

LCMS

Frequently Asked Questions

Doctrinal Issues – The Lord’s Supper/Holy Communion

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The Lord's Supper/Holy Communion

Do we commune with the sacrificed or resurrected body and blood?

Q: *In Communion, do we commune with the sacrificed body and blood of Jesus, or the resurrected body and blood of Jesus?*

A: The answer to your question is that we receive in, with, and under the bread and wine the true body and blood of Christ shed on the cross, Jesus Christ Who is now risen and ascended and sits at the right hand of God the Father. He is the same Christ, and when he gave us the Sacrament, as the Lutheran Confessions affirm, "he was speaking of his true, essential body, which he gave into death for us, and of his true, essential blood, which was poured out for us on the tree of the cross for the forgiveness of sins" (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VII, 49).

In the Sacrament, our Confessions further teach, the same Jesus who died is present in the Sacrament, although not in exactly the same way that he was corporeally present when he walked bodily on earth. With Luther, the Formula of Concord speaks of "the incomprehensible, spiritual mode of presence according to which he neither occupies nor yields space but passes through everything created as he wills....He employed this mode of presence when he left the closed grave and came through closed doors, in the bread and wine in the Supper..."[FC SD VII, 100; emphasis added].

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Can a person use wheat and gluten free Communion wafers as an option?

Q: *I have recently been diagnosed with Celiac Disease, which is an intolerance to gluten, a protein found in wheat, rye, barley and oats. If I consume even trace amounts of the aforementioned substances I become extremely ill. What is the stance of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod on using wheat and gluten free Communion wafers as an option for a person in my position?*

A: In the LCMS we have generally commended the question of gluten free wafers to the realm of individual pastoral judgment.

In its 1983 report on [Theology and Practice of the Lord's Supper](#), the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) stated the following concerning the element of bread in the Sacrament: "Since the Scriptures are silent on the source of the bread, it may be baked from the flour of wheat, rye, barley, or other grains" (16; emphasis added).

Similarly, Dr. C. F. W. Walther, in his *Pastoral Theology*, wrote concerning the kind of grain from which the flour for the bread has been prepared: "It is an adiaphoron whether the bread be leavened, whether it be rye, wheat, barley, or oats bread, and whether it have this or that form, so long only as it is baked of grain flour and water." Since rice is a grain, it would also seem consistent with this position that bread made from this grain would be permissible.

Nothing here would preclude someone bringing bread to the pastor that is gluten free. However, Lutheran practice would require that the pastor consecrate this bread together with the elements being used in the Communion service. You are encouraged to discuss this with your pastor.

The website celiac.com (under the question "Which Grains are safe, which are not?") notes that wheat, rye and barley must typically be avoided, but not necessarily oats, corn or rice. You should consult with your doctor as to whether oats, corn, or rice might be acceptable.

The website glutenfree.com, offers some crackers that might serve as acceptable substitutes. Also virtually gluten-free communion wafers (with a gluten content of .01%) are available at www.benedictinesisters.org.

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Are only LCMS members able to commune at an LCMS church?

Q: *Being raised in the LCMS, I was surprised today when I was visiting a LCMS church that had a pamphlet explaining their beliefs about Communion. It went on to say that if the visitor believed these things also then they could commune at that church. I thought that only LCMS members could commune at LCMS churches. Has this changed?*

A: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has never understood or applied the historic practice of close[d] Communion in such a way as to mean that only LCMS members are permitted to commune at LCMS altars. The official position of the Synod is that not only are members of other Lutheran churches with whom we are in altar and pulpit fellowship invited to commune with us, but also that in certain extraordinary cases of pastoral care and in emergencies members of churches not in fellowship with us may be given Communion. The Synod stated, for example, in 1986 "that pastors and congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod continue to abide by the practice of close Communion, which includes the necessity of exercising responsible pastoral care in extraordinary situations and circumstances" (1986 Res. 3-08 "To Maintain Practice of Close Communion").

A number of resources are available and touch on this subject, including the Commission on Theology and Church Relation's (CTCR) 1983 and 1999 reports on [Theology and Practice of the Lord's Supper](#) and [Admission to the Lord's Supper](#).

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Who may take Communion to the sick and/or shut-ins?

Q: *Who may take communion to the sick of the congregation? Only the pastor? A lay leader?*

A: The LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations has addressed this practice briefly in the question/answer section of its 1983 report on [Theology and Practice of the Lord's Supper](#). The question and answer reads as follows:

"7. May the elders take the consecrated elements to the sick and to shut-ins after the Communion service? The chief consideration regarding such a practice is that the role of the pastor in the sacramental life of the church should not be displaced. The opportunity to conduct a brief service of confession and absolution, to involve other family members in the private Communion, and to be a shepherd for the flock suggests that whenever possible the pastor will distribute the elements to the communicants (cf. pp. 13-15)."

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What does the LCMS teach regarding who may partake in Communion?

Q: *What does the Missouri Synod teach regarding the sacrament of communion and who can partake in this sacrament?*

A: The LCMS believes that Scripture teaches that the Lord's Supper is a precious gift of God in which Christ gives us His true body and blood (in a miraculous way), together with the bread and wine, for the forgiveness of our sins and the strengthening of our faith. Because the Bible teaches that this Sacrament may also be spiritually harmful if misused, and that participation in the Lord's Supper is an act of confession of faith, the LCMS ordinarily communes only those who have been instructed in the teachings of our church and who have confessed their faith in these teachings.

For more information, see the following links: [Admission to the Lord's Supper](#), and [Theology and Practice of the Lord's Supper](#).

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What is the LCMS position on early Communion?

Q: *I understand many congregations are changing their Communion practice to include young children, and the Missouri Synod is also in favor of communing children, so we have been informed by our pastor. Is this true?*

A: In the 1960s the Synod participated in a pan-Lutheran study of confirmation and first Communion. The recommendation of this study was that it would be appropriate to communion children at the end of the fifth grade, prior to Confirmation. In response to this study, both the Commission on Theology and Church Relations and the Board for Parish Education submitted recommendations to the 1973 convention of the Synod. These recommendations conflicted with one another, the CTCR recommending that the Synod retain its traditional practice of communing children after they are confirmed, and the BPS recommending the adoption of the inter-Lutheran study proposal. The Synod itself adopted a resolution in 1973 that basically left up to individual congregations the decision as to what practice they may want to follow. Two [studies](#) done subsequently by a Board for Parish Services (now District and Congregational Services) staff member in the late 1980s indicated that less than 20 percent of LCMS congregations adopted the study proposal and that this percentage remained virtually unchanged for nearly two decades. We have no evidence that an increasing number of congregations have adopted, or are considering the adoption of, the practice of early Communion in recent years.

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Where in the Bible does it say Christ's body and blood are present at Communion?

Q: *What verses in Scripture can be cited that teach "that BOTH bread and wine AND Christ's true body and blood are present in the Lord's Supper?"*

A: All three accounts of the institution of the Lord's Supper in the Gospels (Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-23) explicitly state that Jesus took BREAD, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to his disciples saying, "Take, eat; this [i.e., this BREAD, which I have just blessed and broken and am now giving to you] is my body." Jesus uses similar language in referring to "the cup" (of wine) as "his blood." A plain and straightforward reading of these words leads to the conclusion that BOTH bread AND body, BOTH wine AND blood are present in the consecrated elements of the Lord's Supper.

Perhaps the most explicit expression of this truth, however, is found in 1 Cor. 10:16-17, where Paul writes: "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." Paul clearly says here that we all "partake" of "BREAD" when we receive the Lord's Supper--even as we also partake of and "participate in" the true body of Christ. And he says that we all "partake" of the wine (the cup), even as we also partake of the true blood of Christ. Similarly, in 1 Cor. 11:26, Paul says: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." Paul expressly states here that when we receive the Lord's Supper we are "eating bread" and "drinking the cup" (wine), but he goes on to say that those who eat this bread and drink this cup are also partaking of the true body and blood of Christ.

So "real" is this participation in Christ's body and blood, in fact, that (according to Paul) those who partake of the bread and wine "in an unworthy manner" are actually guilty of "profaning the body and blood of the Lord" (1 Cor. 11:27). (Partaking of the Lord's Supper "in a worthy manner," of course, is not something that we "do" or "accomplish" on the basis of our "personal holiness" or "good works." It means receiving God's free and gracious gifts of life and forgiveness offered in the Lord's Supper in true repentance produced by the work of the Spirit through God's Law and in true faith in Christ and his promises produced by God's Spirit through the Gospel).

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Can I get sick from using the Common Cup?

Q: *Wouldn't it be possible to contract a virus via an infected person who has drunk of the Communion cup prior to you? Drinking from the community cup seems to be the traditional and proper way. But does that potentially put me in harm's way? Does drinking from the individual cups remove some of the community aspect of the gift?*

A: In its report on [Theology and Practice of the Lord's Supper](#), the Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations includes the following question and answer:

"Does it matter whether a congregation uses individual glasses or the common cup to distribute the consecrated wine?"

In the absence of a specific Scriptural mandate, either method of distribution, when performed in a reverent manner, is acceptable. Many Christians prefer the use of the common cup because of its symbolism as representative of the oneness of the body of Christ—the church—and because there is reason to believe that Christ used this method of distribution. Any decision in this area is to be marked by Christian liberty and charity."

Studies have shown that the risk of contracting illness or disease through the use of the common communion cup (properly wiped and handled) is quite small (though not, of course, non-existent). Those who are concerned about this possibility are certainly free to make use of the individual cup option, which is available in nearly all congregations today.

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Can women serve Communion?

Q: *Could you please provide the LCMS's stand on women serving Communion in worship service to assist the pastor?*

A: The official position of the Synod regarding the practice of women serving Holy Communion has been set forth in 1989 Resolution 3-10 "To Address Practice of Women Serving Holy Communion," in which the Synod its members "to conform their practice" to the counsel of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations: "The commission strongly recommends that to avoid confusion regarding the office of the public ministry and to avoid giving offense to the church, such assistance be limited to men" [1985 report on [Women in the Church](#), 47]. While stopping short of saying on the basis of clear scriptural directions in this area "Thus saith the Lord," the Commission argues that the principal concern must be to preserve the uniqueness of the pastoral office as it relates to the role of women in the church.

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Please share the history of close[d] Communion.

Q: I am a member of an LCMS church, and I was wondering where I could get some information about why LCMS churches practice close[d] Communion so I could explain it to a friend who is Christian Reformed.

A: We commend you for your integrity in representing properly the close[d] Communion policy that is followed by our church. Perhaps no other question has been given more attention in our Synod, especially in the last 25 years, than the question of Communion practice.

You are probably aware that it is the official practice of the LCMS to not extend an open invitation to the Lord's Supper to all who share our belief in the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Sacrament.

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod practices close[d] Communion for two main reasons. First, we are a close fellowship. We all believe and confess the same things, especially about Holy Communion. We express and celebrate that close Communion with each other when we commune together.

The second reason is more serious. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 11:29 make it important for us to teach people about Holy Communion, or at least be sure they have been taught, before giving it to them. St. Paul wrote, "For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself." St. Paul gave instructions in this regard to the Christian congregation at Corinth (1 Cor. 11) regarding their responsibility to make certain that people receive the Sacrament to the blessing and not to their harm. It would be very irresponsible to let anyone and everyone receive Communion when they may very well be eating and drinking judgment on themselves. So as you can see, Christians commune not only as individuals, but also as persons who share the same confession of faith as formally confessed in the host church. It is important to emphasize that God has given to Christian congregations the responsibility of administering the Lord's Supper properly and to exercise spiritual care toward all those who desire to commune.

This, of course, means that the congregation has a responsibility to do what it can in Christian love and concern to help people understand the nature of the Sacrament and why they come to it. Pastors and congregations of the Synod (regardless of the size or circumstances of the latter) are expected to honor and uphold the official position and practice of the Synod on "close[d] Communion," which includes the possibility and even necessity of communing non-LCMS individuals in special situations of pastoral care. At its 2007 convention the LCMS once again reaffirmed its official practice of close[d] Communion by adopting a resolution (Res. 3-09) in which it resolved "that all pastors and congregations who have established and practice Communion fellowship contrary to the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions be encouraged by the 2007 LCMS convention to immediately cease such practice."

Traditionally our Catechism has also set forth our church's position almost since its beginning. The theological rationale for the historic practice of close[d] Communion is presented in two CTCR reports: [Theology and Practice of the Lord's Supper](#) (1983) and [Admission to the Lord's Supper: Basics of Biblical and Confessional Teaching](#) (1999). I suggest looking at the answers given to a number of "Common Questions" (Section V) asked about admission to the Lord's Supper as they are presented in the Commission's report titled Admission to the Lord's Supper: Basics of Biblical and Confessional Teaching linked above. The CTCR does not have a file (electronic or otherwise) that contains all of the resolutions which passed at LCMS synodical conventions regarding close[d] Communion. However, Concordia Historical Institute ([CHI](#)) has compiled a CD with a collection of all doctrinal resolutions of the Synod from 1847 through 2004. This collection may have "search" capabilities, and can be ordered on their website. CHI would also be in the best position to inform you whether there is a way to access the specific information you are seeking without ordering the entire CD.

To become more familiar with the LCMS position, you may wish to read the Frequently Asked Question on *Communion Practice* (see page 6 above).

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Disposal of Communion Elements

Q: Following a Communion service, what are the prescribed means for the disposal of the consecrated wine and wafers?

A: To begin with, care should be taken that inordinate amounts of bread and wine are not consecrated at each service, but rather just what is needed for that service.

While Scripture does not tell us whether Christ's body and blood are still present in the bread and wine after Communion, we should still treat what remains with greatest reverence. The point here is to recognize the fact that these elements were used in the service to deliver our Lord's very body and blood to us. How we treat them after the service should never lose sight of that great mystery of faith.

There are two places to find helpful information on this topic. One is Section B.2.c. of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations' 1983 document titled, [*Theology and Practice of the Lord's Supper*](#).

B.2.c. Post Communion Reverence

The consecrated elements which remain after all have communed should be treated with reverence. This reverence has been expressed by Lutherans in various ways. Some have followed the ancient practice of burning the bread and pouring the wine upon the earth. Others have established a basin and drain-piscina-specifically for disposal for the wine. The elders or altar guild may also return the consecrated bread and wine to specific containers for future sacramental use, or the elders and pastor can consume the remaining elements. All of these practices should be understood properly. The church is not, thereby, conferring upon the elements some abiding status apart from their use in the Lord's Supper itself.

The other point of reference is page 89 of *The Altar Guild Manual: Lutheran Service book Edition*, by Dr. Lee Maxwell that says:

"If any of the Lord's body and blood remains, they can be disposed of in a number of ways. The best way is to consumer the remaining elements, since the Lord said, "Take and eat ... Take and drink," and did not provide for anything that was left over. There is historic precedent for reserving the remaining elements against the next communion. The hosts can be stored in a pyx or ciborium (apart from unconsecrated hosts), the blood of the Lord in a suitable cruet or flagon (apart from unconsecrated wine). What remains in the chalice, however, should either be consumer or poured into the piscine or onto the ground, since there may be crumbs or other foreign matter in it. The reserved elements may then be kept in the sacristy or placed on the altar or credence and covered with a white veil. It is un-Lutheran and irreverent to place unused elements in the trash or to pour the remainder of what is in the chalice or flagon into the common drain. "

As noted in the manual, the general practice of the Lutheran Church has been NOT to mix consecrated and unconsecrated elements. If the elements are saved for future use, it is best they are kept separate. The practice of consuming the remaining elements also has a long history in the Lutheran Church.

Your congregation may want to consider purchasing *The Altar Guild Manual* as it covers a variety of altar guild functions that include displaying, cleaning and storing paraments and linens appropriately; caring for sacramental vessels and vestments; preparing for and cleaning up after worship services; ordering

supplies and more. It is available from Concordia Publishing House by calling 800-325-3040 or by going to their [website](#) [search for altar guild manual].

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