

Zion Lutheran Church
A Member Congregation of Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ
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PASTORAL LETTER ON COMMUNION IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

May 28, 2020

Dear Members & Friends of Zion,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. - 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Sunday, March 1, 2020 was the last day on which the sacrament of Holy Communion was celebrated and received at Zion. After prayer and discussion, Zion's council approved the celebration of distance communion during the 10:15am online worship service on the Festival of Pentecost, May 31, 2020. The sacrament is being celebrated in this manner solely due to emergency circumstances. The May 31 distance communion is the only communion service currently scheduled. The council will resume their discussion of communion practice at the June 15 council meeting.

The following instructions were printed in the most recent newsletter which was distributed via email and regular mail on May 22:

Those wishing to commune during online worship are invited to intentionally prepare for communion prior to the start of the service. Prayerfully bring the elements of bread and wine or grape juice to where you will be worshipping. If you need assistance to obtain proper elements of bread, wine or grape juice, please contact the pastor. Since the fullness of the sacrament is present in one of the elements, you may commune with bread or wine/grape juice and simply bow in prayer as the other element is raised in worship. Please consume the elements or return them to the earth following the service.

Throughout the time of the pandemic, I have been reading information from Lutheran and other church bodies as they have researched and presented proposals on the topic of Holy Communion. There are different stances which have been adopted and/or permitted. In some cases, a church leader, such as a bishop, has issued strong guidance, but stopped short of mandating one uniform practice for the church body or synod in which he or she serves.

I have included excerpts from Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC)'s brochure and by-laws at the conclusion of this document. LCMC is the association to which the congregation of Zion belongs. There is both freedom and accountability within the association. Zion, therefore, after prayerfully consulting the Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions, is able to discern a practice of Holy Communion appropriate for the congregation in this time of emergency.

On the Festival of Pentecost, we will read from Acts 2. "When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place." (Acts 2:1). Almost all strongly agree that Holy Communion should be celebrated solely within the gathered Christian community. A main point of contention regarding distance communion is the question, "Is online Christian community really the gathered Christian community"? This is an unprecedented time in our lifetimes, when we are sheltering in place for our safety and for the safety of others. Within this specific and emergency context, I would argue that the community we share together at 10:15am on Sundays and at 12:10pm on Wednesdays is the church community gathered together to worship God. Therefore, within that specific time when we are "together" online, we may celebrate Holy Communion at a distance. I am discouraging households from communing with a recording or communing by themselves outside the 10:15am worship service. Because many who attend the WOW service are currently joining us on Sundays, we have not currently scheduled a Wednesday communion.

At the conclusion of this document are excerpts from a position paper in support of distance communion by two pastors of the North American Lutheran Church (NALC). This paper is part of a larger communication of the NALC which includes a letter from the NALC Bishop and a position paper against distance communion. A link to all these documents is included.

In conclusion, I wish to fully acknowledge that I am not an expert in sacramental theology. I am seeking to prayerfully minister to the congregation of Zion in this extraordinary time, during which we have separated from physical reception of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ for an extended period of time. Distance communion is an option only in this time of emergency. I realize that some who attend the May 31 worship service may be uncomfortable with this practice. In the bulletin, the following invitation and prayer are printed for the time during which the body and blood of Christ will be received.

*For those continuing to fast from the sacrament, you are invited to pray the following prayer,
The Spiritual Communion:*

My Jesus, I believe that You are present in the Most Blessed Sacrament.
I love You above all things,
and I desire to receive You into my soul.
Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,
come at least spiritually into my heart.
I embrace You as if you were already there,

and I unite myself wholly to You.

Never permit me to be separated from You. (*Saint Alphonsus Liguori*)

Members and friends of Zion are welcome to reach out to me for more detailed discussion of Zion's communion practice in the time of pandemic. Please pray for the council and for me as we plan for online worship and for safe ways in which we can return to worship and receive the body and blood of Christ when are again gathered together physically in Zion's worship space.

In the peace and love of Christ,

Pastor Karin

Excerpt from

Welcome LCMC Brochure

Our DNA: We formed in 2000 and we did so around these four statements all leading toward the Great Commission of Matthew 28:16-20: • **We are Free in Christ • Accountable to One another • Rooted in the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions... • ...Working together to fulfill Christ's Great Commission to go and make disciples of all nations.**

Free in Christ: The local church is the front line of ministry and is responsible to carry out the Great Commission and the work of ministry. We do not have a "permission giving" officer, a "national office", or a compilation of rules.

Accountable to One Another: We are in the work of ministry together. Rooted in the

Scriptures: God's Word is our only authority as we seek to carry out this life and witness, and make decisions as to how to live.

And the Lutheran Confessions: We believe the Lutheran Confessions to be a faithful witness to the truth of Scripture and are reliable principles by which to guide the continued development of

Excerpt from

LCMC By-laws

1.01 LCMC is an association of congregations and, subject to the provisions of the constitution of LCMC and these by-laws, the voting members of this association shall be member congregations. For purposes of these by-laws, LCMC is also designated as "this association."

1.02. A congregation is a community of baptized persons gathered around Word and Sacrament. It serves as God's people in the world, nurturing its members and reaching out in witness and service to the world. Each member congregation of this association shall adopt governing documents and govern itself in such a way as to involve its members in fulfilling the definition, purpose and functions of the congregation. This association does not direct, control or supervise the affairs of individual congregations except as specifically provided in the constitution.

1.03. LCMC shall recognize, receive and maintain a list of its member congregations. Member congregations shall, by their practice and their governing documents:

- a. Preach the word and administer the sacraments in accord with the Augsburg Confession;
- b. Uphold and subscribe to the constitution of this association;
- c. Agree to call pastors who actively uphold and subscribe to the constitution of this association and,
- d. Support the life and work of this association by their practice, their governing documents and by written commitment to this association,
- e. Shall provide current census information as requested by the Board of Trustees including but not limited to the number of members, appropriate congregational contact information and identity of pastoral staff.

Excerpt from

**The Rev. Dr. Daniel W. Selbo Bishop of the North American Lutheran Church
Second Pastoral Letter on Virtual Communion**

<https://thenalc.org/wp-content/uploads/Documents/Teaching%20Statements/Second-Pastoral-Letter-on-Virtual-Communion-Bishop-Dan-Selbo.pdf>

From Bishop Selbo's Letter

Does a tele-Communion sharing represent a faithful application of the biblical texts and our Lord's command? To facilitate the discussion, two position papers were produced, representing the two theological positions. Those position papers are available on our NALC website and included with this letter.

Excerpts from

Position Paper #2: Why and how to share Communion in the COVID-19 pandemic
The Rev. Dr. Steve Turnbull, Upper Arlington Lutheran Church (Columbus, OH)
The Rev. Dr. Roy A. Harrisville III, New Life Lutheran Church (Menomonie, WI)

The Gospel of Jesus is good and true and stunningly beautiful — no less so in a time of pandemic. During this time, many pastors and congregations are choosing to share Communion in our homes, led by our pastors at a distance. We are sharing Communion in this way in order to give one another Christ and His benefits, to communicate the presence and promise of Jesus. In Communion, Jesus speaks to our fears and gives us hope. He speaks to our sin and gives us grace. He speaks to our mortality and gives us life, now and forever. During this time when many of us are lonely and longing even for physical contact with others, this is a Gospel opportunity to be touched physically by Jesus and united with His family.

Distance Communion is not “virtual Communion,” a term that prejudices the discussion from the outset. Pastors are leading a Communion liturgy by video, including the Words of Institution, and sharing that video synchronously or asynchronously to their congregations who have prepared bread and wine ahead of time in their homes. ...

The Communion meal of bread and wine, together with the Word of Jesus, is meant to be shared together in community with the Lord’s Church. The Bible teaches us that it is not a private, individual devotional practice. At the very beginning Jesus gave this supper to a gathering of His disciples. The stories in the book of Acts, though admittedly quite different from our own practices, tell us that the growing church broke bread together in their homes. In one of St. Paul’s very few extant references to the Lord’s Supper he begins by addressing the “meetings” of the Corinthians “when they come together.” This assumption is shared by the Formula of Concord: “Christ’s command ‘Do this’ ... includes the entire action or administration of the Sacrament: that in a Christian assembly we take bread and wine, consecrate it, distribute it, receive it, eat and drink it, and therewith proclaim the Lord’s death (FC SD VII.84).”⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Some quote this same passage to oppose distance Communion, as if the “entire action” were not being shared, but this is taking the Reformers’ argument out of context. The argument in context is that the bread should not be “locked up, made into a sacrifice, or carried around in procession” but consumed by the people after consecration (FC SD VII.83). That’s why they had to emphasize the acts of distributing and eating in their congregations. It’s obvious to most people now, but actually eating the meal is part of the “entire act.” We proponents of distance communion are not holding back bread and wine from the people. This passage would be a much more relevant protest against those who would now practice “spiritual Communion,” wherein the clergy consecrate and consume the elements while others observe and pray but do not receive and eat