*DP Vantage Point*

*For Christ and for His world SWD magnifies partnerships,*

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 July, 2012

The church and Communion practices #1

Brothers in the Office of the Holy Ministry;

At our June SWD Convention one of the resolutions that passed was **RES 4-02 To encourage “Life Together” in the South Wisconsin District through the Unity of Practices Regarding the Lord’s Supper.**

While the vote was overwhelmingly in favor of the resolution, the yeas being 218 and the nays being 46, unfortunately it was not unanimous. Notice, I didn’t write “surprisingly”. While I would have much preferred a unanimous vote, I understand why it wasn’t unanimous. As the church has throughout the ages since the institution of the Lord’s Supper, we struggle with who is to rightly receive the Sacrament of our Lord’s body and blood.

Is the Sacrament of the Altar intended for all believers regardless of what church or church body they might belong to? Is the Lord’s Supper a matter of one’s individual beliefs and conscience, or is there a corporate(community) aspect of Holy Communion? Is there a difference between “Close Communion” and Closed Communion”? What about communing someone who is not a member of an LCMS congregation? So we say that we practice “closed Communion” merely as a cover for what has come to be called “functionally open Communion”? You could add more questions to that list. But “Closed Communion” is not an open question.

As you may know, our Lutheran Church Missouri Synod has passed various resolutions in support of “Closed Communion”. In fact no less than 10 times have such resolutions come to an LCMS national convention and been passed. In case you would like to look them up here’s the list:

* + - Res. 2-19, *1967 Convention Proceedings*, p. 93
		- Res. 3-18, *1969 Convention Proceedings*, p. 101
		- Res. 3-01, *1981 Convention Proceedings*, pp. 153-155
		- Res. 3-12, *1983 Convention Proceedings*, p. 158
		- Res. 3-08, *1986 Convention Proceedings*, p. 143
		- Res. 3-08, *1995 Convention Proceedings*, pp. 121-122
		- Res. 3-05, *1998 Convention Proceedings*, pp. 115-116
		- Res. 3-28, *1998 Convention Proceedings*, p. 124
		- Res. 3-09, 2007 *Convention Proceedings*, p. 123
		- *Res. 4-19, 2013 Convention Proceedings, p. 134*

The practice of “closed Communion” is consistent with and faithful to what Lord teaches in Holy Scripture about what Holy Communion is. The practice of “closed Communion” is consistent with and faithful to our confession of what the church is.

Someone no less the stature of C. F. W. Walther makes that point strongly as he penned *“Theses on Communion Fellowship with Those Who Believe Differently “*.

If you have read that document you know that Walther follows his usual pattern of drafting theses and then supplying proof in support of his theses. This document follows that same pattern.

The first four theses read as follows:

Theses I: The true visible church in an absolute sense, or part of the same, is that church in which the Word of God is preached purely and the Holy Sacraments are administered according to Christ’s institution.

Theses II: A Fellowship in which the Word of God is fundamentally denied, or in which a a fundamental denial of the Word of God is tolerated, is not a true orthodox church, but a false heterodox church or sect.

Theses III: Every man is obligated to recognize the true visible church, and, if he has the opportunity, to join it.

Theses IV: Every man is obligated to avoid heterodox churches, an in the event he has belonged to a heterodox church, his obligation is to renounce it and separate himself from it. (page 4 of Walther’s document, available from Concordia Theological Seminary Press)

Under Theses I Walther makes these comments among many others:

* “For if within the Lutheran Church itself there were doctrines of faith which Luthers could either accept or reject, then why not also practice communion fellowship with non-Lutherans who hold to this or that particular doctrine? …Theologians of uncertainty wish only to endlessly seek the truth but have never found it…”(page 7)
* “Every doctrine of the faith is revealed in Holy Scripture with complete clarity and unmistakability, and in that our Church confesses these doctrines, it is the infallible mouth of God.”(page 9)
* “Further W. Baier says: The unity of the church is opposed by syncretism, or the unifying of discordant parts of religion in spite of the differences, in a fraternal, ecclesiastical union so that either the teachers of error in those parts which do not agree or at least the erring persons themselves are allowed within the church fellowship as brothers in Christ and joint heirs of eternal life.”(page 13)
* “Unionism is based on nothing but unbelief, in that it receives, justifies, and tolerates erring =believers and those who openly teach contrary to the Word of God.”(page 19)
* “We know well that the false believers charge that conflict and quarreling over pure doctrine and disunity in the church are our chief delights. Little do they suspect that they are heavy crosses for us. (page 19)

And it is not merely C.F.W. Walther who writes such, Herman Sasse writes this in his 1937 essay entitled *“Theses on the Question of Church and Altar Fellowship”:*

An understanding of the question of church fellowship and altar fellowship is only possible when one has understood the causes of divisions of the church and separation in the Supper. The one church, which is the body of Christ, may be divided by no one. The Table of the Lord, at which the true body and blood of Christ is received, remains ever one and inseparable. As there is only one church, so there is only one Supper. The divisions of Christianity and the separation at the celebration of the Supper have a double cause. They are explained by the sins of lovelessness, which lead to schism and division of the congregation, or by the intrusion of heresy into the congregation, which leads to the formation of sects and necessitates the separation of pure doctrine from false, the church from the sect… 5. Schism and heresy are two allurements which constantly threaten the church. In view of the propensity to schism, admonitions in the NT, such as 1 Cor 1:1 ff.; 11:18; Eph 4:1 ff., are spoken to Christians and Christian congregations. He who destroys the unity of the Christian congregation sins against Christ. He who causes divisions of the congregation about the Supper celebrates the Supper unworthily and eats and drinks the body and blood of the Lord to judgment. In view of the propensity to heresy (e.g., 1 Tim 4:1; 2 Tim 3:1 ff.), the admonitions apply to be on guard for false doctrine and heretics (i.e., Gal 1:7 ff.; Titus 3:10; 1 John 4:1 ff.; 2 John 10 ff.). For if heresy comes to rule in Christianity, then the church may become the synagogue of Satan (Rev 2:9), and the Lord’s Supper can become a sacrifice to idols (Rev 2:20). Thus Christianity has the duty to strictly avoid every church and altar fellowship with heresy, to examine individual believers, to instruct the erring in love, and to most strenuously advance church and altar fellowship within orthodox Christianity. [Sasse, Hermann (2001-06-23). The Lonely Way: Selected Essays and Letters, Volume 1 (Kindle Locations 7876-7883). Concordia Publishing House. Kindle Edition] (emphasis added)

No wonder that we have come to understand that Communion fellowship is Church fellowship; and that Church fellowship is Communion fellowship. No wonder 9 times in the last 45 years the LCMS in convention has stood firmly on our practice of Closed Communion and not altered it.

More to follow…

May our gracious Lord bless as you stand true to our Confession and practice!

Rev. John Wille

President, SWD

*DP Vantage Point*

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September 2012

The church and Communion practices #2

Brothers in the Office of the Holy Ministry;

Since the last edition of the Vantage Point, I have done a quite a bit of reading on the subject of the Holy Supper. As you know, the Lord’s Supper is a meal that we cherish, and rightly so. It is a unique gift from our Lord to His Church and His people. Several of you have commented on the article. Here’s a pertinent comment which I just received from a brother:

For some time now I have had my travelling parishioners gather bulletins for me as they are on their way at LCMS churches over the country.  Now I know I am a small parish so it’s not like I am getting these bulletins every week, but it is a rare bulletin that has a full closed communion statement.  Most of them are “half-closed.”  This isn’t even dealing with those churches that have the statement in and don’t enforce it.  (Mine included, I must admit shamefully that in every case I don’t always enforce or deal with situations as I ought!)  (Forgive me even as I seek forgiveness from my pastor!)  What does closed communion mean?  What is the pure practice?  Does it mean we stop at the altar?  I agree with the need to talk and deal with this issue, but I am just suggesting that it is a bigger problem that some may see as you probably know.  My guess is that congregations that fully enforce closed communion ask questions at the rail, etc. are less than 10%.  Dealing with closed communion kind of seems like President Kieschnick’s speech about stomping out abuses of the 8th commandment.  A noble intention, but a huge giant.

Without a doubt the best place to begin the discussion of Closed Communion is with Holy Scripture, and a discussion of what Holy Communion is really all about.

None of us would argue or disagree with the fact that our Lord’s body and blood are truly present in the Holy Supper “in, with and under the bread and wine for us Christians to eat and to drink.” We believe, teach and confess that our Lord comes to us in the Holy Supper with His body and blood in a supernatural and miraculous manner. We come burdened with our sin; we leave forgiven.

But there is more to the Supper than merely forgiveness. There is unity. There is harmony. There is confession. There is a declaration. St. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 10: 16ff, **“**The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation **(κοινωνία)** in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation **(κοινωνία)** in the body of Christ?Because there is one **(εἷς)** bread, we who are many are one **(εἷς)** body, for we all partake of the one **(εἷς)** bread.”

So that we are working with the same definitions, the Greek words are:

* **κοινωνία**: an association involving close mutual relations and involvement—‘close association, fellowship. That is, one who participates with another in some enterprise or matter of joint concern—‘partner, associate, one who joins in with, sharing, a commonality in the confession of faith in receiving the supper
* **σῶμα**, **τος** *n*: the physical body of persons. This is the real presence!
* **εἷς**: one, in contrast to more than one. Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996).  *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: Based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition.) (604). New York: United Bible Societies.

There is a unity in the Sacrament that is intensely spiritual and theological, the foundation of which is the common confession of our faith. A quote from Elert’s Eucharist and Church Fellowship:

Theologically the Sacrament was always understood as binding its participants together. In Chrysostom we have the most careful working out of the connection between 1 Cor. 10:16 and 17. He raises the question why in v. 16 Paul does not use “partaking” but koinonia.20 He answers that communicating involves not only partaking ( and ) but also being made one, for as the body is united with Christ, so are we made one with Him through this bread.

He continues with Chrysostom’s quote:

[Here he goes over to v. 17.] “What do I mean with koinonia?” he says. “We are that selfsame body.” For what is the bread? The body of Christ. What do they become who partake of it ()? The body of Christ: not many bodies but one body. Many grains are made into one bread so that the grains appear no more at all, though they are still there. In their joined state () their diversity is no longer discernible. In the same way we are also bound up () with one another and with Christ. You are not nourished from one body and the next man from a different body, but all from one and the same body. For this reason he adds, “We have all partaken of one bread. If of one and the same bread, then we are all become the same thing.”[Elert, Werner (2003-04-01). Eucharist and Church Fellowship (Kindle Locations 716-720). Concordia Publishing House. Kindle Edition.]

That begs a series of questions: Are we really one with those Christians who deny infant baptism? Are we really one in the faith with those who deny the real presence? Are we really one with those who endorse homosexual lifestyles? Are we really one in the faith with those who sanction the murder of the unborn? Are we really one in faith with those who reject the Virgin birth, who question the miracles and who even question the resurrection?

Holy Communion is about our Lord coming to us in, with and under the bread and wine; because of that it is also about our unity of faith. Elert writes:

Those who participate in eating the same bread are together the body of Christ. They do not produce this body. The body of Christ is there before they are and before what they do. They are rather drawn into it so they become its members. The fellowship-nature of the Sacrament is in this that Christ incorporates into Himself those who partake of it. [Elert, Werner (2003-04-01). Eucharist and Church Fellowship (Kindle Locations 723-725). Concordia Publishing House- Kindle Edition.]

In 1998 the Office of the President of the LCMS (Rev. Al Barre) published a pamphlet, “What about Fellowship in the Lord’s Supper?” A paragraph in that document quotes the following from Stoeckhardt on 1 Corinthians 10 and 11:

This passage in Corinthians strikes a crushing blow to unionism. To admit those who believe differently to our Communion, and so to our church fellowship, is a contradiction in itself. For those who approach the same altar together profess to be one—on in all points of Christian doctrine and practice—while in reality they disagree. It would be shameful hypocrisy on our part if we would have those who actually profess a different faith than we do join us at the Lord’s Altar. [Stoeckhardt, 1 Corinthians, page 60-61 as quote from the afore mentioned pamphlet]

May our gracious Lord bless as you stand true to our Confession and practice!

Rev. John Wille

President, SWD

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October 2012

The church and her Communion practices #3

Holy Communion Pastoral Care

Dear brothers in the Office of the Holy Ministry:

Not long ago I asked one of our SWD pastors, Rev. Peter Bender (now renowned for his rendition of the Star Spangled Banner at a Cub game) to put into writing something that he discussed with me about Closed Communion. Below are his words:

Pastors are charged to care for the souls of their members and to reach out in love to those who do not know Christ.  "Closed Communion" is not a doctrine, but a practice that takes seriously the pastor's responsibility to care for all the souls that come into the Divine Service or under his care.  Scripture warns about eating and drinking the Lord's supper unworthily and to one's judgment (1 Cor.10 and 11).  Pastors are charged to keep watch over souls and to give an account to the Lord for the care they give (Hebrews 13:17).  In love for all potential communicants, pastor's have the responsibility to talk with people they do not know before admitting them to the Lord's Supper.  They have a responsibility to ascertain their confession of faith, that they might receive the Sacrament in repentant faith and that they might be joined to a church whose confession of faith and teaching is the truth and will support and nurture them in the true faith.  The following outline lists a priority of pastoral concern for those who wish to receive the Sacrament and is a helpful guideline to pastors in administering responsible pastoral care to visitors and members alike.

The Lord's Supper is open to baptized Christians...
 It is closed to those who have not been baptized.

The Lord's Supper is open to those who confess faith in Christ alone for salvation...
 It is closed to those who do not believe in Christ.

The Lord's Supper is open to those who believe that Christ gives us His true body and blood in the Sacrament for the forgiveness of their sins...
 It is closed to those who do not believe that Jesus gives them His true body and blood and who

 do not believe in the Sacrament's benefits.

The Lord's Supper is open to those who are penitent sinners who are not under church discipline in our congregation or elsewhere...
 It is closed to those who do not know their sin, who do not humbly confess their sin, or who rely

 upon their own works for salvation.

The Lord's Supper is open to those who share our confession of faith and teaching...
 It is closed to those who are not one with us in our confession of faith and teaching of the

 Gospel.

Loving pastoral conversations are always important opportunities to witness to the love of Christ. Pastors should affirm and rejoice in a person's confession whenever he or she confesses the truth, but pastors also need to gently hold up to potential communicants the need to belong to a church body whose teaching and confession will support and strengthen true faith in Christ. Christians need pastors. They need to receive the ministry of the Word, Law and Gospel, the call to repentance and faith in Christ, from outside themselves. For this reason, they need to be joined to a church whose confession and teaching is the truth and will support and strengthen saving faith in Christ alone for salvation. These are the reasons why the practice of Closed Communion is important. It can be a valuable instrument for administering responsible pastoral care to communicants and in confessing the Gospel of Christ in love to those who may not know Him or whose confession of faith in Christ needs to be strengthened.

I thank Peter for his faithfulness to our Lord’s Word, for his clarity in speaking of the precious gift of Holy Communion as well as his words about for whom the Sacrament is “open” and for whom it is “closed”.

As pastors in the church we are called by our congregation to be faithful; faithful to our Lord and His Word, faithful to our Lutheran Confessions because they are in agreement with God’s Word. As pastors entrusted with the spiritual care of God’s people, we weigh the words of Scripture carefully. “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning 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. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.” (1 Corinthians 11:27-30) Writing those words I am reminded of the Eucharistic prayer which I heard repeated many times as a child. Before the altar the pastor would lift his voice asking to God asking that no one “partake of this Holy Sacrament to their damnation.”

My prayer is twofold: 1) that those who commune at our altars receive our Lord’s body and blood for the blessings of forgiveness and life(as intended by our Lord), and 2) we as pastors understand and appreciate the awe-inspiring responsibility which has been entrusted to us by our Lord and His church as “stewards of the mysteries of God”.

May our gracious Lord bless as you stand true to our Confession and practice!

Rev. John Wille

President, SWD

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November 2012

The church and her Communion practices #4

The question of Eucharistic hospitality

Dear Brothers in the Office of the Holy Ministry:

Earlier this year I came across a term connected with the practice of Holy Communion which caused me to scratch my head: “Eucharistic hospitality”. Exactly what does this mean? How is this done? At first blush it appeared to be a euphemistic term for ‘open communion’.

I found this definition for “Eucharistic hospitality” in The Lord’s Supper by John Stephenson: “By ‘eucharistic hosptiality’ I mean the welcoming to the Lord’s Table of Christian individuals who belong to church bodies with which the host congregation does not enjoy altar and pulpit fellowship.” (Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics, volume XII, page 6, footnote 13.)

Reading that definition one is easily reminded of the Apostle’s words to the Corinthians: “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation (κοινωνία) in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation(κοινωνία) in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body(ἓν σῶμα οἱ πολλοί ἐσμεν), for we all partake of the one bread.” (1 Corinthians 10:16ff)

AC:

Chrysostom says that the priest stands daily at the altar, inviting some to Communion and keeping others away. [[1]](#footnote-1)

Luther:

I must not have any kind of fellowship with any of them, neither by letters, writings, and words, nor in works, as the Lord commands in Matthew 18 [:17], whether he is called Stenckefeld, Zwingli, or whatever he is called. I regard them all as being cut from the same piece of cloth, as indeed they are. For they do not want to believe that the Lord’s bread in the Supper is his true, natural body which the godless person or Judas receives orally just as well as St. Peter and all the saints. Whoever (I say) does not want to believe that, let him not trouble me with letters, writings, or words and let him not expect to have fellowship with me. This is final.[Luther, M. (1999). *Vol. 38*: *Luther's works, vol. 38: Word and Sacrament IV* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.) (304). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.]

The early church still had a vital understanding of the Eucharist as koinonia. Is it in harmony with the koinonia of the body of Christ that Christians who are not at one should go to the Holy Communion together? By being partakers of the body of Christ in the Eucharist we become of one body () with Christ, says Cyril of Jerusalem, and Cyril of Alexandria rightly concludes that we are then “in Christ” of one body () with one another (p. 29). The partakers become “one body and one spirit.” Therefore there may be nothing separating or dividing them, for that which divides would do injury to the koinonia and so to the unity of the body of Christ. Such divisions are a constant danger even among the baptized. Even though a man must first be baptized before he may partake of the Holy Communion, this does not mean that all the baptized may without distinction partake of the Eucharist together. Divisions can be of various kinds. In the case of heresy it is a confessional division. The extending or refusing of Eucharistic fellowship is then always a confessional act of the whole congregation. Elert, Werner (2003-04-01). Eucharist and Church Fellowship (Kindle Locations 1730-1738). Concordia Publishing House. Kindle Edition.

**Other quotes of interest from Herman Sasse:**

This means, first of all, that it [the Evangelical Lutheran Church] fundamentally rejects church and altar fellowship with churches and fellowships which confess the Reformed doctrine of the Supper. It means, second, that the individual Reformed Christian, if he desires to receive the Supper in a Lutheran Church, may only be allowed if he confesses the doctrine of the Lutheran Catechism. Sasse, Hermann (2001-06-23). The Lonely Way: Selected Essays and Letters, Volume 1 (Kindle Locations 7930-7933). Concordia Publishing House. Kindle Edition.

The Word of God cannot be rightly understood when the Sacraments are not understood. Sasse, Hermann (2001-06-23). The Lonely Way: Selected Essays and Letters, Volume 1 (Kindle Location 8832). Concordia Publishing House. Kindle Edition.

Thus the experiences of the history of the church verify the truth which Luther found in the NT. There is an indissoluble connection between church and Supper, between the Supper and the Gospel… And the entire old Evangelical [Lutheran] Church was completely clear about why it prayed with such passion: That we keep pure till life is spent Your holy Word and Sacrament. It knew that the Gospel cannot be purely maintained if the Sacrament was allowed to decay. Sasse, Hermann (2001-06-23). The Lonely Way: Selected Essays and Letters, Volume 1 (Kindle Locations 11600-11610). Concordia Publishing House. Kindle Edition.

**Sasse:** “Her(the church’s) foreignness becomes clear at every celebration of the Lord’s Supper. As the Sacrament proper to the church, the Supper is, there, as a matter of principle, not a public event….The Supper is thus the Sacrament in which the church’s ‘foreignness from the world,’ and hence her essence as church of God, finds visible expression.”

**Sasse:** Altar fellowship is only possible where a real church fellowship exists.

It is a miraculous eating and drinking, indeed, just as the fellowship with him is something for which there is no possible comparison. It is a miracle, like the eating of the manna and the drinking of the water from the rock in the OT, to which Paul compares it [see 1 Corinthians 10–11]. It is a miracle like that of the feeding of the five thousand. Marvelous is this presence of Christ, who is among us, not only spiritually, not only in remembrance and in hope, but in the divine mystery of the real and essential presence. It is the entire Christ who is present—true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, the crucified and risen one, who descended to hell and ascended into heaven. He is there, in the midst of his church: “Behold there the tabernacle of God is among men” [Rev 21:3]. What one day will be fulfilled in the kingdom of God is present already here. He who will one day come in glory is already present here hidden. [Sasse, Hermann (2001-06-23). The Lonely Way: Selected Essays and Letters, Volume 1 (Kindle Locations 11674-11681). Concordia Publishing House. Kindle Edition.]

There can be no doubt that the NT demands from us that we distinguish between true doctrine and false doctrine, between church and heresy. It is quite clear that this implies that there is no exception from the rule that altar fellowship is church fellowship. At all times, admission to the Lord’s Supper has been understood as the “conclusive action” by which a person testifies that he belongs to the church where he receives Holy Communion. In case he did not belong to it thus far, he joins it by partaking in the Sacrament. “Open Communion” is not Communion at all; it may be a fascinating rite, a religious experience, but it is not the Sacrament of the NT. [Sasse, Hermann (2002-06-24). The Lonely Way: Selected Essays and Letters, Volume 2 (1941-1976) (Kindle Locations 7036-7040). Concordia Publishing House. Kindle Edition.]

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**Stephenson on “Eucharistic Hospitality”. The Lord’s Supper**, John R. Stephenson, Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics Volume XII

Quoting Luther: It is quite true that wherever the preacher administers only bread and wine for the Sacrament, he is not very concerned about to whom he gives it, what they know or believe, or what they receive…However, because we are concerned about nurturing Christians who will still be here after we are gone, and because it is Christ’s body and blood that are being given out in the Sacrament, we will not and cannot give such a Sacrament to anyone unless he is first examined regarding what he has learned from the Catechism and whether he intends to forsake the sins which he has again committed. For we do not want to make Christ’s church into a pigpen [Matthew 7:6], letting each one come unexamined to the Sacrament as a pig to its trough. Such a church we leave to the Enthusiasts! [Lutheran WA 30/III; 567.3-15]

Eucharistic hospitality fosters wholesale spiritual immaturity as it keeps CHirsitian coddled in catechetical diapers. Page 160

**Walther** qualifies his insistence that ‘ordinarily’(*ordentlicher Wiese*) those who are not members ‘of our orthodox church’ should not commune, event they right confess the real presence, with the concession that the danger of death allows for an exception to this rule. Page 161

‘Ambiguous denominationalism’ is no signal of spiritual progress but rather a powerful indication of the mass return of second-century Gnosticism in our midst. It is not a neutral factor, but a demonic delusion to be combated with every fiber of our being.

Communicants at an orthodox Lutheran altar profess not merely the single article of the real presence, but the whole doctrine of the Small Catechism to which they solemnly pledged themselves in their confirmation vow. Page 163

 Eucharistic hospitality, which is to say open communion, send an unmistakable message that the congregation or church body sits loose to the confession which it publicly and formally embraces. Page 163

The successors of Krauth and Walther now find themselves in a more difficult situation than that which faced their fathers as we confront a potent combination of false ecumenism, societal collapse, resurgent paganism, and a Christendom succumb once again to the blandishments of Gnosticism. Our sole comfort in this affliction is that the Lord who once preserved the tiny flocks gather around Ignatius, Polycarp, and Irenaeus in the cities of the ancient Roman Empire will likewise deliver those who face equal an perhaps even greater peril as they hold fast to the faith once delivered to the saints, the faith that is nowhere more crisply and accurately formulated than in the Small Catechism. Page 164

**Elert:**

To the early church a man was orthodox or heterodox according to his confession. He was the one or the other according to that confession with which he was “in fellowship.” The fellowship in which he stood, the church to which he belonged, was shown by where he received the Sacrament. When the Princess Sophia received the Sacrament from a Monophysite priest before the enthronement of her husband (Justin II), it was clear to everyone that she wanted to have no fellowship with the Synodites (Chalcedonians). The reversal of this is reported about her by John of Ephesus (H. E., II, 10). “She came into fellowship with the Synodites” as soon as she began “to communicate with the Synod.” By his partaking of the Sacrament in a church a Christian declares that the confession of that church is his confession. Since a man cannot at the same time hold two differing confessions, he cannot communicate in two churches of differing confessions. If anyone does this nevertheless, he denies his own confession or has none at all. [Elert, Werner (2003-04-01). Eucharist and Church Fellowship (Kindle Locations 3698-3705). Concordia Publishing House. Kindle Edition.]

My prayer is twofold: 1) that those who commune at our altars receive our Lord’s body and blood for the blessings of forgiveness and life(as intended by our Lord), and 2) we as pastors understand and appreciate the awe-inspiring responsibility which has been entrusted to us by our Lord and His church as “stewards of the mysteries of God”.

May our gracious Lord bless as you stand true to our Confession and practice!

Rev. John Wille

President, SWD

**Encourage “Life Together” in the South Wisconsin District through the Unity of Practices Regarding the Lord’s Supper**

**South Wisconsin District Convention, June 2012**

[Today’s Business #1, p.11; Overture 4-02, CW p. 45]

**WHEREAS**, the Lord commands the blessing of life forevermore when brothers dwell in unity (Psalm 133); and

**WHEREAS**, Christ unites Himself to us through His Word and Sacraments, as the Augsburg Confession states:

“The Church is the congregation of saints [Psalm 149:1] in which the Gospel is purely taught andthe Sacraments are correctly administered. For the true unity of the Church it is enough to agreeabout the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments” (AC VII); and

**WHEREAS**, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in convention has continually affirmed her confession and practice on close(d) Communion, as defined and encouraged even as recently as 2007 (res 3-09), and has also encouraged those in error to return to this biblical confession; and

**WHEREAS**, our life together is in Christ’s Body rightly administered throughout the South Wisconsin District; and

**WHEREAS,** it is the responsibility of the District president to “exercise supervision over the doctrine, life, and administration of office of the ordained and commissioned ministers of their district and acquaint themselves with the religious conditions of the congregations of their district” (Synod Constitution, Art. XII-7), as well as “arrange in advance for an official visit to each congregation of his district at least once every three years” (Synod bylaw, 4.4.4[a]);

therefore be it

***RESOLVED*,** that the South Wisconsin District of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in convention reaffirm its confession and unity concerning practices regarding the Lord’s Supper, namely close(d) Communion, in the spirit of “Life Together”; and be it further

***RESOLVED,*** that the South Wisconsin District in convention direct the District president through his triennial visitation of the South Wisconsin District congregations, to explore specifically the practice of the Lord’s Supper in each place; and be it further

***RESOLVED*,** that he would encourage those faithfully practicing close(d) Communion to remain doing so, while advising those with a different practice to reconsider their confession and practice for the sake of the unity of the Synod and District; and be it further

***RESOLVED,*** that the South Wisconsin District president provide a summary of his findings regarding unity in confession and practice of the Lord’s Supper in South Wisconsin District congregations at the 2015 South Wisconsin District convention; and be it finally

***RESOLVED,*** that the South Wisconsin District petition the seminaries to provide a study guide for congregations on the orthodox practice of close(d) Communion in our Synod.

 Action: Adopted

**To Encourage Proper Oversight in Administration of Lord’s Supper by Visitation from Ecclesiastical Supervisors**

RESOLUTION 4-10

Overtures 4-56–66 (CW, pp. 190–195)

Whereas, The Synod has consistently encouraged its pastors and congregations to adhere to faithful communion practices; and

Whereas, Pastors are called to be faithful in their stewardship of the mysteries of God (1 Cor. 4:1–2; 2 Tim. 4:3–4) and are in need of encouragement to carry out this important stewardship; and

Whereas, St. Paul admonishes the Corinthians against eating the Lord’s Supper with divisions among them (1 Cor. 11:17–18); and

Whereas, The Synod in convention has commended for study the 1999 report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, “Admission to the Lord’s Supper”; and

Whereas, concerns about communion practice still come before district and Synod conventions for resolution; and

*Whereas, The practice of inviting all baptized believers who merely affirm the real presence while neglecting to address the necessity of unity of confession, is not consistent with the biblical and confessional position of the Synod; and*

*Whereas, The Synod Handbook directs the district president to “supervise the doctrine, the life, and the official administration on the part of the ordained or commissioned ministers who are members of his district or are subject to his ecclesiastical supervision” (Bylaw 4.4.5); and*

*Whereas, The Synod Handbook makes provision for official congregational visits by the respective district president or his representative; an*d

Whereas, The Synod Handbook states that the district president is to “seek to bring about to the greatest possible degree the achievement of the Synod’s objectives as expressed in Article III of its Constitution” (Bylaw 4.4.4 [b]); and

Whereas, The Synod Handbook states that “he shall conduct his official visits in an evangelical manner” (Bylaw 4.4.4 [c]) and “come to the pastor and the congregation as a brotherly advisor” (Bylaw 4.4.4 [d]); therefore be it

Resolved, That the district president (or his representative) be encouraged to address the congregation’s administration of the Lord’s Supper in his visits; and be it further

Resolved, That those practices which are not in harmony with the Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions be addressed fraternally and evangelically; and be it further

Resolved, That the President of the Synod be exhorted to see that the district presidents apply themselves faithfully to this task; and be it finally

Resolved, That the district presidents support and encourage one another in this aspect of their visitation work.

Action: Adopted (8)

(After discussion, Res. 4-10 was adopted as presented [Yes: 769; No: 215].)

From the *Convention Proceedings 2013*, page 134.

1. Kolb, R., Wengert, T. J., & Arand, C. P. (2000). *The Book of Concord: The confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (71). Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)