

Your Voice # 19: 15.05.2024

Worthy Sacraments

By Roger Whittall ThD

Dear Lutheran Members,

I share your concern over the suggestion that for Lutherans the identity of the minister is a critical factor in the sacrament of holy communion, so that (for example), uncertainty surrounds the reception of communion from a woman pastor. Do I really receive Christ's body and blood, from someone whose ordained status is under question?

This idea has no basis in authentic Lutheran teaching, as key statements from our Lutheran Confessions make clear. In the *Small Catechism*, Luther teaches that what is essential in the Lord's Supper is the effective word of God's promise, so that the bread and wine are received in faith as the gifts of Christ's body and blood given and shed "for me". As in holy baptism, God's word of promise is the critical factor, with no mention of the person administering the sacrament. The *Augsburg Confession* explores exactly this question when – seeking to distance Lutheran teachers from the heretics who taught that the false character of the minister invalidates the sacraments – the confession states that "the sacraments are efficacious even if the priests who administer them are wicked men" (Article 8:2). Today, pastors are people entrusted with the church's God-given ministry of the word and sacraments, being trained, chosen and appointed ("ordained") to publicly serve God's people. We can be certain that *whoever the church calls to this service* does so as one through whom we receive Christ's unique gifts, the "forgiveness of sins, life and salvation" (*Small Catechism* 6:8).

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