

From the Pastor's Desk

Dear Friends in Christ,

From time to time I am asked about our Synod's Communion policy and practice. More often than not, when I am, the person asking is wrestling with the issue of whether or not our policy and practice is unfairly judgmental towards others. Or maybe they are wrestling with that perception, as expressed by a family member or a friend, and they are unsure how to respond. Sometimes LCMS congregations are accused, for example, as a result of our Communion policy and practice, of concluding that we are "better than others."

As you probably know, in the LCMS we practice what is called "Close" or "Closed" Communion. I still remember very clearly referring to our Communion practice years ago, to my pastor at the time, as Closed Communion, and how quickly and firmly he corrected me. There is a degree to which Communion, in LCMS churches, is "closed" to some, but our practice is really better understood as "Close(d) Communion." In other words, both of those words are true at the same time. I try to explain it to our Jr. High Confirmation students this way: at LCMS altars and in LCMS churches, Holy Communion is offered to those who are "close" to one another in belief, and it is, out of necessity, "closed" to those who are not.

One of the things I have found over the years is that, when our members are struggling with Communion issues, or struggling with family members or friends who are struggling with Communion issues, it may be because they are mostly

thinking of Holy Communion in terms of the "vertical" aspect. Many times people forget that the "horizontal" aspect of Communion is also important.

What do I mean by that? Holy Communion is between us and God, yes. But at the same time, it is also between us and our fellow communicants. Both "directions" are captured in the name: Holy Communion is a communion with God and also a communion with our fellow communicants. The New Testament (see 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 and 11:23 ff.) makes it very clear that, not only are we receiving something from Christ in Holy Communion, but we are also proclaiming and expressing something when we commune. We are proclaiming His death for our salvation, and we are expressing our unity in the Christian faith (which revolves around His saving death and resurrection) with our fellow communicants.

When we ask a non-LCMS family member or friend, or a non-LCMS visitor from the community, to refrain from receiving Holy Communion, we are not judging their faith or what is in their hearts. We are not calling the genuineness of their faith into question. We are also not withholding forgiveness and salvation from them, because those are blessings which may also be received by other means. We are, however, demonstrating concern for their public confession, while at the same time seeking to maintain the integrity of our own.

What do I mean by that? Whether or not the person in question agrees personally with everything the church body to which they belong teaches, their church body (with

which they are publicly associated) does subscribe to a particular set of doctrines (that is, to a particular understanding of what the Bible teaches). Their church body and ours do not necessarily agree on every doctrinal point, and that disagreement should not simply be dismissed as unimportant. While we may be able to acknowledge that another church body is Christian (believing in Jesus Christ as Savior), they may still hold to certain doctrinal beliefs which, in our view, clearly contradict what the Bible teaches and therefore wind up obscuring the Gospel truth of all that God has done for our salvation in Christ.

This is why the LCMS has historically maintained that complete doctrinal agreement, and not simply partial agreement, is necessary for joint Communion. The purpose of doing so is not to make some kind of a political statement against other church bodies, but simply to strive to uphold the truth of the Bible, and the centrality of Jesus Christ, in its entirety.

While I realize that most people are more than likely not thinking in these terms when they come to church on a Sunday morning, Holy Communion is, nevertheless, as I indicated above, an expression of unity. For people who belong to different church bodies, which publicly disagree about what the Bible teaches, to commune together is, at best, dishonest. It is an expression of a unity that does not truly exist. To dismiss the importance of that disunity is to run the risk of dismissing the importance of everything the Bible teaches.

All of this falls within the "horizontal" realm of Holy Communion. In the event that the person in question belongs to a church body with a different understanding of the nature of Holy Communion, even more so, we are also demonstrating concern for that person's spiritual well-being. This would fall within the "vertical" realm. While asking such a person to refrain from communing with us may be perceived as unloving, doing so is, in fact, quite loving. 1 Corinthians 11:27-29 teaches us that it is possible to receive Christ's body and blood in Holy Communion to our spiritual harm. This can happen in two ways: (1) if we receive Holy Communion without being genuinely repentant; and (2) if we receive Holy Communion without recognizing that Christ is truly present with His body and blood. For purposes of this discussion, the second reason is the more pressing concern.

Let me try to explain that a bit further. If a person from a non-LCMS background joins us at our Communion rail and receives the bread and the wine believing that they are receiving only bread and wine and nothing more (which is what many non-Lutheran churches believe and teach about Holy Communion), they would be receiving Christ's body and blood without being aware of it. That is not necessarily their own fault; they have been taught otherwise within their particular church body. However, the fact remains, and according to 1 Corinthians 11 they would in that instance be receiving Holy Communion to their spiritual harm and not to their benefit.

In other words, Holy Communion does not automatically benefit a person. In fact, the opposite may very well be true. Why? What a person receives in Holy Communion is not determined by their own belief. It is determined by what God says about the nature of Holy Communion in His Word. And according to His Word, we are receiving Christ's true body and blood in Holy Communion, and not

simply bread and wine (though we receive those, as well).

The same thing is true, by the way (going back to the first reason I mentioned a couple of paragraphs back), when we ask a member to refrain from communing as a result of a public and ongoing sin in their own life. It may be perceived as unloving to do so, but in fact it would be unloving to say nothing. Any parent will understand this concept. Sometimes our children will dislike us or be angry with us for disciplining them, but we do so out of love for them and because we want to correct them, teach them, and protect them from both present and future harm. Something similar is happening when it comes to Holy Communion.

As a pastor, I struggle tremendously with the reality that something which Jesus has given to His Church as a wonderful gift which gives wonderful blessings can, at times, become a source of conflict and hurt feelings. I don't like that. And my heart breaks when I have to ask someone to refrain from communing with us, for whatever reason.

However, the fact remains that our Communion policy and practice is inevitably going to rub people the wrong way at times, even if that is not our intent. Some people will accuse us of being judgmental, or of having a superiority complex, or of being unloving. When that happens, the very best we can do is gently to attempt to explain that our motivation, in fact, is love and concern for their spiritual well-being. In the process, better yet, we can simply point them to the Holy Scriptures. Our Communion policy and practice is not simply a matter of human opinion. It is derived from what Lutheran Christians have always believed that the Bible teaches.

May God continue to guide us in our study of His Word and help us to keep Jesus Christ our Savior at

the center of everything we say and do!

In His Service,

Pastor Derek Riddle

Love Illusions

In the December newsletter, I promised to return in future columns to some of the information Dr. Bryan Salminen shared during the October "Keeping Love Alive" Marriage Workshop. In the second half of the workshop, Dr. Salminen addressed five "Love Illusions." Last month I shared the first illusion: **"Love is a feeling."** This month I would like to continue by sharing the second illusion: **"Relationships should be free of conflict."**

Couples often believe that, if they argue a lot, they must be incompatible. The truth is, however, that all relationships have conflict. If a couple never argues, in fact, there is probably a lot that they are hiding from one another.

Conflict, while rarely pleasant at the time, actually serves several very important purposes within marriage. For one thing, it provides needed distance at times. Yes, you read that correctly. Sometimes distance is actually healthy and proves to be beneficial. That distance, in turn, provides an opportunity, after a period of time, for the couple to reconnect and renew their relationship.

A second reason that conflict is essential within marriage is that it forces communication and the expression of feelings. Sometimes these things don't happen otherwise. Similarly, conflict also forces each member of the couple to see the other's perspective. In turn, this leads to resolution of the conflict and serves to strengthen the marriage in the long run.

A third reason that conflict is beneficial within marriage is that it is actually beneficial for children to see their parents face conflict and resolve it – when it is resolved in healthy ways, of course. This is how children learn conflict resolution. It is also beneficial for children to see their parents experiencing a wide variety of emotions but not being overcome by them. This is how children learn that it is perfectly acceptable and appropriate to have emotions. What is unhealthy is when we allow our emotions to "have" us.

In coming months I will share three additional "love illusions" Dr. Salminen shared with us: (3) Our relationship can never change because of my partner's personality. (4) My husband can't communicate. (5) My wife is always nagging me.

Remaining Lenten & Holy Week Schedule

By now the Lenten season is well underway. Below is the schedule for the remainder of this year's mid-week and Holy Week services.

A reminder that this year's **Soup Suppers**, in order to aid in our observance of the Lenten season, are intentionally simpler than in past years. Soup, bread, and dessert are being served. These meals are again being served by our high school youth as a fundraiser, in particular for this summer's trip to the National Youth Gathering in New Orleans.

The theme of this year's midweek services is "**The Book of Job: Blessed Be the Name of the Lord!**"

Remaining Lenten and Holy Week Schedule

Lenten Midweek #4-6 – March 2, 9 & 16

5:30-6:15 p.m. Soup Supper
(Fellowship Hall)

6:30 p.m. Mid-Week Service

Palm Sunday – March 20 at 9:30 a.m.

Holy (Maundy) Thursday Service (with Holy Communion) – March 24 at 6:30 p.m.

Good Friday Service – March 25 at 1:00 p.m.

Easter Sunrise – March 27 at 7:00 a.m. (followed by an Easter Breakfast in the Fellowship Hall)

Easter Sunday (with Holy Communion) – March 27 at 9:30 a.m.

Please mark your calendars and plan to attend these special services.

2016 Lenten devotional booklets, from Lutheran Indian Ministries, were placed in your mailboxes in February. Extra copies, for visitors or for members to share with family, friends, or neighbors, remain available in the narthex. A handful of copies of this year's Lenten devotional booklet from Lutheran Hour Ministries, entitled "**Love's Greatest Sacrifice**," are also available in the narthex. You may also read or listen to the devotions on-line, or subscribe to receive them via E-mail, at www.lhm.org.

BOARD OF ELDERS

The Board of Elders are to assist Pastor with the spiritual growth and care of members and the worship life of the congregation. This year we will be spending one half hour before our monthly meetings to do Elder Training to help us so that we may better serve all members of our congregation in our **caring, reaching, sharing, and teaching**. If anyone has a question or concern please contact your Elder that has been assigned to you. The members and Elder Zone teams are on the bulletin board between Pastor's and the church office doors.

As we continue with the last half of our midweek Lenten services before we come to Holy Week, we ask that you come join in and hear God's Word. Lent is a time of repentance and humility. Jesus humbled Himself by dying on the cross for us and for our salvation. This Lenten season we can take up our cross and follow Jesus. We repent, asking Jesus to create a clean heart in us so we may follow Him as we meditate on His Word, growing in our faith as we learn all that He has done and continues to do for us. This Easter as we remember the love Jesus shows us, we too may show His love to others through our **caring, reaching, sharing, and teaching**. This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. Christ has risen! He has risen indeed!

The Lutheran Hour

The Lutheran Hour can be heard locally on Sunday mornings at 7:00

a.m. on 92.5 FM and at 11:00 a.m. on 1450 AM. You can also listen on-line or via podcast at www.lutheranhour.org. Now you can also download the new Lutheran Hour Mobile App to your mobile device. Instructions for doing so can be found at www.lhm.org/apps/.

March 2016 Schedule:

March 6

"Reconciled Reconcilers"

Lutheran Hour Speaker: Rev. Dr. Gregory Seltz

Through forgiveness, God gives us another way to deal with people who have hurt us.

(2 Corinthians 5:17-20)

March 13

"It's Worth the Sacrifice"

Lutheran Hour Speaker: Rev. Dr. Gregory Seltz

God calls us to be the right people in the wrong place, for the sake of others.

(Philippians 3:8-14)

March 20

"Strive for What You Already Have"

Lutheran Hour Speaker: Rev. Dr. Gregory Seltz

Christianity is about putting to work what God has already given us, in Christ.

(Philippians 2:5-11)

March 27

"An Unbeliever's Sermon"

Lutheran Hour Speaker: Rev. Dr. Gregory Seltz

Pastor Ken Klaus asked several non-believing friends to help him write his Easter sermon. Hear what they said.

(Luke 24:5-6)

Stewardship Corner

Lent is a season of repentance. Repentance is turning away from sin, while we turn toward God for the forgiveness of sins. During Lent, we hear the Word of God and consider our lives in light of it. We confess our failures, and receive absolution, that is, forgiveness, and then commit ourselves to do better.

What does God say about giving to the Church? The Bible

tells us. Our giving should be first fruits giving (Genesis 4:4; Proverbs 3:9). Our giving should be regular, on the first day of week, which has the Divine Service in mind (1 Corinthians 6:1-2). Our giving should be proportional: according to our income (1 Corinthians 16:1-2), according to what we have been given (2 Corinthians 8:12; Luke 12:48), our giving should be given with a spirit of eagerness and enthusiasm (2 Corinthians 9:2), generosity and liberality (2 Corinthians 8:20), cheerfully without compulsion (2 Corinthians 9:7). Our giving should be directed to those who teach us (Galatians 6:6-7) because a laborer is worthy of his hire, and we all know the going rate of such laborers in our communities (Luke 10:7; 1 Timothy 5:18).

Now consider your own giving in light of the Bible's teaching. Are you giving of your first fruits, taking it out of your paycheck first, or does God get what's left over? Are you giving voluntarily and cheerfully? Are you giving proportionally and generously? Are you giving with eagerness and enthusiasm? Are you giving to your local congregation, sharing all good things with the one who teaches you? If your answer to any of these is "No," then repent. Turn away from your sin and toward God for forgiveness. Confess your failure. Receive absolution. And commit to do better. We know that the Spirit is willing but our flesh is weak. We believe, and we pray that God, through Word and Sacrament, would help our unbelief, our lack of trust in His ability to provide.

And this is precisely what God promises. This is what St. Paul wrote to the Church in Corinth: ""The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves

a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. As it is written, 'He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.' He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for all your generosity, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God" (2 Cor 9:6-15).

St. Paul tells us that the Lord of all will both supply and increase what you need to give to the church for its work in and for the world. He tells us that this work that God is doing in us will enrich and bless us in every way and through this it will produce thanksgiving to God. Everyone benefits. We will be blessed in our giving, and it will produce thanksgiving to God in those who receive it.

Giving to the church is not a burden, just like all of God's teaching (1 John 5:2-4). They are not a burden because of He who gives it: the God who loves us and gave His only Son to die so that we may live. He loved us in that He sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption as sons. . . . So we are no longer slaves, but sons, and if a son, then an heir through God (Galatians 4:4-5, 7). We are heirs. We receive the full rights of sons, a status that Christ our Lord achieved for us by His death, resurrection, and ascension.

So we strive to do what He asks because we are His children. And when we don't, we repent. We confess our sins. We receive absolution. We desire to do better, praying that God would work in us both to will and

to do according to His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13).
Taken from www.lcms.org

Keep Our Ministry Growing

When passing by the match poster in the narthex, notice that we are half way to our goal.....thanks to all have been a part of this. As of February 17, our church mortgage is down to \$13,987.25. How exciting to be a part of this historic church event! That is why the Planning Team has decided to put a special envelope every month into the member mailboxes. This will give everyone an easy opportunity to be a part of this challenging event. Please pray about how you might participate.

Easter EGGStravaganza!

On Saturday, March 5, from 10 a.m. until noon in the Fellowship Hall at Peace. Free Pancake Breakfast from 10:00-10:45, Crafts and Cookie Decorating from 10:45-11:30, Story Time from 11:30-noon. For all children in Kindergarten through 5th Grade (all children must be accompanied by an adult.) Sponsored by the Board of Evangelism. Food donations are needed; please see the sign-up sheet in the narthex. Thank you!!



Visit us on the web:
www.peacelcms.org



Peace Lutheran Church - Rogers City