



May 2024

Dear Friends in Christ,

The apostle Peter wrote that Christians are a “royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9). That means that we live in the world as God’s representatives. We speak for God to the world. And we speak for the world in prayer to God. It also means that we are priests for one another. I speak God’s Word to you and you speak God’s Word to me. I pray for you and you pray for me.

Martin Luther called this the “priesthood of all believers.” Before Luther, most Christians believed that the Church was made up of a hierarchy of bishops, priests, deacons, and just plain old lay Christians. But Luther argued -- based on the New Testament -- that the office of ministry does not create a hierarchy. The office of ministry is an office that holds people responsible for shepherding the Church in the work of ministry. In Lutheran churches, we don’t call our pastors “priests” because we are all priests for each other. The job of the pastor is not to do the work of ministry in place of lay people. Instead, pastors lead and guide and equip the whole Church to do ministry together.

Still, some Lutheran churches have insisted that only ordained pastors should preside at Communion. Lutherans have also insisted that only ordained pastors should baptize except in the case of an emergency.

LCMC (Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ), however, says that we are free in Christ. We recognize that pastors have no special power to make sacraments work (as in the Roman Church). And so, in LCMC, you will occasionally see lay people preaching, presiding at Communion, and baptizing. We expect that a trained and ordained pastor will be supervising, but we are free to act as the priesthood of all believers.

The Roman Church taught that the power to make Christ present in the sacrament of Communion was in the priest through the sacrament of his ordination. Luther, on the other hand, argued that what makes Christ present in the sacrament is the proclamation of Jesus’ promise received by faith.

The Roman Church today says that Jesus isn’t really present in a Lutheran celebration of Communion because we don’t have priests ordained in the pope’s hierarchy. We Lutherans say that Jesus is certainly present in Communion whenever and wherever Jesus’ promise is proclaimed and trusted. It is the word and not the worker who makes Communion and Baptism real.

One of the things I love about LCMC is that we allow lay people to participate in sharing the sacraments of Baptism and Communion. We don’t have to get special permission from a bishop who doesn’t know who we are. We trust local pastors to make sure that the sacraments are shared rightly. And so just as we trust lay people to preach the gospel, we also trust lay people to preside at Communion and Baptism. After all, which is harder, to preach a Biblical and evangelical sermon, or to follow the liturgy of Baptism or Communion?

I have always thought it would be wonderful for parents to be able to be the ones to baptize their own children under the training and supervision of the pastor. Why not? It is not the faith or the piety or the wisdom of the pastor that makes baptism real. It is the promise of God’s Word. So in the future, if you are bringing your child to the Church for the gift of baptism and if you are interested in participating in the actual rite of Baptism for your child, let me know. We will work together to see that your child is baptized into Christ and that you can have a hand in it.

Yours in Christ, *Phil Nielsen*