

# **Advisory Opinion**

## **Who May Preside at the Celebration of the Sacraments?**

“Who may preside at the celebration of the Sacraments?” So begins a phone conversation about once a month coming into the Department of Constitutional Services.

### **Sacraments:**

The Sacraments, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are central in our response as a church to the good news of Jesus Christ.

#### **W-1.0106 : Word and Sacrament**

In Christian worship Jesus Christ is truly present and active among us, by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the gifts of Word and Sacrament. Wherever the Scriptures are read and proclaimed and the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper are celebrated, the Church bears witness to Jesus Christ, the living Word, and proclaims the mystery of faith. Through these means of grace, God imparts and sustains our faith, orders our common life, and transforms the world. Through these same acts of worship, we share in the life of the Spirit, are united to Jesus Christ, and give glory to God.

#### **W-1.0107 : Worship and the Church**

God's gifts of Word and Sacrament establish and equip the Church as the body of Christ in the world. The mission of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church flows from Baptism, is nourished at Lord's Supper, and serves to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to all. In the same way, the Church's ministry emerges from the font, arises from the table, and takes its shape from the Word of the Lord. Therefore the worship of the triune God is the center of our common life and our primary way of witness to the faith, hope, and love we have in Jesus Christ.

To be a Christian is to worship Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. To be a member of Christ's body, the Church, is to share through Word and Sacrament in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit.

### **A. MINISTERS OF THE WORD AND SACRAMENT**

The Form of Government and the Directory for Worship together identify those persons within the denomination who are authorized to administer the Sacraments and those councils which may authorize individuals to administer the Sacraments.

The starting point is located at G-2.0501 which describes that Ministers of Word and Sacrament (also called teaching elders and pastors) shall in all things be committed to teaching the faith in word and deed

and equipping the saints for the work of ministry (Eph. 4:12). They may serve in a variety of ministries, as authorized by the presbytery. ... When they serve at font and table, they shall interpret and 'show forth' the mysteries of grace in word and action, lifting the people's vision toward the hope of God's new creation.

#### *Lord's Supper Authorized by Session*

W-3.0410 sets forth that "The Lord's Supper shall be authorized by the session and administered by a minister of the Word and Sacrament...."

The session may authorize the celebration of the Lord's Supper at events other than the Service for the Lord's Day, including services of Christian marriage, ordination and installation, services of wholeness, ministry to the sick, and services of witness to the resurrection. At all such events, the Word is to be read and proclaimed. When the Lord's Supper takes place apart from public worship, the congregation shall be represented by one or more members."

W-3.0401, W-3.0402-W-3.0408 (baptism) and W-3.0409-W-3.0415 (Lord's Supper)

#### *Lord's Supper Authorized by Presbytery, Synod or General Assembly*

It is also clear that a council other than a session may authorize the celebration of the Lord's Supper in other contexts beyond the congregational setting.

G-3.0301 b. This responsibility [of the presbytery] shall include authorizing the celebration of the Lord's Supper at its meetings at least annually and for fellowship groups, new church developments, and other non-congregational entities meeting within its bounds.

W-3.0410 A council may authorize the celebration of the Lord's Supper in certain contexts beyond the congregational setting, such as hospitals, prisons, schools, military bases, or other ministry settings (G-3.02, G-3.03)

#### *Baptism Authorized by Session*

W-3.0403 Baptism shall be authorized by the session and administered by a minister of the Word and Sacrament. The session's responsibilities for Baptism include: encouraging parents (or those exercising parental responsibility) to present their children for Baptism without undue haste or undue delay; encouraging new believers to be baptized; examining candidates for Baptism, or their parents, and instructing them in the significance of the Sacrament; enrolling those who are baptized as members of the congregation; and providing for their ongoing nurture and formation for baptismal life in the world. The congregation as a whole, on behalf of the universal Church, is responsible for nurturing baptized persons in Christian life. The session may designate certain members of the congregation as sponsors or mentors for those who are baptized or for their parents.

### *Baptism authorized by Presbytery, Synod or General Assembly*

A council may authorize a Baptism, to be administered by a minister of the Word and Sacrament†, in certain situations beyond the congregational setting, such as hospitals, prisons, schools, military bases, or other ministry settings. In these cases, the minister of the Word and Sacrament† is responsible for ensuring that the name of the newly baptized person is placed on the appropriate roll of a council (G-3.02, G-3.03).

## **Non-PC(USA) Ministers**

### *Formula of Agreement Ministers of Word and Sacrament*

Ministers of Word and Sacrament from denominations with which we are in approved agreement through Formula of Agreement, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Reformed Church in America, and the United Church of Christ. we “recognize each other's Baptism and authorize and encourage the sharing of the Lord’s Supper among their members.”

### *Ministers of Word and Sacrament from other Christian denominations*

A presbytery may also offer temporary membership for a minister of another Christian denomination who is serving a validated ministry or installed relationship under the Formula of Agreement when the minister has satisfied the requirements of preparation for such service established by the presbytery’s own rule. It has been understood that this preparation includes the proper training for understanding the Sacraments including Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. All minister members (temporary or full membership) are able to perform the sacraments. So, it is important that the requirements of preparation are full and include preparation for presiding over the sacraments.

That leaves the question whether Ministers of Word and Sacrament from other Christian denominations who have not been granted temporary membership in a presbytery with the preparation required for temporary membership are allowed to celebrate the Sacraments within Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) congregations or councils. There is no clear Authoritative Interpretation for this question. Since the Formula of Agreement is about those denominations with whom the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is in full communion, this office would suggest that Ministers of Word and Sacrament from other Christian denominations than those with whom the Presbyterian Church (U.S. A.) is in full communion would have to be prepared by the presbytery established by rule in order to be authorized by the presbytery to be eligible to then be authorized by a session to administer the Sacraments.

## **B. RULING ELDERS**

### *Lord’s Supper*

Similar to Ministers of Word and Sacrament from other Christian denominations, the Form of Government and the Directory for Worship empowers a presbytery to authorize and train ruling elders to administer or preside over the Lord’s Supper in the event of the absence of pastors (W-4.0101) or when the presbytery deems it necessary to meet the needs for the administration of the Sacrament . (G-

3.0301b). The key to the authorization is making sure that the ruling elders are prepared through training to understand the meaning of the Lord's Supper.

### *Baptism*

W-3.0402 tells that Baptism is the sign and seal of our incorporation into Jesus Christ... Baptism enacts and seals what the Word proclaims: God's redeeming grace offered to all people. Baptism is at once God's gift of grace, God's means of grace, and God's call to respond to that grace. Through Baptism, Jesus Christ calls us to repentance, faithfulness, and discipleship. Through Baptism, the Holy Spirit gives the Church its identity and commissions the Church for service in the world.

W-3.0403 is clear that Baptism shall be authorized by the session and administered by a minister of the Word and Sacrament.

There is not a corresponding section which empowers a presbytery to authorize a ruling elder to administer the sacraments.

It is possible for a presbytery to commission a ruling elder to a specific pastoral service to one or more validated ministries which includes the authorization to administer the Sacraments (including Baptism) and administering a marriage ceremony after the presbytery determines that its strategy for mission first determines it and the presbytery shall prepare, instruct and examine as appropriate for the particular commission. G-2.1001 and G-2.1002. The presbytery supervises the commissioned ruling elder and assigns a Minister of Word and Sacrament as a mentor and supervisor.

## **C. INQUIRERS AND CANDIDATES FOR MINISTRY**

Only inquirers or candidates for ministry under G-2.0606 who are ruling elders may be authorized by the presbytery where they are engaged in candidacy to administer the Lord's Supper (G-3.0103b) and only those who have been previously commissioned for particular pastoral service (G-2.0) may be authorized and commissioned to administer the Baptism.

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