20B The sponsors of children are often called “godparents.” They may fulfill a variety of social roles in certain cultures. These roles may be regarded as an elaboration of the central baptismal role they have undertaken. Such sponsors take on a lifelong task to recall the gifts of Baptism in the life of their godchild.

Background 20C The sponsor provided by the congregation is, in the case of the baptism of an infant, especially concerned to accompany the family as it prepares for Baptism and, as a mentor, to assist the integration of the child into the community of faith as it grows in years. In the case of the baptism of an adult, this sponsor accompanies the candidate throughout the catechumenate, in prayer and in mutual learning, assisting the newly baptized adult to join in the ministry and mission of this community.

Application 20D The entire congregation prays for those preparing for Baptism, welcomes the newly baptized, and provides assistance to sponsors.

³⁵ *Statement on Sacramental Practices*, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, 1991.

BAPTISM TAKES PLACE IN THE ASSEMBLY

Principle

21 Candidates for Holy Baptism, sponsors, and an ordained minister called by the Church gather together with the congregation for the celebration of Baptism within the corporate worship of the Church.

Application 21A When pastoral considerations require Baptism to take place outside of corporate worship, if at all possible representatives of the congregation gather for Baptism. In such a case a public announcement of the baptism is made at the service the following Sunday.

Application 21B Baptism may take place at varying points in the worship service. When the Baptism follows the Liturgy of the Word, it helps to emphasize Baptism's connection to the promise of the Gospel and faith in that promise and leads the baptized to the altar. When infants are baptized in a service where adults are not, the Baptism may be part of the entrance rite. This emphasizes that their instruction is to follow and reminds the whole congregation of the baptismal nature of the order for Confession and Forgiveness. At the Vigil of Easter, baptisms are placed between the Service of Readings and the proclamation of the Easter texts. This helps Christians to remember their burial with Christ into death, and rising with him to new life.

A PASTOR PRESIDES AT BAPTISM

Principle

22 An ordained minister presides at Holy Baptism.³⁶

Application 22A God is the one who acts in Baptism. The pastor, congregation, candidates, and sponsors gather around the font to administer the sacrament. The pastor presides in the midst of a participating community. Ordinarily this presider is the pastor of the congregation where the Baptism is being celebrated. The pastor acts as baptizer, but does so within a congregation of the Church which actively assents and responds.

BAPTISM MAY OCCUR BEFORE AN IMMINENT DEATH

Principle

23 In cases of imminent death, a person may be baptized by any Christian. Should sudden death prevent Baptism, we commend the person to God with prayer, trusting in God's grace.

Application 23A Counsel for such a baptism at the time of imminent death may be found in *Occasional Services* and should be widely known in the Christian community.³⁷ A dead person, child or adult, is not baptized. Prayers at such a death may include naming, signing with the cross, anointing for burial, and commendation to God. Prayers and commendations may be offered in the event of a stillbirth or of the early loss of a pregnancy.

Application 23B When a person who was baptized in imminent danger of death survives, *Occasional Services* provides for a Public Recognition of the Baptism at corporate worship.³⁸

³⁶ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Baptism, 22.

³⁷ *Occasional Services* (1982), 16–22.

³⁸ *Occasional Services* (1982), 17–22.

WE BAPTIZE IN THE NAME OF THE TRIUNE GOD

Principle

24 Holy Baptism is administered with water in the name of the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Baptism into the name of the triune God involves confessing and teaching the doctrine and meaning of the Trinity. The baptized are welcomed into the body of Christ. This is the community which lives from “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit”³⁹

Background 24A The Church seeks to maintain trinitarian orthodoxy while speaking in appropriate modern language and contexts. While a worldwide ecumenical discussion is now under-way about such language, we have no other name in which to baptize than the historic and ecumenically received name.⁴⁰

Background 24B It is in the crucified Jesus that we meet the God to whom he entrusted all, who raised him from the dead for us, and who poured out the Spirit from his death and resurrection. Washing with water in this name is much more than the use of a “formula.” The name is a summary of the power and presence of the triune God and of that teaching which must accompany every Baptism. Without this teaching and without the encounter with the grace, love, and communion of the triune God, the words may be misunderstood as a magic formula or as a misrepresentation of the one God in three persons, “equal in glory, coeternal in majesty.”⁴¹ What “Father” and “Son” mean, in biblical and creedal perspective, must also be continually reexamined. The doctrine of God teaches us the surprising theology of the cross and counters “any alleged Trinitarian sanction for sinful inequality or oppression of women in church and society.”⁴²

³⁹ 2 Corinthians 13:13.

⁴⁰ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Baptism, 17.

⁴¹ Athanasian Creed.

⁴² Action of the Conference of Bishops, March 8–11, 1991, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Application 24C Some Christians, however, are received into our congregations from other churches in which they were baptized “in the name of Jesus Christ.”⁴³ There are some whose Baptisms were accompanied by trinitarian examination and confession of faith,⁴⁴ and whose Baptisms have occurred within the context of trinitarian life and teaching. We will do well to avoid quarrels over the validity of these Baptisms.

Application 24D Outside the context of trinitarian life and teaching no Christian Baptism takes place, whatever liturgical formula may be used.

⁴³ Acts 2:38.

⁴⁴ Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus, 21.

BAPTISM IS A PUBLIC SIGN

Principle

25 We seek to celebrate Baptism in such a way that the celebration is a true and complete sign of the things which Baptism signifies.⁴⁵

Background 25A “The pedagogical force of practice is considerable.”⁴⁶ A strong baptismal theology calls for a strong baptismal practice, teaching and showing forth the meaning of Baptism and inviting Christians to discover continually its importance for their daily lives. Those who plan baptisms attend to the use of faithful words and gracious actions, to including the event within the Sunday service, to the architectural or natural setting, to the regular preparation of candidates, sponsors, parents, and congregation for Baptism, to post-baptismal teaching that strengthens us for mission, and to the possibility of great festivals as times for Baptism.

Application 25B “It is appropriate to designate such occasions as the Vigil of Easter, the Day of Pentecost, All Saints’ Day, and the Baptism of Our Lord for the celebration of Holy Baptism. Baptismal celebrations on these occasions keep Baptism integrated into the unfolding of the story of salvation provided by the church year.”⁴⁷ The Vigil of Easter is an especially ancient and appropriate time for Baptism, emphasizing the origin of all baptism in Christ’s death and resurrection.

⁴⁵ Martin Luther, “The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism,” 1, in *Luther’s Works* 35:29.

⁴⁶ *The Sacrament of the Altar and Its Implications*, United Lutheran Church in America, 1960, c.5.

⁴⁷ *Lutheran Book of Worship* Ministers Edition, 30; cf. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Baptism, 23.

WATER IS USED GENEROUSLY

Principle

26 Water is a sign of cleansing, dying, and new birth.⁴⁸ It is used generously in Holy Baptism to symbolize God's power over sin and death.

Application 26A A variety of modes may be used; for example, both immersion and pouring show forth God's power in Baptism. Immersion helps to communicate the dying and rising with Christ. Pouring suggests cleansing from sin. We have taught that it is not the water which does such great things, but the Word of God connected with the water.⁴⁹ God can use whatever water we have. Yet, with Martin Luther, we wish to make full use of water, when it is possible. "For baptism . . . signifies that the old man [self] and the sinful birth of flesh and blood are to be wholly drowned by the grace of God. We should therefore do justice to its meaning and make baptism a true and complete sign of the thing it signifies."⁵⁰

A FONT IS LOCATED IN THE ASSEMBLY

Principle

27 A baptismal font filled with water, placed in the assembly's worship space, symbolizes the centrality of this sacrament for faith and life.

Application 27A As congregations are able, they may consider the creation of fonts of ample proportions filled with flowing water, or baptismal pools which could allow immersion. "The location of the font within the church building should express the idea of entrance into the community of faith, and should allow ample space for people to gather around."⁵¹

⁴⁸ *Lutheran Book of Worship*, 122.

⁴⁹ The Small Catechism, part four.

⁵⁰ Martin Luther, "The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism," 1, *Luther's Works*, 35:29.

⁵¹ *Lutheran Book of Worship* Ministers Edition, 30.

OTHER SIGNS PROCLAIM THE MEANINGS OF BAPTISM

Principle

28 The laying on of hands and prayer for the Holy Spirit's gifts, the signing with the cross, and the anointing with oil help to appropriate the breadth of meanings in Baptism. Other symbolic acts also are appropriate such as the clothing with a baptismal garment and the giving of a lighted candle.

Background 28A These interpretive signs proclaim the gifts that are given by the promise of God in Baptism itself. Some keys to their interpretation are given in the Holy Scriptures. The laying on of both hands with the prayer for the gifts of the Holy Spirit is a sign of the pouring out of the Spirit of God to empower the people of God for mission. The sign of the cross marks the Christian as united with the Crucified. The use of oil is a sign of anointing with the Spirit and of union with Jesus Christ, the anointed one of God.

BAPTISM INCORPORATES INTO THE CHURCH

Principle

29 In Baptism people become members not only of the Church universal but of a particular congregation. Therefore all baptisms are entered into the permanent records of the congregation and certificates are issued at the time of the administration of the sacrament.

Application 29A The time of the presentation of this certificate may be at the Baptism itself or at a post-baptismal visit or during post-baptismal formation. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America keeps a roster from the baptismal ministry of its military chaplains.

BAPTISM IS REPEATEDLY AFFIRMED

Principle

30 The public rite for Affirmation of Baptism may be used at many times in the life of a baptized Christian. It is especially appropriate at Confirmation and at times of reception or restoration into membership.

Application 30A “When there are changes in a Christian’s life, rites of affirmation of Baptism and intercessory prayer could mark the passage.”⁵² “Moving into a nursing home, beginning parenthood or grandparenthood, choosing or changing an occupation, moving out of the parental home, the diagnosis of a chronic illness, the end of one’s first year of mourning, the ending of a relationship, and retirement are all examples of life’s transitions that could be acknowledged by these rites.”⁵³ Other examples include adoption and the naming of an already baptized child, release from prison, reunion of an immigrant family, and new life after abuse or addiction.

Application 30B Every Baptism celebrated in the assembly is an occasion for the remembrance and renewal of baptism on the part of all the baptized. The Easter Vigil especially provides for a renewal of baptism.⁵⁴

⁵² *The Confirmation Ministry Task Force Report*, 9–10.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Lutheran Book of Worship* Ministers Edition, 152.

PART 3

HOLY COMMUNION

and the CHRISTIAN ASSEMBLY

WHAT IS HOLY COMMUNION?

Principle

31 At the table of our Lord Jesus Christ, God nourishes faith, forgives sin, and calls us to be witnesses to the Gospel.

Background 31A Here we receive Christ's body and blood and God's gifts of forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation to be received by faith for the strengthening of faith.⁵⁵

JESUS CHRIST HAS GIVEN THE HOLY COMMUNION

Principle

32 The Lord's Supper was instituted by Jesus Christ on the night of his betrayal.⁵⁶

Background 32A In numerous places in the Gospels, the early Church also recognized the eucharistic significance of other meals during Christ's ministry and after his resurrection.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ The Small Catechism, and Augsburg Confession XIII.2.

⁵⁶ Matthew 26:26–29 and parallels; 1 Corinthians 11:23–24.

⁵⁷ See, for example, Mark 6:30–52 and parallels, Luke 24:13–35.

JESUS CHRIST IS TRULY PRESENT IN THIS SACRAMENT

Principle

33 In this sacrament the crucified and risen Christ is present, giving his true body and blood as food and drink. This real presence is a mystery.

Background 33A The Augsburg Confession states: “It is taught among us that the true body and blood of Christ are really present in the Supper of our Lord under the form of bread and wine and are there distributed and received.”⁵⁸ The Apology of the Augsburg Confession adds: “We are talking about the presence of the living Christ, knowing that ‘death no longer has dominion over him.’”⁵⁹

Background 33B “The ‘how’ of Christ’s presence remains as inexplicable in the sacrament as elsewhere. It is a presence that remains ‘hidden’ even though visible media are used in the sacrament. The earthly element is . . . a fit vehicle of the divine presence and it, too, the common stuff of our daily life, participates in the new creation which has already begun.”⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Augsburg Confession, Article x.

⁵⁹ Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article xxiv.

⁶⁰ *The Sacrament of the Altar and Its Implications*, United Lutheran Church in America, 1960.

THE CELEBRATION OF HOLY COMMUNION INCLUDES BOTH WORD AND SACRAMENTAL MEAL

Principle

34 The two principal parts of the liturgy of Holy Communion, the proclamation of the Word of God and the celebration of the sacramental meal, are so intimately connected as to form one act of worship.

Application 34A Our congregations are encouraged to hold these two parts together, avoiding either a celebration of the Supper without the preceding reading of the Scriptures, preaching, and intercessory prayers or a celebration of the Supper for a few people who remain after the dismissal of the congregation from a Service of the Word. The Holy Communion is not simply appended to the offices of Morning or Evening Prayer.

Application 34B The simple order of our liturgy of Holy Communion, represented in the worship books of our church, is that which has been used by generations of Christians. We gather in song and prayer, confessing our need of God. We read the Scriptures and hear them preached. We profess our faith and pray for the world, sealing our prayers with a sign of peace. We gather an offering for the poor and for the mission of the Church. We set our table with bread and wine, give thanks and praise to God, proclaiming Jesus Christ, and eat and drink. We hear the blessing of God and are sent out in mission to the world.

THE HOLY COMMUNION IS CELEBRATED WEEKLY

Principle

35 According to the Apology of the Augsburg Confession,⁶¹ Lutheran congregations celebrate the Holy Communion every Sunday and festival. This confession remains the norm for our practice.

Background 35A The Church celebrates the Holy Communion frequently because the Church needs the sacrament, the means by which the Church's fellowship is established and its mission as the baptized people of God is nourished and sustained.⁶² This practice was reaffirmed in 1989 by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. We continue to need "consistent pastoral encouragement and instruction relating to Holy Communion . . . pointing up Christ's command, his promise, and our deep need."⁶³ For a variety of historical reasons, Lutherans in various places moved away from the weekly celebration of the sacrament.

Application 35B All of our congregations are encouraged to celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly, but not every service need be a Eucharist.

Application 35C Participation in the sacramental meal is by invitation, not demand. The members of this church are encouraged to make the sacrament a frequent rather than an occasional part of their lives.

⁶¹ Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article xxiv.

⁶² "The Grace-full Use of the Means of Grace: Theses on Worship and Worship Practices," Lutheran members of the North American Academy of Liturgy, 1994, 28.

⁶³ *A Statement on Communion Practices*, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1989, II.B.2. (Identical to 1978 statement of predecessor church bodies.)

THE HOLY COMMUNION HAS A VARIETY OF NAMES

Principle

36 A variety of names demonstrate the richness of Holy Communion. Those names include the Lord's Supper, Holy Communion, Eucharist, Mass, the Sacrament of the Altar, the Divine Liturgy, and the Divine Service.

Background 36A Each name has come to emphasize certain aspects of the sacrament. The "Lord's Supper" speaks of the meal which the risen Lord holds with the Church, the meal of the Lord's Day, a foretaste of the heavenly feast to come. "Holy Communion" accentuates the holy *koinonia* (community) established by the Holy Spirit as we encounter Christ and are formed into one body with him and so with each other. "Eucharist" calls us to see that the whole meal is a great thanksgiving for creation and for creation's redemption in Jesus Christ. "Divine Liturgy" says the celebration is a public action, carried out by a community of people. Yet, "Divine Service" helps us to see that the primary action of our gathering is God's astonishing service to us; we are called to respond in praise and in service to our neighbor. The term "Mass" is probably derived from the old dismissal of the participants at the end of the service and the sending away of the bread and the cup to the absent: it invites us into mission. "Sacrament of the Altar" invites each one to eat and drink from the true altar of God, the body and blood of Christ given and shed "for you."⁶⁴

⁶⁴ "The Grace-full Use of the Means of Grace: Theses on Worship and Worship Practices," 27.

THE HOLY COMMUNION IS GIVEN TO THE BAPTIZED

Principle

37 Admission to the Sacrament is by invitation of the Lord, presented through the Church to those who are baptized.⁶⁵

Application 37A When adults and older children are baptized, they may be communed for the first time in the service in which they are baptized. Baptismal preparation and continuing catechesis include instruction for Holy Communion.

Background 37B Customs vary on the age and circumstances for admission to the Lord's Supper. The age for communing children continues to be discussed and reviewed in our congregations. When "A Report on the Study of Confirmation and First Communion"⁶⁶ was adopted, a majority of congregations now in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America separated confirmation and reception of Holy Communion and began inviting children to commune in the fifth grade. Since that time a number of congregations have continued to lower the age of communion, especially for school age children. Although *A Statement on Communion Practices*⁶⁷ precluded the communion of infants, members and congregations have become aware of this practice in some congregations of this church, in historical studies of the early centuries of the Church, in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, and in broader ecumenical discussion.

Application 37C Baptized children begin to commune on a regular basis at a time determined through mutual conversation that includes the pastor, the child, and the parents or sponsors involved, within the accepted practices of the congregation. Ordinarily this beginning will occur only when children can eat and drink, and can start to respond to the gift of Christ in the Supper.

⁶⁵ *A Statement on Communion Practices*, 1989, II.A.2.

⁶⁶ "A Report on the Study of Confirmation and First Communion by Lutheran Congregations," Joint Lutheran Commission on the Theology and Practice of Confirmation. (Philadelphia: Lutheran Church in America, 1969).

⁶⁷ *A Statement on Communion Practices*, 1989, II.A.2.

Application 37D Infants and children may be communed for the first time during the service in which they are baptized or they may be brought to the altar during communion to receive a blessing.

Application 37E In all cases, participation in Holy Communion is accompanied by catechesis appropriate to the age of the communicant. When infants and young children are communed, the parents and sponsors receive instruction and the children are taught throughout their development.

Background 37F Catechesis, continuing throughout the life of the believer, emphasizes the sacrament as gift, given to faith by and for participation in the community. Such faith is not simply knowledge or intellectual understanding but trust in God's promises given in the Lord's Supper ("for you" and "for the forgiveness of sin") for the support of the baptized.

Application 37G When an unbaptized person comes to the table seeking Christ's presence and is inadvertently communed, neither that person nor the ministers of Communion need be ashamed. Rather, Christ's gift of love and mercy to all is praised. That person is invited to learn the faith of the Church, be baptized, and thereafter faithfully receive Holy Communion.

THE AGE OF FIRST COMMUNION MAY VARY

Principle

38 Common mission among the congregations of this church depends on mutual respect for varied practice in many areas of church life including the ages of first Communion.

Background 38A "In faithful participation in the mission of God in and through this church, congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization—as interdependent expressions of this church—shall be guided by the biblical and confessional commitments of this church. Each shall recognize

that mission efforts must be shaped by both local needs and global awareness, by both individual witness and corporate endeavor, and by both distinctly Lutheran emphases and growing ecumenical cooperation.”⁶⁸

Background 38B There is no command from our Lord regarding the age at which people should be baptized or first communed. Our practice is defined by Christ’s command (“Do this”), Christ’s twin promises of his presence for us and for our need, and the importance of good order in the Church. In all communion practices congregations strive to avoid both reducing the Lord’s Supper to an act effective by its mere performance without faith and narrowing faith to intellectual understanding of Christ’s presence and gifts. Congregations continually check their own practices and statements against these biblical and confessional guides.

Application 38C Congregations of this church may establish policies regarding the age of admission to Holy Communion. They also may grant pastoral exceptions to those policies in individual cases which honor and serve the interdependence (*koinonia*) of congregations of this church.

Application 38D Out of mutual respect among congregations, children who are communing members of a congregation of this church who move to a congregation with a different practice should be received as communing members (perhaps as a pastoral exception to the congregation’s general policy). They and their parents also should be respectful of the traditions and practices of their new congregation. Even if transferring children have received education appropriate to their age in a former parish, the new congregation’s program of instruction is also to be followed.

⁶⁸ *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, 8.16.

THE HOLY COMMUNION TAKES PLACE IN THE ASSEMBLY

Principle

39 The gathered people of God celebrate the sacrament. Holy Communion, usually celebrated within a congregation, also may be celebrated in synodical, churchwide, and other settings where the baptized gather.

Application 39A Authorization for all celebrations of Communion in a parish setting where there is a called and ordained minister of Word and Sacrament is the responsibility of the pastor in consultation with the Congregation Council.

Application 39B In established centers of this church—e.g., seminaries, colleges, retreat centers, charitable institutions, and administrative centers—authorization for the celebration of Holy Communion shall be given, either for a limited or unlimited time, by the presiding bishop of this church or, where only one synod is concerned, by the bishop of that synod.

Application 39C In institutions not formally associated with this church—e.g., hospitals, retirement homes, colleges and universities, or military bases—where there is a called pastor or chaplain, authorization for the celebration of Holy Communion rests with the pastor in consultation with the appropriate calling-sending expression of this church.⁶⁹

Background 39D The authorizing role of bishops is a sign of our interconnectedness. This church provides for ministry in many settings. Chaplains, for example, bring the means of grace to people in institutions on behalf of the whole Church.

⁶⁹ *A Statement on Communion Practices*, 1989, II.A.6. See also churchwide continuing resolution 7.44.A96 on the “Table of Sources of Calls for Ordained Ministers.”

A PASTOR PRESIDES AT THE HOLY COMMUNION

Principle

40 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.⁷⁰

Background 40A “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.”⁷¹

⁷⁰ *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, 7.61.01.

⁷¹ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Eucharist, 29.

LAY ASSISTING MINISTERS SERVE IN MANY ROLES

Principle

41 Designated and trained lay persons serve in a variety of leadership roles in the Eucharist. Among these assisting ministers will be readers, interpreters, cantors, musicians and choir members, servers of communion, acolytes, leaders of prayer, those who prepare for the meal, and those who offer hospitality.⁷²

Background 41A “The liturgy is the celebration of all who gather. Together with the pastor who presides, the entire congregation is involved. It is important, therefore, that lay persons fulfill appropriate ministries within the service.”⁷³

PREPARATION IS RECOMMENDED

Principle

42 Forms of preparation for Holy Communion focus the community of faith both on the breadth of creation’s need for redemption and the depth of God’s redemptive actions. Such forms of preparation are recommended, but not required, for that person “is worthy and well prepared who believes these words, ‘for you’ and ‘for the forgiveness of sins.’”⁷⁴

Application 42A Opportunities for corporate and individual confession and absolution, including the use of the Brief Order for Confession and Forgiveness, are especially appropriate. Helpful forms of personal preparation may include self-examination, prayer, fasting, meditation, and reconciliation with others through the exchange of peace.

⁷² See also Application 8A.

⁷³ *Lutheran Book of Worship* Ministers Edition, 25.

⁷⁴ The Small Catechism, Article vi. Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VII., 68–69.

Background 42B In considering preparation for Holy Communion many people in our congregations have turned for counsel to Paul's admonition to the Corinthians: "Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For all who eat and drink without discerning the body eat and drink judgment against themselves."⁷⁵ Paul's words are addressed to those in the community who are eating and drinking while excluding from the meal others who belong to Christ. "Do you show contempt for the church of God," he says, "and humiliate those who have nothing?"⁷⁶ The body that Christians need to discern is the body of Christ which is the Church⁷⁷ and that is the body which is being ignored by the exclusions in Corinth.

THE HOLY COMMUNION IS CONSECRATED BY THE WORD OF GOD AND PRAYER

Principle

43 The biblical words of institution declare God's action and invitation. They are set within the context of the Great Thanksgiving. This eucharistic prayer proclaims and celebrates the gracious work of God in creation, redemption, and sanctification.

Application 43A Our worship books provide several options for giving thanks at the table of the Lord. All of them begin with the dialogue of invitation to thanksgiving and conclude with the Lord's Prayer. Most of them include the preface and the Sanctus after the dialogue. Many continue with an evangelical form of the historic prayer after the Sanctus. The full action, from dialogue through the Lord's Prayer, including the proclamation of the words of institution, is called the "Great Thanksgiving." Our congregations, synods, and churchwide organization are encouraged to use these patterns of thanksgiving.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ 1 Corinthians 11:28–29.

⁷⁶ 1 Corinthians 11:22.

⁷⁷ 1 Corinthians 12.

⁷⁸ Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article xxiv., 76.

BREAD AND WINE ARE USED

Principle

44 In accordance with the words of institution, this church uses bread and wine in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Communicants normally receive both elements, bread and wine, in the Holy Communion.

Application 44A A loaf of bread and a chalice are encouraged since they signify the unity which the sacrament bestows. The bread may be leavened or unleavened. The wine may be white or red.

Background 44B The use of leavened bread is the most ancient attested practice of the Church and gives witness to the connection between the Eucharist and ordinary life. Unleavened bread underscores the Passover themes which are present in the biblical accounts of the Last Supper.

Application 44C For pressing reasons of health, individuals may commune under one element. In certain circumstances, congregations might decide to place small amounts of non-wheat bread or non-alcoholic wine or grape juice on the altar. Such pastoral and congregational decisions are delicate, and must honor both the tradition of the Church and the people of each local assembly.

Background 44D Some communicants suffer from allergic reactions or are recovering from alcoholism. As suggested by the 1989 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America *A Statement on Communion Practices*,⁷⁹ it is appropriate for them to receive only one of the elements. Their pastor may assure them that the crucified and risen Christ is fully present for them in, with, and under this one element. While our confessions speak against Communion "in one form,"⁸⁰ their intent is to protest the practice of withholding the cup from the whole assembly. The confessional concern is to make both the bread and the wine of the sacrament available to the faithful, and not to inhibit them.

⁷⁹ *A Statement on Communion Practices*, 1989, II.C.3.

⁸⁰ See Smalcald Articles, III., 6.

COMMUNION PRACTICES REFLECT UNITY AND DIGNITY

Principle

45 Practices of distributing and receiving Holy Communion reflect the unity of the Body of Christ and the dignity and new life of the baptized.

Application 45A The promise of Christ is spoken to each communicant by those distributing the Sacrament: “The Body of Christ given for you;” “The Blood of Christ shed for you.” Ordinarily the bread is placed in the communicant’s hand and the chalice is guided by the communicant or carefully poured by the minister of communion.

Application 45B Continuous communion of the whole congregation, with the post-communion blessing given after all have communed, underscores the aspects of fellowship and unity in the sacrament. Either standing or kneeling is appropriate when receiving Communion.⁸¹ Ministers of Communion will need to facilitate the communion of those who have difficulty moving, kneeling, standing, holding the bread, or guiding the chalice.

Application 45C Common devotion during the distribution of Communion is served both by music and by silence.

⁸¹ *A Statement on Communion Practices*, 1989, II.C.3.

LEADERS COMMUNE AT EACH SERVICE

Principle

46 As a sign of unity, and out of their own need for grace, the presiding minister and assisting ministers may commune at each Eucharist.

Application 46A “It is appropriate within the Lutheran tradition that the presiding minister commune himself/herself or receive the Sacrament from an assistant.”⁸² This reception may be before or after the congregation communes.

THE BREAD AND WINE ARE HANDLED WITH REVERENCE

Principle

47 The bread and wine of Communion are handled with care and reverence, out of a sense of the value both of what has been set apart by the Word as a bearer of the presence of Christ and of God’s good creation.

Application 47A The food needed for the sacramental meal is placed on the table before the Great Thanksgiving. This is done so that the gathered assembly may see the full sign of the food it is to share, and so that we may give thanks and proclaim God’s promise in conjunction with the use of this very bread and wine. Nonetheless, in the rare event that more of either element is needed during distribution, it is not necessary to repeat the words of institution.⁸³

Application 47B Any food that remains is best consumed by the presiding and assisting ministers and by others present following the service.

⁸² *A Statement on Communion Practices*, 1989, II.C.3.

⁸³ *A Statement on Communion Practices*, 1989, II.C.2.

CONGREGATIONS PROVIDE COMMUNION FOR THE ABSENT

Principle

48 Congregations provide for communion of the sick, homebound, and imprisoned.

Application 48A *Occasional Services* provides an order for the Distribution of Communion to Those in Special Circumstances. As an extension of the Sunday worship, the servers of Communion take the elements to those unable to attend.⁸⁴

Application 48B When pastors celebrate a service of Word and Sacrament in a home, hospital, or other institution, the corporate nature of the gift is strengthened by including others from the congregation. *Occasional Services* provides an order for the Celebration of Holy Communion with Those in Special Circumstances.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ *Occasional Services* (1982), 76–82.

⁸⁵ *Occasional Services* (1982), 83–88.

WE PRACTICE EUCHARISTIC HOSPITALITY

Principle

49 Believing in the real presence of Christ, this church practices eucharistic hospitality. All baptized persons are welcomed to Communion when they are visiting in the congregations of this church.

Application 49A Admission to the sacrament is by invitation of the Lord, presented through the Church to those who are baptized.⁸⁶ It is a sign of hospitality to provide a brief written or oral statement in worship which teaches Christ's presence in the sacrament. This assists guests to decide whether they wish to accept the Lord's invitation. In the exercise of this hospitality, it is wise for our congregations to be sensitive to the eucharistic practices of the churches from which visitors may come.

Application 49B When a wedding or a funeral occurs during a service of Holy Communion, communion is offered to all baptized persons.

⁸⁶ *A Statement on Communion Practices*, 1989, II.A.2.

LUTHERANS LONG FOR UNITY AT CHRIST'S TABLE

Principle

50 Because of the universal nature of the Church, Lutherans may participate in the eucharistic services of other Christian churches.

Background 50A This church's ongoing ecumenical dialogues continue to seek full communion with other Christian churches.

Application 50B When visiting other churches Lutherans should respect the practices of the host congregation. A conscientious decision whether or not to commune in another church is informed by the Lutheran understanding of the Gospel preached and the sacraments administered as Christ's gift.

Application 50C For Lutheran clergy to be involved as presiding or assisting ministers in the celebration of Holy Communion in other churches, a reciprocal relationship between the denominations involved should prevail.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ *A Statement on Communion Practices*, 1989, II.A.7.



PART FOUR

THE MEANS *of* GRACE
and CHRISTIAN MISSION

THE MEANS OF GRACE LEAD THE CHURCH TO MISSION

Principle

51 In every celebration of the means of grace, God acts to show forth both the need of the world and the truth of the Gospel. In every gathering of Christians around the proclaimed Word and the holy sacraments, God acts to empower the Church for mission. Jesus Christ, who is God's living bread come down from heaven, has given his flesh to be the life of the world.⁸⁸ This very flesh, given for the life of all, is encountered in the Word and sacraments.

Background 51A Baptism and baptismal catechesis join the baptized to the mission of Christ. Confession and absolution continually reconcile the baptized to the mission of Christ. Assembly itself, when that assembly is an open invitation to all peoples to gather around the truth and presence of Jesus Christ, is a witness in the world. The regular proclamation of both Law and Gospel, in Scripture reading and in preaching, tells the truth about life and death in all the world, calls us to faith in the life-giving God, and equips the believers for witness and service. Intercessory prayer makes mention of the needs of all the world and of all the Church in mission. When a collection is received, it is intended for the support of mission and for the concrete needs of our neighbors who are sick, hurt, and hungry. The holy Supper both feeds us with the body and blood of Christ and awakens our care for the hungry ones of the earth. The dismissal from the service sends us in thanksgiving from what we have seen in God's holy gifts to service in God's beloved world.

Application 51B In the teaching and practice of congregations, the missional intention for the means of grace needs to be recalled. By God's gift, the Word and the sacraments are set in the midst of the world, for the life of the world.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ John 6:51.

⁸⁹ John 1:14; Matthew 28:19; John 10:10.

BAPTISM COMES TO EXPRESSION IN CHRISTIAN VOCATION

Principle

52 Christians profess baptismal faith as they engage in discipleship in the world. God calls Christians to use their various vocations and ministries to witness to the Gospel of Christ wherever they serve or work.

Background 52A “As baptized people, we see our daily life as a place to carry out our vocation, our calling. All aspects of life, home and school, community and nation, daily work and leisure, citizenship and friendship, belong to God. All are places where God calls us to serve. God’s Word and the church help us to discover ways to carry out our calling.”⁹⁰

Application 52B Teaching about vocation and opportunities for witness and service play an important role in the preparation of adults for Baptism and in post-baptismal catechesis for both adults and children.

⁹⁰ *The Confirmation Ministry Task Force Report*, 5; *Together for Ministry: Final Report and Recommendations of the Task Force on the Study of Ministry*, 1993, 15–16.

THE WORD OF GOD LEADS CHRISTIANS TO LIVED PRAYER

Principle

53 Because of the living Word of God, Christian assemblies for worship are occasions for intercessory prayer. On the grounds of the Word and promise of God the Church prays, in the power of the Spirit and in the name of Jesus Christ, for all the great needs of the world.

Application 53A Intercessory prayer is one of the ways that Christians exercise the priesthood of all the baptized. In the Sunday service, such prayer is appropriately led by a lay assisting minister. This prayer is also lived. Christians are called and empowered by the triune God to be a presence of faith, hope, and love in the midst of the needs of the community and the world.

THE HOLY COMMUNION STRENGTHENS US TO WITNESS AND TO WORK FOR JUSTICE

Principle

54 As a means of grace Holy Communion is that messianic banquet at which God bestows mercy and forgiveness, creates and strengthens faith for our daily work and ministry in the world, draws us to long for the day of God's manifest justice in all the world, and provides a sure and certain hope of the coming resurrection to eternal life.

Background 54A Christian eschatology, the teaching that God has an intention and a goal for all the beloved created universe, belongs to the celebration of Holy Communion and to the catechesis of all communicants. This Supper forms the Church, as a community, to bear witness in the world. Our need to be nourished and sustained in this mission is one principal reason for the frequent celebration of the sacrament.

Application 54B “When you have partaken of this sacrament, therefore, or desire to partake of it, you must in turn share the misfortunes of the fellowship, . . . Here your heart must go out in love and learn that this is a sacrament of love. As love and support are given to you, you in turn must render love and support to Christ in his needy ones. You must feel with sorrow all the dishonor done to Christ in his holy Word, all the misery of Christendom, all the unjust suffering of the innocent, with which the world is everywhere filled to overflowing. You must fight, work, pray, and—if you cannot do more—have heartfelt sympathy. . . . It is Christ's will, then, that we partake of it frequently, in order that we may remember him and exercise ourselves in this fellowship according to his example.”⁹¹

⁹¹ Martin Luther, “The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ, and the Brotherhoods,” 9,12. *Luther's Works*, 35:54, 56–57.

STUDY HELPS

NOTE TO THE LEADER

As leader, you play an important role in this study. A study leader will be responsible to plan the sessions, make sure resources are available to participants, guide the discussion in order to cover the material, encourage participation by all, help summarize learning, and help to carry through on any possible actions that may arise from your study. You do not need to be a pastor or church professional to lead this study, but some previous study of Word and Sacrament will be helpful.

PURPOSE OF YOUR STUDY

The goal of your study should be three-fold:

1. To help those who study understand the principles that are a part of the statement, including the background and applications of the principles.
2. To help those who study think through their own understanding, appreciation, and use of the means of grace within their congregational setting.
3. To help students compare local congregational practices with the principles in the statement and suggest possible changes that might enrich the sacramental life of the congregation.

NOTE Any suggestions for changes in the worship life of the congregation that result from this study should be forwarded to the congregation's Worship Committee, if such a committee exists, or to the Congregation Council for possible action.

CAUTION Any suggestions to change the manner in which a congregation worships may be seen as a threat by some. Many people treasure the comfortable repetition that worship often becomes in worshipping communities. Assure all that the purpose of the study is not to institute wholesale changes

in how the congregation goes about its worship. The changes that may be suggested would be done only after careful study and with the consent and cooperation of all of the members.

AUDIENCE

The statement is meant to enrich the sacramental life of ELCA congregations. In order to accomplish that task, groups of individuals in congregations need to come together to study the statement and to think through its implications for the congregation. Any group of youth and/or adults in the congregation would benefit from a study of the statement. The most productive study, however, might be done by those who have responsibility for the worship life of the congregation—a Worship Committee, the Congregation Council, the Altar Guild, etc.

PREPARATION

Be sure you have a copy of the statement for each participant. Making these available before your first session and encouraging all to read through the statement ahead of time can enrich your discussion.

You might assign one person to lead opening and closing prayers or worship.

You might assign a set or group of principles to individual participants (or participants working in pairs). Encourage participants to become as familiar as possible with the principles they have been assigned. They might do additional research on the principles, write or summarize the principles in their own words, interview people in the congregation about the principles, write discussion questions relating to the principles, or bring someone who is an “expert” in the area that the principles cover to your class session.

Invite the pastor, the congregation’s director of music, or others who could enrich your discussion, especially during specific sessions.

Be sure to include children and or young people in your discussions.

Be sure to include some who have a long history in the Lutheran church or in your congregation. Their memories can enrich your discussion.

SESSION PLANS

The statement is made up of fifty-four principles divided into four major parts. You should first read over the whole statement and mark those principles that seem most relevant to your congregation. Your choices will help you plan how to go about your study.

Decide how many sessions you will be able to dedicate to this study. You might, for example, decide on four one-hour sessions. In that case you might study one part at each session. The parts, however, are not equal in length or complexity. You may find that trying to deal with all of the principles in Parts 2 and 3 may be difficult in single sessions.

You might give copies of the statement to those who will attend your study sessions. Ask them to read through the entire statement before your first session. Suggest that as they read, they mark those principles that they feel are most important to them or to your congregation. At your first session, list all of the principles that have caught the interest or concern of participants. Make it a point then to read through and discuss all of these during your sessions together.

DOING A SESSION

You might follow this pattern for each of your study sessions.

BEGIN WITH PRAYER

READ

Read through principles that you have determined will be a part of your study during the session. You might read them aloud or ask those who may have read them ahead of time to summarize the principles and the background and applications. Note questions or comments that come from participants as you read.

REFLECT

Ask participants to share what comes to mind from their own experience as you did the reading of the principles. Encourage them to tell personal stories of how they were involved in the actions indicated by the principles. For example, when you read principle 20, ask those who are willing to share their own experience with their sponsors or godparents or their experience in serving in that role. Or when you read principle 38, ask those who are willing to share their memories of their own first communion. The purpose of this section is to help participants reflect on the statement in terms of their own faith life and practice.

DISCUSS

Move through the principles you have chosen for your session one at a time.

Read over the principles again and talk about it. Use questions that may come from the group or questions you have prepared ahead of time.

If you have assigned the principles to participants to research, ask those who may have done some independent study to share their discoveries and their discussion questions.

Ask the pastor or another visiting expert to comment.

Encourage participants to state the principle in their own words in order to be sure that all understand.

Take time to deal with questions or concerns that may remain for some participants.

EVALUATE

After your discussion of each principle, or toward the end of your session, be sure to think through the implications of the principles you have been discussing for the worship life of your congregation. For example, you might talk about what it would mean to have communion at every Sunday worship service; what changes would be needed if younger children were to be communed; what training might be needed in order to involve more people in leading Sunday worship, and so forth. Keep your discussion as practical as possible.

VISION

You might end each session with a time for participants to project into the future what some of the enrichments of worship you have talked about might mean for the worship life of the congregation or their own worship life. Encourage them to be as specific as possible. For example, what would it mean for the congregation to commune children at first grade? And what would that mean for their own faith life or practice?

CLOSE WITH PRAYER OR WORSHIP