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## What Is Close(d) Communion?

**C**lose (or “closed”) Communion is the practice of serving Holy Communion to those for whom Christ intended it – namely, to those who have been instructed in the Christian faith, who are able and willing to “examine themselves,” and who share a common faith and confession. This practice dates back to the earliest days of the Church. In fact, most Christians in the world today belong to church bodies that practice some form of close(d) Communion.

### “For the Forgiveness of Sins”

On the night He was betrayed, “Now as they were eating [the Passover meal], Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body.’ And He took a cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink of it, all of you, for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.’” (Matthew 26:26–28) (see also Mark 14:22–24; Luke 22:19–20; 1 Corinthians 11:23–26) The words *for the forgiveness of sins* make it clear that Christ instituted this sacred meal of His body and blood for sinners who need God’s forgiveness. As Luther says, “These words ... show us that

in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us through these words. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation” (Small Catechism, “The Sacrament of the Altar”).

### “Examine Yourself”

But only those who are properly prepared according to our Lord’s command are to receive the Lord’s Supper. Writing by Christ’s authority (1 Corinthians 11:23) to sinner-saints in Corinth, St. Paul says “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself” (1 Corinthians 11:27–29). While Christ intended this sacred meal to bring only blessing to those who partake, Paul’s words make it clear that this Sacrament, if misused, can be spiritually harmful. In love, therefore, he urges us to examine ourselves before approaching the Lord’s Table. We examine ourselves by asking questions: (1) Are we sorry for our sins (Psalms 38:18; 2 Corinthians 7:10)? (2) Do we trust in Jesus Christ as our Savior from sin (2 Corinthians 13:5)? (3) Do we believe that we receive Jesus’ body and blood in the

Sacrament (Luke 22:19–20)? and (4) Do we desire, with the Spirit’s help, to change our sinful lives (Ephesians 4:22–24)?

### Who Should Not Commune?

Those, therefore, who do not believe in Jesus as their Savior or who eat and drink without recognizing the body of the Lord should not commune, because that person eats and drinks judgment on himself. Those unable to examine themselves, such as infants, or those who have not received proper instruction, should receive such instruction before coming to the Lord’s Table. Those unwilling to examine themselves – those who are openly ungodly or unrepentant or who refuse to be reconciled with others—cannot receive Christ’s forgiveness in the Sacrament unless they recognize their sin and their need for His forgiveness. When the Church says to such people, “Do not commune,” it speaks in *love*. It seeks to keep them from possible harm, and it seeks to lead them to receive the body and blood in a way that blesses them.

## The Lord's Supper: A Proclamation of the Gospel

St. Paul says, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). Each time we gather together at the Lord's Table we "preach" the Gospel together. We profess to the world "the Lord's death," that Jesus shed His blood for the forgiveness of our sin. It would not be honest or helpful, therefore, to commune with those who do not share the same confession of faith, since we do not want to say one thing with our words and another with our actions.

## Caring for Those Who Commune

Church membership should never be the only consideration in determining who should commune. Missouri Synod congregations usually issue a general invitation to the Lord's Supper to members of congregations that are in church fellowship with our Synod. It is important to recognize, however, that the scriptural practice of close(d) Communion includes the necessity of exercising pastoral care in special cases and unusual circumstances. Visitors desiring to receive Communion are encouraged to speak with the pastor, because he (along with the congregation and the individual communicant) shares a

God-given responsibility for making decisions that are faithful to what God's Word teaches about admission to the Lord's Table (1 Corinthians 4:1-2; 11:23).

## Why Close(d) Communion?

So ... why do we practice close(d) Communion? Because Scripture teaches us

- To welcome to the Sacrament all those who are properly prepared;
- To hold in high esteem this sacred meal for sinners;
- To examine ourselves before partaking of Jesus' body and blood;
- To recognize the Lord's Supper as a proclamation of the Gospel;
- To show Christ's love and concern for all who desire to commune.



## CONCORDIA TRACTS

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