

May 17, 2020

Dear First Lutheran Church,

Peace of the Lord be with you! As we have now worshiped virtually from our homes for more than a month, we are mindful of some of the blessings encountered and also some of the challenges posed by worshiping in this new way. Some blessings have been worshipping more regularly, and renewed spiritual practices, prayer, and Bible study. Some of the challenges have been feeling less connected with our larger First Lutheran Church community and the deep desire to receive holy communion. When we gather together for worship, we experience the good news of God in Jesus Christ proclaimed in the words of scripture, shared in the sacraments, and present in our relationships as a faith community. Jesus even tells us, “where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there with them” (Matthew 18:20).

Worshiping together under normal circumstances, our participation in the Lord's Supper is an open, welcome, and loving invitation from God. We are never compelled, obliged, or required to participate. Each person receives communion, or chooses not to, according to her or his own conscience. Although we now worship at home in these exceptional circumstances, we are aware that your spirit may still long for participation in Christ's holy meal as it strengthens and sustains your spiritual health and well-being.

With that in mind and heart, Pastor Dan and I, in consultation with our worship leadership and with the support of our Congregational Council, have decided to make available for households in our congregation, whose conscience and spiritual well-being cause them to hunger and thirst for God's love made visible in holy communion at home during these exceptional times, a new and optional rite that has been adapted from the rite of “Distribution of Communion to Those in Special Circumstances” in the Occasional Services book and the rite of “Household Communion in Exceptional Times” adapted from a rite prepared by Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod and shared by the Nebraska Synod.

In these exceptional times of a global pandemic, our congregation is not able to gather for in-person worship—all of us are homebound, but the Spirit still gathers us together (Matthew 18:20). We remain a community even when we are not together. Therefore a new “Rite for Celebrating Holy Communion at Home in Exceptional Circumstances” was prayerfully and faithfully adapted to make it possible for households to celebrate the Lord's Supper at home until we are able to gather for in-person worship together as a congregation again safely. As Bishop Maas wrote in his March 27th letter, “All I ask is that all of us remember that exceptional practices in exceptional times are just that—exceptional, not normative.” This optional rite is not created as a permanent substitution for communal, in-person celebration of holy communion in worship during normal circumstances, rather it is an exceptional practice

for an exceptional period in your home.

If you live by yourself and you also desire to participate in holy communion with others who live by themselves, please contact Pastor Justin and he will organize a gathering with you and others, using technology, and together you will participate in holy communion.

Desiring holy communion for your own spiritual health and well-being and that of your household who are not able to receive it in exceptional circumstances because of public health and safety concerns is a matter of pastoral care. While yes, there are countless thoughts around this exceptional practice in exceptional times, we must determine what is best for our faith community and use our “reverent, best guess” to decide on how to provide care. Please contact Pastor Justin or Pastor Dan if you would like to further discuss the scriptural, theological, or Lutheran traditional understandings of the sacraments and the priesthood of all believers.

There are some logistical pieces to consider before celebrating holy communion at home in times of exceptional circumstances. Bread and wine/juice: Feel free to use whatever bread you have on hand in your home, but this could also be a time when you bake some bread by yourself or with your household. You may use an old household recipe, sandwich bread, pita bread, flour or corn tortillas, or even crackers. Feel free to use whatever wine (kind does not matter) or grape juice you already have at home or you may want to purchase a special wine or juice that you reserve for this special occasion.

All that is to say that the bread, wine, and juice themselves do not matter. It is, alone, the power of God and the word and institution of our Lord Jesus Christ that produces the true presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Supper. What matters is God's promise that Jesus is present.

As you are baking or getting the bread and wine/juice ready, you may light a candle to remind you of Christ's presence with you as you reflect on what this holy communion means to you and your household. Think about Jesus sharing that last meal with his disciples, his dearest friends. Think about how you might go, serve, and love one another as Jesus has loved you. Whatever you use and however this goes, know that it is sacred and holy because God makes it holy and Jesus is the host of this meal. God be with you during this holy time,

Yours in Christ,

Pastor Justin

The Rite for Celebrating Holy Communion at Home in Exceptional Circumstances

This rite for Celebrating Holy Communion at Home in Exceptional Circumstances is optional for those, who for their own spiritual health and well-being, desire to celebrate this sacrament at home during a time of exceptional circumstances. This rite may be done at the conclusion of the First Lutheran Church online worship.

The gathered household may light a candle as a reminder of Christ's peace and presence with them and selects one household member to be the leader of the rite. When this rite is celebrated by individuals gathering through technology with one of the pastors, the pastor will be the leader of the rite. The leader thoroughly cleans her/his hands and prepares the place where communion will be celebrated by clearing the area of unnecessary items to make room for the elements. The leader prepares the bread and wine or juice to be administered. The bread may be placed on a clean plate or in a basket and the wine or juice may be poured into a wine glass or a clean cup. Depending on the health of each household member, the leader will determine if the wine or juice will be shared from a common cup or from individual cups. It is advised that if one member is sick, that individual cups be used. The leader leads the parts labeled "L" for leader and the rest of the household participates with the parts labeled "C" for communicants.

Once the place and elements are prepared, the leader may gather the other communicants and observe a brief silence for centering or sing a hymn together before beginning with the following words.

L Peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ.

C **Peace be with you also.**

L Let us pray. Gracious God, loving all your family with tender mercy: as you sent the angel to feed Elijah with heavenly bread, assist us in this ministry on which we set forth. In your love and care, nourish and strengthen us through this means of your grace, that through the body and blood of your Son we may all know the comfort for your abiding presence.

L/C **Amen**

L God is a holy and generous host. God sets a table where we feast with the communion of saints, even when we are physically apart in exceptional circumstances. In God's faithfulness, we are prepared to witness God's goodness with every gift he has given us to share, that all people may know God's peace through Jesus Christ, now and forever. So, as we prepare for this great gift, let us confess our sins and hear the promise of God's forgiveness.

Brief silence for personal reflection

L/C **Most merciful God, we confess that we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves. We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name. Amen.**

L In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for us, and for his sake God forgives

us all our sins. To those who believe in Jesus Christ, he gives the power to become children of God and bestows on them the Holy Spirit.

L/C Amen

L When the Spirit gathers us as a physically-distancing faith community for the celebration of Holy Communion, we hear again the stories of God's mighty acts, the love shown us in the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we receive the gifts of God's grace and forgiveness.

L The Lord be with you.

C And also with you.

L We lift up our hearts.

C We lift them to the Lord.

L Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

C It is right to give God thanks and praise.

The leader takes the bread, and holds it so all gathered may see it, saying (1 Corinthians 11:23-24):

L In the night in which he was handed over, our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks; broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat, this is my body, given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

The leader returns the bread to the plate and takes the wine/juice, and holds it so all gathered may see it, saying (1 Corinthians 11:25-26):

L And again after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this in remembrance of me."

L In the language of your heart, whatever language that may be, let us pray the prayer that Jesus taught us...

L/C Our Father, in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

L This is Christ's table. It's a table of love and welcome. It's a table of fellowship with the poor and communion with the earth. It's for you who have great faith and for you who wish you had more. It's for you who have tried to follow Jesus, and you who have failed. It's for you when you depend on this meal for your lives and find this meal a strange thing. These are the gifts of God for the people of God.

C **Thanks be to God.**

The leader tears the bread into small pieces and distributes one piece to each communicant with these words.

L The body of Christ, given for you.

C **Amen.**

The leader takes the common cup or individual cups of wine/juice and passes it to each communicant with these words.

L The blood of Christ, shed for you.

C **Amen.**

The leader asks another household member to commune her/him with the same words.

Brief silence for reflection

After the brief silence for reflection on this gift of God, the leader leads the household in prayer with the following words.

L May the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen you and keep you in his grace. Let us pray...

L/C **O God, we give you thanks that you have set before us this feast and gift of your grace, the body and blood of your Son. By your Spirit strengthen us to serve all in need and to give ourselves away as bread for the hungry, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

or

Gracious God, in this meal you have drawn us to your heart, and nourished us at your table with food and drink, the body and blood of Christ. Now send us forth to be your people in the world, and to proclaim your truth this day and evermore, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

The leader concludes the rite with the following blessing.

L Now may the Lord bless us and keep us. May the Lord's face shine on us and be gracious to us. May the Lord look upon us with favor, and give us peace.

L/C **Amen**