Ruling Elders Administering Sacraments
L. Roy Taylor
Stated Clerk, PCA

The *Westminster Standards* and the *Book of Church Order* explicitly limit the administration of the sacraments to ministers (Teaching Elders). See *WCF* 27-4; 28-2; 29-3; *WLC* 169; *BCO* 57-5; 58-4; 58-5; 58-7. In the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Traditions only priests administer the sacraments which rites are regarded as having the power of grace within the dispensing of the sacraments themselves. The primary role of priests is to dispense the sacraments. Reformed Churches do not regard ministers as priests, and Reformed Churches do *not* teach that the sacraments confer grace by any power in the sacraments themselves. The primary role of ministers is to minister the Word (*WLC* 158). Historically the administration of the sacraments in the Reformed Tradition is so closely connected to the ministry of the Word that, the administration of the sacraments has been limited to Ministers of the Word.

The priesthood of all believers is a doctrine that is held by most Protestants to mean that one does not need a priest as an intermediary between the believer and God, but one may read and study the scriptures, pray, and engage individual and family worship without the presence or guidance of a priest. The priesthood of believers is also coupled with the Protestant doctrine of the perspicuity of scripture, that is, that the message of salvation is sufficiently clear in the scriptures, that one does not need a priest to understand the Gospel. Most Protestants do not take the priesthood of believers to mean that there are no ordained offices in the Church or that unordained believers may administer the sacraments.

In some Presbyterian-Reformed denominations Ruling Elders have been allowed to administer the sacraments in extraordinary situations, i.e. when it is actually impossible to secure the services of a minister. Like some other Presbyterian-Reformed denominations, the PCA considered the possibility of Ruling Elders administering the sacraments when it studied the number of offices in the Church over a period of six years (1973-1979). See *PCA Digest, Position Papers,* Part V, pp 455-497 or http://pcahistory.org/pca/digest/studies/2-455.html. The Seventh General Assembly adopted the following:

> C. ADMINISTRATION OF SACRAMENTS BY RULING ELDERS:
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> Of all the questions before this Committee, this one has provided the most discussion in the Church and the most division among brothers. It was the lengthy discussion of the minority report on the floor of the Second General Assembly which brought the initial formation of this special Ad-Interim Committee. Papers included in the Appendix to this report, (Majority and Minority Reports of the Ad-Interim Committee to the Second General Assembly and "Ministers of the Word," by Donald A. Dunkerley), present some of the basic issues involved. Your Committee finds that there is one

overriding factor which forces us to the conclusion that we have reached that only Teaching Elders should be allowed to administer the Sacraments in the PCA. And that factor is the clear prohibition of any other performing these tasks by our Confessional Standards. The *Confession of Faith,* Chapter 27, Section IV, states: "There be only two sacraments ordained by Christ our Lord in the Gospel; that is to say, Baptism, and the Supper of the Lord: neither of which may be dispensed by any, but by a minister of the Word lawfully ordained." In addition, *Larger Catechism* Question No. 176 states: "The Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper agree, in that the author of both is God; the spiritual part of both is Christ and His benefits; both are seals of the same covenant; are to be dispensed by ministers of the gospel, and by none other." If the PCA were to make the major change of allowing Ruling Elders to administer the Sacraments, it would be necessary that major changes be made to our Confessional Standards. While the Standards must never be set above the Scriptures as the rule of faith and practice, yet we have certainly given strong testimony to their lasting quality and trueness to the Scriptures, and changes should only be made when there is clear and overwhelming evidence, biblically, that they are wrong. We find no such evidence in the case of administration of the Sacraments. The administration of the Sacraments, by its very nature, is a proclamation of the Word of God by example, and as practiced consistently throughout most of Reformed Church history, should only be done in conjunction with the preaching of the Word. The continuation of this practice is necessary to continue good order in the Church.

In response to the question raised by the motion from the floor at the First General Assembly concerning the administration of the Sacraments by the Ruling Elders (see *Minutes of the First General Assembly*, 1-39, p. 34), your Committee would recommend the following:

Recommendation No. 8:
That the General Assembly affirm that in keeping with the Confessional Standards of the Church, only properly ordained Teaching Elders may administer the Sacraments. *Adopted.* (*Minutes of the Seventh General Assembly*, 1979, pp. 83-84).