

*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? (1 Corinthians 10:16)*

Every profession has its joys and difficulties. As a pastor, sometimes these categories overlap. For example, I love answering questions (Please ask! Seriously!). Yet, as you might imagine, some questions are more difficult than others, sometimes because those questions are loaded with a lot of emotional, relational, or spiritual baggage. One of the most obvious illustrations is any question having to do with Closed Communion. This month, I thought it might be helpful to answer any number of common questions regarding this topic. Hopefully it is illuminating and helpful, even if it can be difficult!

### **What is ‘closed’ Communion? Don’t we practice ‘close’ Communion?**

The short answer is that there is no difference. The term ‘closed’ was used until more recently, when ‘close’ came into use. Unfortunately, ‘close’ usually causes unnecessary confusion, since it is understood often as ‘close enough’ or ‘close to the same’ instead of indicating a unity of faith and fellowship in Christ.

### **Why can’t anyone commune?**

Paul warns in 1 Corinthians that *whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord (11:27)*. The Supper was misused so badly at Corinth that some who were eating unworthily had become *weak and ill, and some have died (11:30)*. Paul adds, *Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? (2 Corinthians 6:14)*.

### **What makes someone ‘worthy’ to commune?**

Faith in the words of Jesus Christ, specifically that his body and blood have been “given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins” (SC). Again, baptized Christians who believe this are ‘worthy’, not because they are perfect or somehow better than others, but because they recognize their need!

### **Is Confirmation, as such, necessary before communing?**

It might surprise you to know that Confirmation, as we know it, is a relatively recent invention – and not even a Lutheran one. Lutherans confess this about receiving the Sacrament: “No one is admitted to the Sacrament without first being examined. The people are also advised about the dignity and use of the Sacrament, about how it brings great consolation to anxious consciences, so that they too may learn to believe God and to expect and ask from Him all that is good. This worship pleases God. Such use of the Sacrament nourishes true devotion toward God” (AC XXIV). Confirmation has simply become the way that Christians are taught and examined before communing. But, there are other ways to teach and examine.

### **Why can’t other Christians from outside our fellowship commune with us then?**

Communion is a tangible gift of forgiveness we receive from Christ. But, we can never forget that Communion is a *union* of people (a community!) who confess the same faith and who walk together in forgiveness and love. Christians should never pretend to have unity where there is none. This is true even if a Christian belongs to a church that has ‘Lutheran’ in the name but is outside of our fellowship (i.e. they have a different confession of faith). This is hard, especially when someone was confirmed at Immanuel or another LCMS congregation but has since joined a church apart from our fellowship. Finally, to be clear, closed Communion goes both ways. In other words, just as those from outside our fellowship do not commune at our altar, *neither should we commune at churches in other denominations, even if they say we are welcome*. This may be the hardest for all of us, yet to confess Christ is neither convenient nor easy.

-Pastor Squire

“One bread, one cup, one body, we, rejoicing in our unity, proclaim Your love until You come to bring Your scattered loved ones home.”  
 (“Lord Jesus Christ, We Humbly Pray,” *LSB 623*, v. 4)