

Closed Communion

at

Hope Lutheran Church, De Pere Wisconsin



As a member congregation of the Lutheran Church— Missouri Synod, yes... we do practice the ancient, Biblical practice of Closed communion. But what exactly does this mean?

I. United in Faith and Confession

To start with, the Holy Bible teaches that those who participate in the Lord's Supper are closely united by a common faith and understanding of the teachings of Scripture.

"Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf."

1 Corinthians 10:16-17

First Corinthians 10 refers to a special union that takes place when Christians receive Holy Communion together. Believers who share in the Lord's Supper are called "one body." By receiving the Supper together, we are making a statement about the unity of faith that we share.

The question is, "How much unity should Christians who receive the Lord's Supper together share?" Is it only necessary to agree that Jesus is the Son of God and our Savior? Or is the unity that the Bible has in mind stronger than that? For an answer, we return to God's Word in the Bible:

[Jesus said,] "Go and make disciples of all nations... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."

Matthew 28:19-20

"I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought."

1 Corinthians 1:10

Among others, these Bible verses show us that Christians should teach "everything the Lord commanded," seeking a faith that is "perfectly united in mind and thought." Our Lord wants believers who confess a true oneness of faith to gather, work, worship and commune together. It is a sad consequence of the divisions in Christianity that inter-communion between us and Christians of differing confessions is not legitimate. Reception of the Lord's Supper by Christians not fully united with us would imply a oneness when that oneness doesn't exist.

II. The Real Presence

The Holy Bible also gives us a second reason why we practice Closed Communion in our Church:

"Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take and eat; this is my body.' Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'"

Matthew 26:26-28

"Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.... For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself."

1 Corinthians 11:27,29



When Christians receive the Lord's Supper together as Jesus directed, they receive the very body and blood of Jesus in a miraculous way. However, the Bible warns that those who fail to recognize Jesus' body and blood in the Lord's Supper are participating to their spiritual harm, rather than benefit. Because many congregations and denominations do not acknowledge the Real Presence of Jesus' body and blood, we must be careful about those whom we invite to Holy Communion. Because the Lord has named congregations and pastors as the "*servants of Christ and stewards of the*

mysteries of God" (1 Cor. 4:1), we must take care that those who receive Christ's body and blood truly understand what is received in the Lord's Supper.

III. Participation in the Sacrament

If you are a member in good standing at a congregation in the LC–MS (Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod), or in the LC–C (the Lutheran Church–Canada), that membership indicates that you have publicly stated your agreement with what we believe and teach here at Hope. You are welcome to participate in the Lord's Supper with us. We only ask that you notify the pastor or an elder prior to the service to let us know you will be joining us at the altar. You will be given a Visitor Communion card to fill out and hand to the Usher when you are welcomed forward.

On the other hand, if you have no church home or belong to a different Lutheran denomination (such as the ELCA or WELS), we ask that you meet with our pastor first before joining us for the Lord's Supper. Since there is some variation in teaching even between Lutheran denominations, we need to establish unity first before communing together (Communion is a *sign of unity*, not a *means toward* unity).

Some Lutheran churches are very similar to us in their beliefs. In this case, it may only be necessary to attend one or two informal visits with our pastor so that he may explain our teachings. Some other denominations are quite different in their beliefs. In this case, our pastor will invite you to attend our Bible Information Class, a course offered periodically in which you can learn more about what we believe and teach, based on the Bible. Once we have established a full unity of faith, you may then

join our church and participate in the Lord's Supper with us.

IV. Other Questions

Q: *Why haven't I heard of Closed communion before?*

A: Closed Communion is not something new to the church. Jesus and his apostles directed the early church to practice it. Martin Luther and the early Lutheran Church practiced it. In fact, most Christian denominations practiced Closed Communion until the past few decades. The Word of God has not changed; sadly, many have become lax in following it in this regard.

Q: *Won't people wonder if I don't commune?*

A: The members of our church understand that there are valid reasons not to commune, especially if you are a visitor. Never commune out of fear or pressure of what others will think! Ask if it is right in Christ's eyes and in accord with his Word.

Q: *Should I feel left out?*

A: No! The Lord's forgiveness announced throughout the service and sermon is still yours even if you do not commune. He has not forgotten you. Full participation in the Lord's Supper is a privilege that is more meaningful when it comes at the proper time and with the Lord's blessing. While others are receiving the Supper, we encourage you to stay. Sing the hymns. Meditate on our Lord's suffering and death for the forgiveness of our sins. Offer up your prayers to God in the certainty that he will hear you and answer you. Following the Distribution, the service will conclude with prayer, benediction, and a closing hymn.

