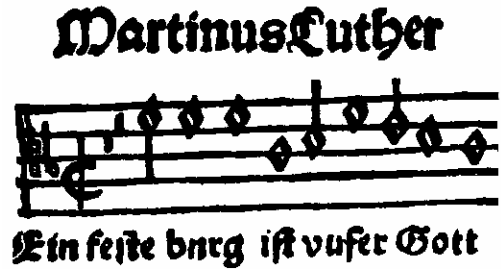


Liturgy, Hymnody, & Pulpit

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Your Neighbor & Closed Communion

*Reprinted with permission from a presentation by the Rev. Dr. Ronald Garwood,
Former Wyoming District President
at the Tell the Good News About Jesus Convocation in Casper, Wyoming, January 27-28, 2006*

Why is closed communion so difficult to explain? Dr. Garwood says what many have been unwilling to say: there is no "silver bullet." Doing justice to the Biblical doctrine and practice of close communion (as well as providing proper pastoral care for a visitor) takes more than a few minutes before a Sunday Divine Service. Misunderstanding Close Communion is caused by misunderstanding the Gospel and the Lord's Supper. In his typical conversational, pastoral way, Dr. Garwood teaches why close communion was practiced in the early church and why we should continue this Biblical practice today. LHP

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to this presentation, and God bless us all as we consider His Gospel, and specifically the Lord's Supper. To that end, we do ask His blessing in prayer.

Lord, we do ask Your blessing upon us as we meet together today to consider Your Gospel, the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and our mission and evangelism responsibilities in regard to Christ and the Gospel. Lead and guide us by Your Holy Spirit through Your Word, that we may grow in our faith, and also be equipped to serve You according to Your Word and Will. Bless us according to Your grace and mercy, in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Well, let's get to our topic.

The practice of Closed or Close Communion, (the terms are used interchangeably and mean basically the same thing), is not well understood in our day and age, and therefore it is criticized by many outside the LCMS, and even by some within our Synod.

So our task is to see what we can learn together that will help us witness to others in regard to this sound doctrine and practice, and how to explain the practice as we invite others to our congregations for worship.

And to begin, it is important to note that the main reason that there is so much confusion about Closed Communion is that the Lord's Supper is not properly understood, and for that matter the Gospel and all its articles are not well understood.

So, to be properly equipped to assist people in understanding and dealing with Closed Communion, we must fully understand the nature and benefits of the Sacrament ourselves.

So, let's begin there, and in fact, we'll make that our major emphasis in this presentation.

YOUR NEIGHBOR & CLOSED COMMUNION

I. What is the Lord's Supper?

It is noteworthy that Jesus instituted His Supper at a celebration of the Passover in Jerusalem.

Passover – A ceremony instituted by God by which the people of Israel remembered their deliverance from Bondage in Egypt by His mighty acts.

Historical Perspective – People of Israel (Jacob) were in Israel by invitation due to relationship that Joseph, a Son of Jacob, had with the ruler of Egypt, but the Scripture states that there came to rule in Egypt a Pharaoh “who did not know Joseph.” SO, the people of Israel (the Hebrews) were made slaves and forced into a suffering state by the Egyptians, and their cry went out to God for deliverance.

God then, in His time, sent Moses down to Egypt to tell Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go. Pharaoh would not let the people go, and so God sent a series of plagues against the nation, including turning the water of the Nile to blood, an infestation of frogs, gnats, hail, darkness and other such things, and when Pharaoh still would not let the people of Israel go, the final plague was the death of the first born in all the land, which would include the first born among the people of Israel.

BUT, God gave the people of Israel a plan and a pledge –

*Take a lamb from their flock, a male, one year old, unblemished

*The lamb was to be killed at twilight on the prescribed day

*Blood from the lamb was to be placed on the door posts and lintel of the home.

*Then, when angel of death came through the land to kill the firstborn in each house, He would pass over any house which had on it the blood of the lamb.

AND, the Lord commanded Israel, “*Now this day will be a memorial to you, and you shall celebrate it as a feast to the Lord; through your generations you are to celebrate it as a permanent ordinance.*” (Ex. 12:14)

As a part of the memorial feast, the flesh of the lamb was eaten, along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.

The Passover was a memorial meal commanded by God in order that the people would remember His deliverance of them from bondage for the generations to come.

*They were to remember to so that they would trust in His promises, remember that He loved them, and had, and would deliver them.

*And, through the Passover meal, they would proclaim all this to succeeding generations, so that these generations too would believe in Him, and His care, and love, and would trust His promises.

*Now, in addition to these things, the Passover meal was also given to the people in order to point to the future deliverance from the guilt of sin for all people by the promised Messiah, the Christ.

*The Passover was a remembrance of what had happened, and also a

picture of the promised coming deliverance of the people from the bondage of sin.

Again, the Lord Jesus instituted His Supper on the Passover, and this is not without significance.

--He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

--His Supper is a celebration of deliverance.

--In the Supper, we eat the very sacrifice made for our deliverance, the body and blood of Christ.

--And, Jesus instituted His Supper stating, "Do this in remembrance of Me."

II. Now, what is it that we are to remember?

What do we receive in the Lord's Supper, why do we partake of the Supper?

1. First, we have the Lord's invitation and command "take eat," take drink," "Do it in remembrance of Me."
2. Second, in the Supper, we receive the true body and true blood of Christ.
 - a. This is known among us as the doctrine of the "Real Presence"
 1. Not Transubstantiation – Roman Catholic (explain)
 2. Not Representation – Reformed (explain)
 3. In, with, and under the bread is the true Body of Christ because He said it IS, and in, with, and under the wine is the true Blood of Christ, because He said it IS.
 - a. Luther called this a "sacramental presence."
Bread and wine are present, but also present is the true body and blood of Christ.
3. This true body and blood of Jesus is given us to eat and drink as a pledge or assurance of our forgiveness on account of His sacrifice on our behalf.
 - a. He sacrificed Himself for the payment of the sins of all people, taking all sin upon Himself and paying the full penalty for it.
 - b. Dr. Martin Luther, in his exposition of the Gospel of John, commented on John 1:36 "And looking upon Jesus as He walked; he said, 'Behold the Lamb of God!'" and wrote these words:

This is our greatest certainty, that we know where sins are laid. For the Law lays them upon our conscience, but God takes them from us and lays them upon the shoulders of the Lamb. For, if they were to line upon us,...we would be lost, because sin is so strong and powerful. And God says: "I know your sins are far too heavy for you to bear. Therefore, behold, I will lay them upon My Lamb, and will take them from you." Believe in this promise, and if you believe, you are free from sin. For sin has only two places where it can be: it is either with you, so that it lies on your shoulders, or it lies upon Christ, the Lamb of God. And if it lies on you, you are lost, but if it rests on Christ you are free and blessed. (Luther's Works, W.A. 46. 683f)

SO, all of our sin which should and would condemn us to hell, has been removed from us and charged to Jesus, who then paid the full price of death and damnation for us. And by faith in His saving work for us, all the benefits of His saving activity are freely given to us. As the Bible

states, “...*that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.*” (John 3:16b) We are saved from the guilt of our sin by the work of the crucified and risen Christ, through our faith in Him.

And, the faith necessary to believe in Jesus and receive His saving gifts, is worked in us by the Holy Spirit who comes to us in and with the Word of God.

The very Gospel that announces our salvation in and by Jesus, has the power to convert us and make us believers.

- *“For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.”* Romans 1:16
- *“...faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of Christ.”* Romans 10:17
- *“This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.”* (John 6:29)
- *“No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him...”* (John 6:44)

And there are other Scripture verses which could be cited here.

It is the Holy Spirit, working through the Law and Gospel who brings us to true repentance and faith.

It is the Holy Spirit who creates faith in us, enables us to believe.

-No one decides on their own that they are going to believe in Jesus.

-No one makes a decision for Christ by their own power.

-No one decides to join the Church.

We are not able to do this as sinful human beings.

Rather, we must be converted, we must be reborn, we must be made new, and all that is accomplished in us by God, through and by the means of grace.

It is He who makes us Christians, believers in Jesus.

Again, no one joins the Church, the Body of Christ, but rather, we are incorporated into the Church by God, made members of the Body of Christ by Him.

And, to those who are believers, the Sacrament of Holy Communion is given to strengthen our faith, to refresh us in our faith, to keep us in the faith.

In the words of institution of the Holy Supper, Jesus states plainly that His blood is being poured out and His body given, ...*for many,*” *for you, for the forgiveness of sins.*” Which is a great reminder, a great refreshment in and by the Gospel.

So there is great benefit for Christians in receiving the Sacrament in faith. Martin Luther in his Small Catechism wrote these words, which you probably know well:

“What is the benefit of such eating and drinking?”

“That is shown us by these words, ‘Given and shed for you for the remission of sins;’ namely, that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us through these words....”

“How can bodily eating and drinking do so much?”

“It is not the eating and drinking indeed that does them, but the words here written, ‘Given and shed for you for the remission of sins;’ which words, besides the bodily

eating and drinking, are the chief thing in the Sacrament; and he that believes these words has what they say and express, namely, the forgiveness of sins.”

So, the benefits of the sacrifice of Christ are given to us in the Sacrament of the Altar, and are received by faith. Faith then is necessary to receive the Sacrament, for true faith is strengthened and confirmed in and by the sacrament.

Therefore, the Lord’s Supper is NOT an evangelism tool. IF the person receiving the Sacrament is not a believer in Jesus, then the Sacrament not only does not have any value for that person, but the lack of true faith in Christ and in the benefits of His sacrifice is actually a judgment against that person.

I Corinthians 11:27-29, ***“Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not discern the body rightly.”***

III. Now, what does it mean to “*not discern the body rightly?*”

In the CTCR document entitled “Admission to the Lord’s Supper,” put out in November of 1999, there are three ways described based on the First Corinthian text in which a person may not discern the body rightly.

“First, “*discerning the body*” requires faith that Christ’s true body and blood are received in, with, and under the Eucharistic bread and wine.” In other words, belief in the words of Jesus is required, so that we know that the real body and blood of Christ are truly present in the Sacrament. Not believing this is not trusting the Words of Jesus that His true body and blood are present, which is a denial of what He says we receive in the Supper. That is ‘not discerning the body.’”

“Second, “*discerning the body*” implies faith in and desire for the (benefits) of the Lord’s Supper.” The Lord’s own words of institution of the Supper state that the primary benefit of the Sacrament is the forgiveness of sins. So failing to discern the body means not understanding that one is a sinner and in need of the forgiveness of sins, not being repentant, or not understanding that the forgiveness of sins is offered or available in the Sacrament.

Dr. Martin Luther wrote, “*Those alone are unworthy [to receive the Sacrament] who neither feel their infirmities nor admit to being sinners.*” So a lack of repentance and faith is a failure to discern the body.

“Third, the context indicates that “*discerning the body*” must involve a repentant willingness to remove sinful divisions between Christians that fracture the visible unity of the congregation and contradict the Gospel-corporate character of the Lord’s Supper.” We remember that the Scripture text in which Paul is writing these words by the power of the Holy Spirit is written to the Corinthian church in which there was great disunity over a number of issues, and even misunderstandings and sinful practices in regard to the Lord’s Supper.

So examining oneself, and making sure that we are aware of our sin, sorry for our sin, sorry for the divisions among us, and the like, and truly repenting and throwing ourselves on the mercy of the Lord and receiving His forgiveness, is a part of “discerning the body.”

THEREFORE, communing in a worthy manner, as the text says we should, is the ability to “discern the body,” which as noted in the three parts above, consists of repentance and faith, and unity of faith. And this repentance and faith has two dimensions, one vertical and one horizontal.

The vertical dimension is faith and trust in our reconciliation to God in Christ through the forgiveness of sins which He won for us on the Cross, and our justification provided in His resurrection. Faith in Christ as our Savior and Lord enables one to receive the benefits of the Sacrament and be refreshed and strengthened in the faith.

As the Lord’s Supper is celebrated, the Lord is addressing each Individual communicant, through the servant of the Word, the Pastor, the representative of Christ, and saying to them, take and eat, this is My body given for YOU, take drink, this is My blood shed for YOU for the forgiveness of YOUR sins. YOU are included in My sacrifice. This Gospel is for YOU. YOU are forgiven!

In the Lord’s Supper, Jesus is ministering to each individual believer in a very special way. For in the Sacrament, He is dealing with us very personally and assuring us that we have the benefits of the Sacrament, which is the full forgiveness of our sins and the gift of everlasting life.

BUT, though participating in the Lord’s Supper is always a very personal matter, it is NEVER a private matter. There is also a horizontal dimension to the Lord’s Supper, that is, a relationship with our fellow communicants. One who communes worthily, acknowledges the importance of preserving a unity with fellow communicants and is willing to do what is possible to remove any fracture or division in that unity. That could be a doctrinal division, or it could be a division caused by my sin against another person, or theirs against me, or some other division that has occurred in the fellowship.

The Bible states in I Corinthians that receiving the Lord’s Supper with other people is a joint proclamation of the Lord’s death, that is, a proclamation of the nature and benefits of the Lord’s death. This proclaiming of the nature and benefits of the Supper is primarily to each other as people commune together. Faithful communicants are remembering the saving work of Jesus on their behalf, but not just on their behalf, but also on the behalf of the other communicants. So, the communicants are proclaiming to one another the meaning and benefit of the Sacrament as they commune together.

Disunity among those who commune together, contradicts the very character of the Lord’s Supper. The body and blood of Christ are for the strengthening of the faith of each believer, and also for the unity, the oneness and unity of the body of Christ, the Church, for those who are truly one with Him are also truly one with each other. So, those who commune must not perpetuate or ignore disunity in their midst.

Pastors should continue on a regular basis to teach the members of their congregations about the need for unity, that is a need for mutual love, for forgiveness of each other, and a growing together in common and true faith. The members of the fellowship, members of the congregation, need to be deliberate about forgiving each other, seeking forgiveness of others, of being careful of the faith of others, not giving offense to others by confessing false teaching or practice, so that the celebration of the Lord’s Supper is truly a sacrament of unity with Christ and with each other.

So, receiving the Lord’s Supper at the same altar with others, confesses a common faith and unity with those at that altar. Our participation in the Lord’s Supper is a public confession on our part that we are not only in fellowship with Christ, but that we are also in fellowship with those with whom we commune.

Dr. C.F.W. Walther wrote in his book on *Pastoral Practice*,

“The Holy Supper is one of the marks, one of the banners of the church, one of the seals of the church’s doctrine and faith. In whichever church one receives the Holy Supper, one is confessing that church and its doctrine. There cannot be a more inward, brotherly fellowship than that into which one enters with those in whose fellowship he receives the holy Supper.” (Walther, *Pastoral Theology*, p. 110-111, 149)

Our Synod’s Commission on Theology and Church Relations states the following in this regard:

“Close communion seeks to prevent a profession of confessional unity in faith where there is, in fact, disunity and disagreement. It would be neither faithful to the Scriptural requirements for admission to Holy Communion nor helpful to fallen humanity if the Christian Church welcomes to its altars those who deny or question clear Scriptural teachings.”

All of this is why closed communion was faithfully practiced in the church until recent times. Open communion has increased dramatically as devotion to the true doctrine of the church has decreased. But in the early church, oneness of doctrine and faithful adherence to sound teaching was taken very seriously by those who communed together.

Werner Elert in his book, *Eucharist And Church Fellowship In the First Four Centuries*, writes,

“The strict limitation of participation [in the Lord’s Supper] is clearly evidenced at the end of the apostolic age.” In the same book Elert also states, *“By his partaking of the Sacrament in a church, a Christian declares that the confession of that church is also his confession. Since a man cannot hold two differing confessions at the same time, he cannot commune in two churches of differing confessions.”* (pg. 77)

And Dr. Alvin Kollman, and Dr. Dale Meyer now serving as the President of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, wrote in an article in the *Concordia Journal* in September of 1980:

“The celebration of the Lord’s Supper in the early church was highly exclusive. After the service of the Word, all were required to leave the worship area who were catechumens [or non-members]. Only full members of the congregation were permitted to remain. The doors were even locked and guarded so that no outside would profane the celebration. This was indeed not an open communion practice. It was close communion, even closer than ours today.”

At the heart of all this is the truth that receiving the Sacrament is not only to publicly acknowledge ones faith in Christ and the fact of our full forgiveness of sins in Him, but it also publicly acknowledges the confession of the church in which one is communing as your own confession. In other words there is a very important horizontal dimension to the Lord’s Supper, which demands the faithful practice of Closed Communion by a Christian congregation.

IV. The official practice of Closed (Close) Communion by the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod is therefore consistent with the teaching of the Scripture and also the practice of the early Church.

Closed Communion is not an invention of the LCMS, but rather our doctrine and practice of the Lord's Supper is consistent with the doctrine and practice of the church down through the last 2000 years or more.

AND, most of main line Christendom today still practices Closed Communion, including Roman Catholic Church, Eastern Orthodox Church, all Lutheran sister churches of the LCMS, and other orthodox Lutheran churches, such as WELS, ELS, Church of the Lutheran Confessions, and the like. Again, the majority of Christian churches around the world practice closed communion.

The departure from the doctrine and practice of Closed Communion began only about 500 years ago during the time of the Reformation. At that time, Reformers like John Calvin and John Zwingli took a different position than did Luther in regard to the Words of Institution which Jesus spoke at the initial Supper.

They decided, based on human reason, that the bread and wine in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper only REPRESENT the body and blood of Christ, and therefore their appreciation for and understanding of the Sacrament was greatly depreciated from that of the Scripture.

Then, in 1817 open communion received a huge boost in practice when Emperor Frederick William III, ordered Lutherans in Germany, who were practicing Closed Communion, to admit people of the Reformed churches to Holy Communion. This took place in what is known as the Prussian Union. Many, if not most Lutheran congregations resisted this, in fact, some left Germany for this reason and came to the United States, including Dr. C. F. W. Walther and others who formed the beginnings of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod.

And, from the Reformation point forward to this day, open communion has become the practice of "Protestant" churches around the world. And some of the driving forces behind this trend are the following:

1. A devaluing of the Word of God, not believing what is written there not only in regard to the Sacrament, but also in regard to Sin, and Salvation by grace alone on account of Jesus alone by faith alone.
2. A devaluing of a common Biblical doctrine. The Bible is the true Word of God, and all doctrine (that is teaching) should be taken only from there. But there is a growing adherence to the belief that truth is relative, and different people can perceive the truth as they want, and that is acceptable and even good.
3. Therefore, unity in the faith is not seen as something important and surely not something necessary in regard to receiving the Lord's Supper with others. Rather than be firm in the truth, tolerance is urged and even expected. The attitude appears to be that we should all just believe in Jesus, and what is believed in regard to Jesus is not important. This thinking promotes unity by ignoring disunity and disagreements.
4. There is a very strong individualism growing in our nation and world. There is an emphasis on individual rights and privileges, rather than corporate rights and privileges. The focus is on what I want and what I think is good. And this individualism therefore emphasizes the vertical dimension of Holy Communion while ignoring or even denying the horizontal dimension. The attitude is that I can commune in any church I want because what matters is what I believe, and what others believe doesn't matter.
5. Therefore the role of the Pastor in the congregation as a servant of the Word of God and one having shepherding responsibilities over the flock he serves is greatly devalued or even rejected. So pastoral care, and congregational responsibilities in regard to the office of the keys, are also devalued, and even disdained and emotionally spoken against. The attitude seems to be, "How dare you judge me, how

dare you keep me from Communion, I'm just as good as you are, you can't stop me from doing what I want to do, we are all to love one another, and not let differences divide us," and the like.

All of the above attitudes and trends have even caused denominations like the United Methodists, the Church of Christ, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterians, The Episcopal Church, and others, to come together in Communion fellowship even through there are many disagreements and differing beliefs among them. The attitude is that, "Yes, we do disagree on many things, but we'll just ignore those and function as if there were none."

Thus, the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod is criticized for continuing to practice the Biblical, Confessional, historical practice of Closed Communion. We are seen to be old fashioned, unfriendly, judgmental, unloving, and the like.

All that being the case, how do we respond to people, to accusations, to a false understanding not only of what we preach, teach and confess, but why we do so? What should we say or do when we are challenged in regard to our practice of the Lord's Supper, to Closed Communion?

Well, let me say right up front, that whatever you say or do, many people will simply not hear you or understand what you are saying. They really don't want to understand your position (the LCMS teaching and belief) in this regard.

There are some situations in which they just will not hear what you have to say. Their minds are made up and there is nothing you are going to say to them that is going to have any positive impact. And that is true for a lot of reasons, so just know that up front, that failure to help people understand, or be accepting of this Biblical teaching and practice, is not necessarily your fault. Say what you will, or bring as many sound arguments and teaching from the Scripture and you may, they simply have made up their mind and nothing is going to change that.

Nonetheless, when we are given the opportunity to make a good witness to the Lord's Supper and it's true nature and benefits, and therefore the correctness of Closed Communion, we should try to do so and make the good confession.

SO, WHAT SHOULD WE SAY OR DO?

First of all, the proper doctrine of the Lord's Supper, and therefore the practice of Closed Communion cannot be explained in just a few minutes. That's why your pastor is really put on the spot when a nonmember of the congregation approaches him a few minutes before worship and asks to commune. And when he learns that they are not members and therefore asks them NOT to commune and they become real upset and even angry, he does not have the time right then to properly address the situation.

So you keep that in mind also. To properly address questions put to you in this regard by friends or relatives, understand that it is going to take some time. A few words or even sentences is not going to get it done. That being the case, ask to have some time to discuss this with them. Or, maybe you don't have the time, or maybe you don't feel qualified to deal with the issue with them, and if that is the case, you have a couple of options.

1. You could ask their permission to have your pastor visit with them in this regard. And if they agree to this, take the time to contact your pastor and then follow up with the other person and take the trouble to set up the meeting.

2. You could ask your pastor for some good literature, a good book (not volumes), or a good paper, or good pamphlet or the like that you can either keep on hand, or have access to in some way, to make available to those who make ask you about the practice of Closed Communion.

If the situation involves some friends or relatives who are attending worship with you on a Communion Sunday, be honest and alert them to the Closed Communion practice at your church before the Sunday service if possible so that they are not caught by surprise.

And if they are confused or upset and there is not time to talk about the matter in depth right then, promise to visit with them after the service in some detail. At that point you might consider one of the suggestions above in regard to referring them to your pastor, or putting some good literature in their hands.

Another thing to consider in this circumstance, is for you to refrain from receiving the Sacrament that day in love and care for your friend or family member. If you stay seated with them during the Supper, you exhibit care and concern for them, and keep them feeling abandoned or set apart.

But, let's assume that you have a little time to talk, and the other person is open to listening, and maybe even interested in why they can't commune in your church, in addition to inviting them to speak with your pastor, or putting some good literature in their hands, you could consider some of the following:

1. Explain that communing at the altar in your congregation is a witness to the fact that the communicants all believe the same thing, and in that you know that the other person does not believe all the things that your church teaches that you don't want to cause them to make a false statement or confession.

This shows love and concern for them, hopefully they will receive what you tell them as just that. IF they do, it could lead to some good discussion as to what the belief difference may be.

2. In addition, making the same comment about the unity expressed in communion together, and then letting the other person know that you don't want to cause a conscience problem for them, and therefore they should not commune, shows the same kind of love and care.

It may not be received that way, but you can sincerely make this comment and hopefully it will help.

In both these cases you are indicating a concern for the other person, which is good and correct, and a loving way of addressing them in regard to Closed Communion.

The point was made earlier in this presentation that participation in the sacrament in a particular church is a confession, and therefore we should help those who are not of our confession, NOT violate their own conscience or confession by communing at our church.

AND, we should not commune at a church which has a different confession than we do. We should not commune at a Methodist Church, or a Baptist Church, or an ELCA Church, and the like. For in so doing we give a witness that we confess the same faith as those in that church, which is not true. And, if we are giving witness that we believe as those with whom we commune do, we may in fact confirm a person with false beliefs in those beliefs.

3. The practice of Closed Communion is one of love and care for all those who commune. We are concerned as to what others believe. We do not want the person to eat and drink to their own damnation. We do not want to confirm a person in their unbelief. We don't

want to allow someone to do something which they do not understand and which may well result in their harm, even damnation.

Another point here is that those who charge that we who practice Closed Communion are loveless and uncaring, are guilty of the very thing that they are charging us with, passing judgment.

We can make the point that the practice of Closed Communion is a loving act, and encourage those with questions about it in that regard to give us a chance to explain, or talk with our pastor, or take some good literature on the subject and read it.

4. The practice of Closed Communion is one of love and care in that we are concerned for the pastoral care of the individual. They need to be led to a confession of sin and sincere repentance and a total dependence on the grace of God in Jesus Christ for forgiveness. This requires teaching and guiding. We don't just leave people on their own in dealing with the disease of sin.

EXAMPLE: As a parent, if our child comes to us and says that they do not feel well, we don't just say, "Well go into the bathroom and get something out of the medicine cabinet for yourself." Rather, we question them as to the nature of their ailment. We try to help them understand what the problem is so that the proper medicine can be administered. And so it is with good pastoral care and ministry with the Law and Gospel. It is the Holy Spirit who leads a person to true repentance and faith, and the Holy Spirit comes through the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. So we care about what people hear and read, and what they believe. We do not want to love people to death, but rather to love them to life, which at times means practicing tough love.

Therefore as you deal with others in regard to Closed Communion, be careful to conduct yourself in a loving and concerned way. NOT in a haughty prideful way, because that does great damage to the Gospel and to others.

5. As we have already noted we may be confronted with the charge that we are judging people by not admitting non-members to Communion in our congregation. We may be charged with claiming by the practice of Closed Communion that we alone are Christians, and that those who are not admitted to the Sacrament are not Christians. We can reply in this regard that we are not making that judgment or accusation by the practice of Closed Communion.

By not inviting other people who confess to be Christians to share the Lord's Supper with us, we are not making a judgment that they are not Christians. Rather, we are simply making the point that they do not confess the faith as we do, and that this lack of unity does not allow us to commune together.

So if this challenge is put before you, you may sincerely state that the practice of Closed Communion is not a judgment that others are not Christian, but rather we are simply acknowledging that there are differences in our confession and we do not want to express unity where there is none.

You could also point out that you would not commune in their church, not because you do not believe that their church is Christian, but because you want to honor the fact that there are differences in the confession and you don't want to confuse others, or ignore or dishonor those differences.

6. In this regard, we could add some Scripture evidence to our point, by referencing Acts 2:42 which addresses activities in the early church, "***And they were continually devoting***

themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

The point here is that the oneness in doctrine then resulted in fellowship and participation in the Lord's Supper.

So, where there is a difference in doctrine, we do not practice the Lord's Supper together for the Sacrament is a witness to the fact that we are united in our doctrine.

Dr. Francis Pieper, a former President of the LCMS, a teacher at our Seminary in St. Louis, and a writer of many books on our doctrine and practice as a Synod, wrote:

"Christian congregations, and their public servants, are only the ministrants and not the lords of the Sacrament. The Lord's Supper is not their institution, but Christ's. Therefore they must follow Christ's instructions in administering the Sacrament." (Christian Dogmatics, Vol. III, pg. 381)

7. When challenged about Close Communion, we can then make the point that the Supper is the Lord's Supper, not ours, and so we deal with it as He has taught and commanded. It is not our Supper, but His, and so we don't have a choice but to administer it as He has instituted it, and as the early church practiced it. And we can make the point that unity in faith was a part of that. Belief in the real presence was a part of that. Belief in Jesus alone as Savior was a part of that. So closed communion was a part of that.

Therefore, our Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod practices Closed Communion, and we should do so faithfully and without apology.

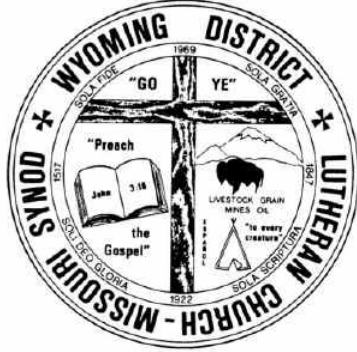
Closed Communion serves the Gospel because it helps preserve the Gospel from error and advances the Gospel. As noted earlier, many people are confused in regard to the Lord's Supper, and so quite naturally don't understand or accept Closed Communion. But when people are instructed in regard to the true Gospel, and the Lord's Supper as pure Gospel, they will come to understand the practice of Closed Communion, and will also come to defend the Gospel and Closed Communion.

Therefore, proper teaching and instruction are very necessary in dealing with Closed Communion and the Gospel in general. It is rarely possible to take just a few minutes and a few words to explain Closed Communion and make people real comfortable with it. So there are no perfect words or phrases that will accomplish a ready explanation, there are no special and immediate techniques to use in bringing somebody to a complete understanding and acceptance of, Closed Communion.

But, whatever our response, compassion and understanding for those denied the Supper at our altars should characterize our response. And we should pray for those for whom we are concerned in this regard. Pray for them that God will grant them an open heart and a full measure of the Holy Spirit. Pray for them that God will work saving faith in them and make them His own.

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