



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Worship Formation & Liturgical Resources: Frequently Asked Questions

Where do we keep sacramental elements?

The worship staff receives a number of similar inquiries on worship-related topics from across the church.

These responses should not be considered the final word on the topic, but useful guides that are to be considered in respect to local context with pastoral sensitivity.

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In the early church and continuing to this day, Christians have sent the bread that was left from the Holy Communion to those who could not be present. Over time, the manner in which such bread was reserved has evolved in different ways (For such history, See *From Age to Age* in Resources).

Some Lutheran congregations keep sacramental bread and wine on a credence table or a shelf to be distributed to the sick and homebound. A small number of Lutheran congregations have an aumbry, a box attached to the wall on one side of the altar to house the reserved sacrament. Some maintain the practice of placing a clear encased light near the eucharistic elements.

There is no official Lutheran position on the practice of placing a clear encased light near the sacramental elements intended for distribution to the sick and homebound. Lutheran theology does affirm the real presence of Christ in the sacrament and the practice of keeping sacramental elements to commune the sick and homebound. Lutheran congregations that decide to maintain a clear encased light near the elements do so to honor or mark the area where the sacramental elements are kept, not to "worship" the elements. Such a light, however, could be confused with a continually lit lamp that hangs in some sanctuaries, often in proximity to the Eucharistic elements. (See ["What is a sanctuary lamp?"](#))

Reserving Eucharistic Elements

While reserving the elements is an important way to commune the sick and homebound, it is recommended that these be placed in a space other than the sanctuary (see also, ["How Can We Provide for Communion of the Ill, Homebound and Imprisoned?"](#)).

Current Lutheran design philosophy, like that of the Roman Catholics, affirms that the worship space is for the gathering of God's people around Word and Sacrament. The primary symbols in the worship space are the table (altar), the ambo (lectern/pulpit), the baptismal pool/font (with paschal candle), and the people gathered themselves. Other

symbolic furniture, including aumbry or containers for the sacrament (with or without accompanying lights) are best placed in a separate chapel or in the sacristy.

If there is more bread than is needed for communing the homebound, ill or imprisoned or if this is not yet the congregation's practice, leftover bread and wine may simply be consumed following the liturgy by those present. Wine may also be poured on the ground and bread dispersed to feed birds and wildlife.

RESOURCES

Frequently Asked Questions:

- ↻ How can we provide for communion of the ill, homebound and imprisoned?
- ↻ What is a Sanctuary Lamp?

Resources Available from Augsburg Fortress:

- 📖 Brugh, Lorraine S. and Gordon W. Lathrop. *Using Evangelical Lutheran Worship: The Sunday Assembly*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2008.
- 📖 Stauffer, S. Anita. *Altar Guild and Sacristy Handbook*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000.

Other Resources

- 📖 Foley, Edward. *From Age to Age: How Christians Celebrated the Eucharist*, revised and expanded edition. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2009.

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