

**Policy and Practice Regarding
Word and Sacrament Ministry
When a Regularly Called Pastor is Not Present**
December 2008

Normal Practice

As a point of departure, normal practice is considered to be that the people of a particular worshipping community will gather around the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the sacraments at least once each week with the regularly called pastor(s) of that community preaching and presiding. The form of this worship broadly follows the rite of:

Gathering
Word (readings and preaching)
Meal
Sending

This does not imply, however, that every worship service of the community must be Eucharistic or that every worship service must be a preaching office. It is common and ordinary for the people of God to gather for prayer offices that contain neither preaching nor celebration of the sacraments. It is common for the people of God to gather in some form of the service of the Word which includes preaching but no meal. Small groups of Christians regularly worship with simple prayer and scripture reading rituals, commonly known as “devotions.”

When a Regularly Called Pastor is Not Present

In the absence of a regularly called pastor, the following options are available to congregations in descending order of preference:

1. If the absence of a regularly called pastor from the ELCA roster is expected to last for three months or more, the congregation should consult the Office of the Bishop to find a qualified **interim pastor** who can be appointed by the bishop or called by the synod council to serve the congregation on a regular basis while a new regularly called pastor is sought.
2. If the absence of a regularly called pastor from the ELCA roster is short-term or if the congregation is unable to afford reasonable compensation for either a regularly called pastor or an interim pastor, the congregation may invite pastors to stand in on a week-by-week basis as **pulpit supply pastors**. A list of pastors available for pulpit supply is available on the synod Web site along with suggested honoraria for pastors fulfilling this role.
3. In the event that no pastor on the ELCA roster is available to serve as either an interim pastor or a pulpit supply pastor, **pastors in good standing on the roster of one of our full communion partners** may serve in one of these roles. Before contracting with a non-ELCA pastor, the congregation president must consult with the Office of the Bishop to make sure that the pastor in question is in good standing with his/her denomination. The ELCA presently has full communion partnerships with:
 - a. The Episcopal Church, USA
 - b. The Reformed Church of America
 - c. The Presbyterian Church, USA
 - d. The United Church of Christ
 - e. The Moravian Church

4. In the event that no pastor from any of these rosters is available, the congregation may contract with a lay leader to lead worship. Non-ordained leaders will be expected to lead **non-eucharistic** worship services only, and they must, minimally, be endorsed in a candidacy process for professional leadership in the church. They must also have satisfactorily completed at least one seminary course in preaching.

Such lay leaders may be drawn from the following lists:

- a. Rostered Diaconal Ministers of the ELCA
- b. Rostered Associates in Ministry of the ELCA
- c. ELCA seminary students who have been endorsed by the synod ministry committee of their home synod and who have either completed parish internship or who are currently serving as parish interns

Because these lay leaders are expected to lead prayer offices and services of the Word only, a congregation led in this way must at the very least have an ordained pulpit supply pastor lead worship once per month so that the sacraments can be offered.

Inappropriate Practice

1. It is inappropriate for those who have not been properly called and ordained as Ministers of Word and Sacrament to preside at the table or to conduct non-emergency baptisms.
2. It is inappropriate for congregations to offer the sacraments less frequently than once each month.
3. It is inappropriate for ordained pastors to consecrate, privately, large amounts of “reserve sacrament” to be distributed at some other time by a non-ordained person. This practice attributes a magical power to the ordained that is totally inconsistent with the Lutheran theological point of view. The consecration of the elements is a function of the gathered people of God with the ordained minister functioning on behalf of and in the presence of the assembly:
 - a. Publicly consecrated elements may be carried by appointed individuals from the assembly to those unable to attend the worship of the whole assembly.
 - b. Under situations of duress, emergency, or incapacity, ordained pastors may consecrate the elements in a private communion service on behalf of the community.
 - c. Lay ministers who feel personally called or compelled to include sacramental ministry in their work are expected to enter the candidacy process to be called and ordained by the Church as ministers of Word and Sacrament.

Exceptions

Because no policy can foresee every contingency for a reasonable pastoral response to the missional needs of the people of God, congregations, ministers or pastors who have a carefully formulated reason to diverge from this policy may appeal directly to the Executive Committee of the Synod Council for an exception.

Included with this policy is a form for such an appeal which must be submitted in advance of a regular quarterly meeting of the Executive Committee. The schedule of these meetings may be obtained by calling the bishop’s executive assistant.

**Application to the Executive Committee
For Extraordinary Parish Leadership**

Name of Congregation:

Person(s) Applying for the Exception:

Please briefly describe the exception to normal practice that you are requesting:

Are there particular reasons why your needs cannot be met by the existing policy and practice?

How long to you expect to need the exception to continue?

Date the request was received by the synod office:

Executive Committee Decision: