

The Sacrament of Holy Communion is not simply a personal, individual act. The celebration of Holy Communion is also a public act of confession. In other words, it testifies to our unity in the "teaching of the Apostles" (cf. Acts 2:42). When you receive the Sacrament at a church's altar, you are giving public testimony that you agree with that church's doctrinal position. This is why we believe, teach, and confess that Holy Communion is the highest expression of church fellowship. We believe that to agree about the Gospel is more than agreeing to some generalities concerning Jesus or the Bible. There is no such thing as a "generic" Christianity. When we commune together we testify to our agreement in the Gospel and all the articles of the Christian Faith. Holy Communion, in this sense, is a mark of confessing the Christian Faith. When we decline to give Holy Communion to persons not of our church body, we are not doing so because we think they are "bad people" or because they are "not Christians." We practice a "closeness" at our communion rail because we sincerely believe that this is what the Word of God teaches and what God would have us do with his Son's precious body and blood.

Closed communion is not meant to be a judgmental practice, in the sense that we are condemning people. It is a practice which preserves and upholds the truth and power of the Sacrament. It is a practice which we Lutherans feel protects those who do not believe the same things as we do. It is a practice which recognizes that a person's church membership does mean something. To belong to a church means to confess what that church believes and confesses. To commune at a church's altar is the highest expression of confessing oneness with what that church teaches. A person must determine for oneself if what one's church teaches is what the Word of God teaches. We respect each individual's decision in this matter, but we cannot in good conscience create the impression that differences between churches are of no significance. Because the differences between churches concern the Gospel of our Savior Jesus Christ, we know that the differences are important and do matter. This is why we choose to practice closed communion, a practice which is found in the historic, orthodox Lutheran Church since the time of the Reformation and a practice which can be traced back to the very early years of the Christian church. We hope that our beliefs will be respected by those who differ with us. We certainly do not intend to offend anyone or do we wish to create ill-will and hurt feelings. Hopefully, this brief explanation will help you or someone else understand that our love for the Sacrament, and our love for the individual, are the motivations for our practice of closed communion.

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The 2017 Small Catechism with Explanation teaches the scriptural understanding of Closed Communion. Page 342 and following gives the biblical references concerning the decision of a pastor, the steward of the mysteries of God, to withhold communion. Matthew 26 and 28 teach us that communion is for Jesus' disciples who are baptized and instructed in the faith. 1 Corinthians 11:28 teaches us to examine ourselves before receiving the Lord's supper. Those unable to examine themselves are not to receive it. Acts 2:42, 1 Corinthians 11:26, 10:17, Romans 16:17, and Ephesians 4:1-4 seek to guard those who eat and drink the body and blood of the Lord from receiving it to their harm because they have a different faith, a different confession. 1 Corinthians 5:11, 13 and 1 Corinthians 10:20-21 reminds us that those who are openly ungodly and unrepentant, living contrary to God's word, are excluded from the Lord's table. Matthew 6:15 instructs us that those who are unforgiving and refusing to be reconciled to their neighbor are not to receive the Lord's supper. 1 Corinthians 10:17 reminds us that we who are many are one body for we all partake of the one bread. The Lord's supper brings consolation to trouble hearts and minds through the forgiveness of sins won by Christ. What a great gift!