

What does God teach in His Word about Holy Communion?

“While they were eating, 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.’” (cf. Matthew 26:26–28; Mark 14:22–25; Luke 22:14–20; 1 Corinthians 11:17–29). “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42).

“For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. Therefore, 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. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.” (1 Corinthians 11:26-29)

What does the Lutheran church believe about the Lord’s Supper?

The Lutheran church believes, teaches and confesses that the Lord’s Supper is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, given to us Christians to eat and to drink. We hold that the bread and the wine in the Supper are the true body and blood of Christ and that these are given and received into the mouths of all who commune. Those who believe the promise: “Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins,” receive forgiveness of sins, new life and salvation. This promise, along with the bodily eating and drinking, is the main thing in the Sacrament. The Lutheran church rejects and condemns incorrect understandings of the Lord’s Supper, such as the view that the sacrifice of the Mass delivers man from his sins, or that the substance of the consecrated bread and wine is actually changed into the body and blood of Christ. We also reject and condemn the view that in the Lord’s Supper the true body and blood of Christ is not received by the mouth of the communicants, under the bread and wine, but is received only spiritually in the heart by faith, or that the bread and wine are only symbols of the far-distant body and blood of our Lord.

How is the Lord’s Supper an expression of church fellowship?

While the Lord’s Supper is always a personal matter, it is never a private matter. That is an important truth that is often overlooked. Those who commune at the same altar are thereby declaring publicly that they are united in the doctrine of the Apostles (Acts 2:42). Therefore, fellowship in the Supper is church fellowship. This is what is taught by Holy Scripture in 1 Corinthians 10 and 11. Here is how one of our church’s teachers explained this truth. “As there is but one bread, one loaf, from which we eat, so we who are eating of this loaf are one body. The eating of one and the same loaf of bread unifies us to one body. Our participation in the Lord’s Supper is a public profession on our part that we

are not only in fellowship with Christ, but that we also are in fellowship with those with whom we commune at the Lord's Table. We all eat the same bread, the body of Christ. Through that act we indicate that we belong together. All of us Christians who in the Lord's Supper eat the body of Christ and drink His blood present ourselves as one spiritual family. What we eat and drink together, Christ's body and blood, ties us together more closely than the bonds of blood. We declare ourselves to be brothers and sisters in Christ. Upon this Bible passage do we base the saying, 'Altar Fellowship is Church Fellowship.' This passage in Corinthians strikes a crushing blow at unionism. To admit those who believe differently to our Communion, and so to our church fellowship, is a contradiction in itself. For those who approach the same altar together profess to be one—one in all points of Christian doctrine and practice—while in reality they disagree. It would be shameful hypocrisy on our part if we would have those who actually profess a different faith than we do join us at the Lord's Altar" (Stoeckhardt, 1 Corinthians, p.60–61).

What is the Lutheran church's motive for practicing close communion?

When the Lord gave His Passover Meal to the Children of Israel, it was only for those who believed in Him as their Savior God. When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper to replace the Passover Meal, it was with His close circle of disciples, not large crowds. This highlights what the Church has always practiced. The Lord's Supper is a meal of close spiritual fellowship. It is an expression of this close fellowship.

Our Lutheran church practices the ancient biblical practice of close communion. This is a beautiful expression of fellowship and unity. While so many other Christian churches and church bodies have abandoned the biblical principles of close communion, we maintain this scriptural principle. We practice close communion, not because it is easy or so we can feel self-righteous, but because this is what God says in His holy Word. He says it; we believe it; that's it.

Conclusion

On the basis of God's Holy Word, our Lutheran church continues to practice the ancient, biblical and confessional practice of close communion as an opportunity to give joyful witness to our unity in the true faith. In Holy Communion, we are uniting in a vertical relationship with our Triune God. By receiving Holy Communion, we are saying that we are in a common union with God in what He teaches us in His Word. In Holy Communion, we are also uniting in a horizontal relationship with our fellow believers. By receiving Holy Communion, we are saying that we are in a common union with our fellow communicants in what God teaches us in His Word.

We practice close communion with the belief that this is what the Lord would have us do as we faithfully administer His body and blood in His holy Sacrament. Close communion is not a practice unique to Water of Life Lutheran Church or the Wisconsin Evangelical

Lutheran Synod. It is also practiced by the majority of Christians in the world who are members of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox communions, as well as other Lutheran church bodies in America and around the world. Hopefully, this brief explanation will help you understand that our love for our Lord and His Sacrament, and our love for the individual, is the reason why we practice close communion.