

# One little *word* can fell him

## Addendum to “Communion and Covid-19”

### Ten reasons to question whether “online Communion” is “truly good, right and salutary”

ON MARCH 20, 2020, the CTCR unanimously endorsed “Communion and Covid-19” (CC19), an opinion on certain Holy Communion practices during the coronavirus pandemic. The opinion was drafted by the staff, in concurrence with the chairman of the Commission, at the request of the Synod president. While the opinion in its entirety met with widespread expressions of gratitude and agreement, some have also questioned it — particularly its recommendation against online, streaming services of Communion in which households consecrate with the pastor and then commune together alone.<sup>1</sup>

An anonymous document has been circulated within the Synod titled “Communion in Homes During Times of Crisis: Scriptural and Confessional Principles” (CIH).<sup>2</sup> It is evidently written and/or endorsed by pastors who are now advocating and practicing online home Communion services in their congregations and who intend to continue the practice. The authors offer it “in the spirit of fraternal discussion and edification,” and in it they “share some of the Scriptural and Confessional principles that guided our decision-making.”<sup>3</sup>

CIH offers three statements or assertions to support the practice of online family Communion:

First, we believe that it is appropriate to celebrate the Lord’s Supper, even while faithful participants may be in different physical locations, because the gifts offered in Christ’s body and blood are not based on

our locations, but in wherever Christ has promised to be present.<sup>4</sup>

Second, we believe that it is appropriate for both pastor and people to speak the Words of Institution in the celebration of Communion because the words and gifts of Christ are given to the whole Church.<sup>5</sup>

Third, we believe that the promise and certainty of the Lord’s Supper is not found in the mere recitation of a certain set of words. Nor is it found in the physical space in which a set of words is spoken. The promise and certainty of the Lord’s Supper is found *in Christ and Christ’s Word alone*.<sup>6</sup>

We appreciate the aforementioned purpose of the document, to engage in “fraternal discussion and edification.” In that same spirit, what follows are 10 reasons in support of the CTCR conclusion given in CC19, that Lutheran churches should refrain from online Communion services as described therein.

#### 1. God’s *Word* alone gives us everything we need for faith, life and salvation.

IT SHOULD BE CAUSE FOR THANKSGIVING that disagreement over this particular practice does not preclude agreement in important truths. First, both those who oppose and those who approve of the practice believe, teach and confess that the Sacrament of the Altar is the gift of Christ’s very body and blood, “in and under the bread and wine, which we Christians are commanded by Christ’s word to eat and drink” (LC Fifth Part, §8, KW 467).<sup>7</sup> Second, both parties fully hold to the teaching that the forgiveness of sins is conveyed to those who commune in faith, believing Christ’s words that the Sacrament is “‘given for you’ and ‘shed for you

<sup>4</sup> CIH, 2.

<sup>5</sup> CIH, 3.

<sup>6</sup> CIH, 5.

<sup>7</sup> References to the Lutheran Confessions are from Robert Kolb and Timothy Wenger, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), with the specific confession abbreviated, the section(s) indicated by § and the page in the volume following the abbreviation KW.

<sup>1</sup> The CTCR first objected to a proposed practice in which congregations would hold online or streaming services wherein the words of institution are spoken by the pastor in a video while individuals in their homes receive bread and wine or grape juice from their own tables (or altars). This CTCR position was consistent with a 2006 CTCR opinion on “DVD Communion” regarding a similar approach using a recorded DVD rather than streaming or online videos ([files.lcms.org/wl/?id=7ZiqCqGn3FiMMtQcbrCFQuPjfn9AoMQ](https://www.lcms.org/wl/?id=7ZiqCqGn3FiMMtQcbrCFQuPjfn9AoMQ)). The central objection raised in both CTCR opinions is that such practices would inevitably result in “doubts or uncertainty about the Sacrament” since they depart significantly from the pattern and practice of the New Testament. The CTCR also stated that it could not endorse the practice of having the pastor consecrate elements for elders to distribute.

<sup>2</sup> At this time neither the authors of the document nor its place nor the date of its publication are known.

<sup>3</sup> CIH, 2.

for the forgiveness of sins” (SC Sacrament of the Altar, §5–6 and 9–10, KW 362–63). Third, and most importantly, both parties can join in the song and sentiment of “A Mighty Fortress” with its triumphant cry that, in the face of Satan and all his evil ways, “one little word can fell him” (LSB 656:3).

We rejoice that *all* of us can agree that God’s Word *alone* (Holy Scripture) gives us the wisdom to address difficult and vexing theological problems, that God’s Word *alone* (the Gospel) is the one thing needful (LUKE 10:42) and “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (ROM. 1:16),<sup>8</sup> and that God’s Word *alone* (Jesus) is “the way, and the truth, and the life” (JOHN 14:6). We praise God for this. For this very reason, we endeavor here to “speak the truth in love” (EPH. 4:15) to and with brothers and sisters in Christ. This means at times speaking forthrightly, but always in a spirit of fraternal and collegial prayer, hope, and desire that God would grant us a spirit of unity on this and all other issues that threaten to divide us as a church body, and thereby hinder our witness to Christ.

Underlying the teachings about the Lord’s Supper noted in the first paragraph is the confessional insistence on the trustworthiness and power of the Word of God. In the Small Catechism the reality of the bodily presence of Christ in the Sacrament’s elements is substantiated by the *written Word of God*: “the holy evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and St. Paul write thus,” says Luther before giving the Words of Institution. Then he adds that the benefits of the Lord’s Supper are “the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation,” which he again buttresses with the Word: “Eating and drinking certainly do not do it, but rather the words that are recorded” (SC Sacrament of the Altar, §4–8, KW 362–63). This is true also of Baptism. There, too, the power lies not in the element, but in the Word of God which is always trustworthy. It, too, forgives and saves “as the words and promise of God declare” (SC Sacrament of Holy Baptism, §5–6, KW 359). Water cannot do this, “but the Word of God, which is with and alongside the water, and faith, which trusts this Word of God in the water” can indeed do what it promises (SC Sacrament of Holy Baptism, §9–10, KW 359). And, what is true of both Baptism and the Lord’s Supper is also true of the Office of the Keys. Our Synod catechism reminds us that Christ gives His church power

“to forgive the sins of repentant sinners” by showing that very promise from *the Word of God*:

This is what St. John the Evangelist writes in chapter twenty: The Lord Jesus breathed on His disciples and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.” (JOHN 20:22–23)<sup>9</sup>

All of this, of course, is simply a reminder of the Lutheran understanding of the Means of Grace, that is, the means that God uses to bestow His gracious gift of forgiveness and, with it, life and salvation. He does so by His Word. The Word is the foundational Means of Grace: “Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (ROM. 10:17). The Spirit works through the word of Christ to create faith. This truth is the foundation of the Lutheran doctrine of justification and our understanding of salvation. The Word does it all! We confess with Luther:

Therefore everything in this Christian community is so ordered that everyone may daily obtain full forgiveness of sins through the Word and signs appointed to comfort and encourage our consciences as long as we live on earth.<sup>10</sup>

The Word here is the Gospel, the promise that Christ Jesus is Lord, that we are justified by grace through faith in Christ, that in Him all sin is atoned and forgiveness is freely given. The Gospel empowers the “signs” — Baptism, the Supper and Absolution. All this is

because God is extravagantly rich in his grace: first, through the spoken word, in which the forgiveness of sins is preached to the whole world (which is the proper function of the gospel); second, through baptism; third, through the holy Sacrament of the Altar; fourth, through the power of the keys and also through the mutual conversation and consolation of brothers and sisters. Matthew 18[:20]: “Where two or three are gathered ...”<sup>11</sup>

Note first the reference to God’s “extravagantly rich” grace. How grateful we are that the Gospel comes to us by various means. We have its voice even in these perilous times of quarantine. Its extravagance applies both to its full and total declaration that *all sins* are forgiven for

<sup>8</sup> Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>9</sup> *Luther’s Small Catechism* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1986) as it appears in *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2017), 27, 314. Abbreviated as LSCE.

<sup>10</sup> LC Creed, §54–55, KW 438.

<sup>11</sup> SA III [4], KW 319.

Jesus' sake and God's gracious variety of forms by which it can be both heard and enacted — in baptismal washing, in the gathered meal of Christ's body and blood, in the declarations of grace and absolution, in the quiet reminders given by members of the royal priesthood to one another. Extravagant grace indeed!

Note also Luther's reference in the foregoing quotation to the preaching of forgiveness as "the proper function of the gospel." Scripture's Word spoken is the foundation for every other means by which forgiveness is delivered to believers. The Word alone makes the "signs" efficacious and salvific. And the practices of Baptism, Communion, the power of the keys, and the words of "mutual conversation and consolation" of fellow believers with one another all have the common foundation of the Gospel and with it, the central benefit of the forgiveness of sins. For this reason, as highly as the Lutheran church has valued these sacred acts, we have also acknowledged that one who is unable to receive them, but does not scorn them, does not forego the precious gifts of forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. Even Baptism, which Lutherans have always performed in emergency circumstances, is not to be viewed legalistically as a requirement to be fulfilled to gain one's salvation.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, we do not doubt the salvation of our baptized infants and little children or prospective members who are yet to be catechized, even though they do not yet commune. Why? Because the Gospel Word, which is the power of God for salvation (Rom. 1:16) and gives us everything we need for faith, life and salvation, has been heard and believed.

CIH does not deny the power of the Word at work in the Lord's Supper. Rather, it says "we believe that the promise and certainty of the Lord's Supper is not found in the mere recitation of a certain set of words. Nor is it found in the physical space in which a set of words is spoken. The promise and certainty of the Lord's Supper is found in *Christ and Christ's Word alone*." For this we give thanks. However, we do question some of the conclusions drawn from this valid assertion in CIH, as the following will show.

## 2. It is the *Lord's Supper*, not our supper.

THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR is not ours to do with it as we please. It is the Lord's Supper and He is the true "officiant" since it is He who acts in the Words of Institution — and who instructs us regarding the proper *use* of His Supper.

Our Lord Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to the disciples and said: "Take, eat; this is My body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me."

In the same way also He took the cup after supper, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. This do as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."<sup>13</sup>

In these words, He calls us (His disciples) to repeat His holy meal (Do *this*) in His remembrance. He tells us what to do (taking bread and the cup of wine), what we are eating and drinking (His body and blood) and what we receive with it (forgiveness). The synoptic Gospels reinforce one another in these essential facts while St. Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians corroborates them in the earliest church, showing both how they may be wrongly and rightly enacted.

Our confessions take care to show not merely that Lutheran churches have a semblance of the sacraments, but also the right use of them: "through God's grace our churches are now enlightened and supplied with the pure Word *and right use* of the sacraments" (SA Preface of Martin Luther §10, KW 299; emphasis added). This was especially true regarding the Sacrament of the Altar.

Early in the Reformation a chief point of controversy was the private Mass. In the Smalcald Articles Luther calls it a human invention, an unnecessary thing that can be omitted without sin or danger, something that distracts from reception in a "better and more blessed way ... according to Christ's institution," a practice that has led to abuses, and a work by which individuals think they are reconciled to God, acquire forgiveness and merit grace, thereby distracting from the Lamb of God who alone takes away our sin.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> LSCE question # 312, 295.

<sup>13</sup> LSCE 28, 322.

<sup>14</sup> See SA II, 2, §2–7, KW 302.

Luther then meets the final objection to His view — that the private Mass is a form of devotion:

If some want to justify their position by saying that they want to commune themselves for the sake of their own devotion, they cannot be taken seriously. For if they seriously desire to commune, then they do so *with certainty* and *in the best way* by using the sacrament administered according to Christ's institution.<sup>15</sup>

None of the above material is focused on the efficacy of the private Mass. “It is not a question of *can* one commune alone; rather, it is a question of *should* one commune alone.”<sup>16</sup> Similarly, the CTCR's primary concern with online Communion is whether one can do it with certainty — whether it is a *right use* (“truly good, right and salutary”) of the Sacrament “according to Christ's institution.”

Concern over right use is clearly evident in the Formula of Concord. CIH quotes from the Formula's Epitome (VII, §8 and 9) to emphasize the necessity of the Words of Institution and that it is Christ's own words, not the minister's recitation, that effect the presence of Christ's body and blood in the elements.<sup>17</sup> It states its agreement with the CTCR's CC19 in this, but then objects to the Commission's concern over “where these words must be spoken” as representing the CTCR's endorsement of an incantation: “We have difficulty understanding how an insistence that a certain set of words be spoken by a certain person in a certain space can be conceived of as anything other than the very definition of an incantation.”<sup>18</sup> We object to this claim on the basis of the Formula of Concord itself. Lutherans have been concerned precisely with such things as who speaks the words of institution and the place of the speaking. To say otherwise would be to suggest, for example, that one could record the words of institution and play them (say, on one's cell phone) anywhere and anytime at all and still be fully confident that the Sacrament is being consecrated — after all, God's Word is always and everywhere powerful and efficacious! Such a view of the power of God's Word “wherever and however it is

spoken” (CIH, 7), with specific reference to the words of institution (CIH, 7), is detached from careful and serious attention to the scriptural *context* of the Lord's institution of His Supper and its grounding in a specific identifiable and locatable set of actions that, as our Lutheran Confessions teach, constitute “right use.” The Epitome certainly addresses this, saying, “God has and knows various ways to be present *at a certain place*” (FC Ep VII, §14, KW 505, emphasis added), including a specific and unique way to be present in the body and blood of Christ at specific places and times when the Supper is used and practiced according to Christ's institution. These are matters of *right use* — the *usus* or *actio* that the Formula of Concord Solid Declaration discusses:

In order to preserve this true Christian teaching on the Holy Supper and to avoid and eliminate many kinds of idolatrous abuses and perversions of this testament, this useful rule and guide is taken from the Words of Institution: nothing has the character of a sacrament apart from the use [*usus*] instituted by Christ or the divinely instituted action [*actio*]. (That is, when Christ's institution is not observed as he established it, there is no sacrament.) This rule dare not be rejected in any way, but it can and should be followed and preserved in the church of God with great benefit. The *usus* or *actio* (that is, the practice or administration) does not refer primarily to faith or to the oral partaking, but to the entire external, visible administration of the Supper, as Christ established the administration of the Supper: the consecration, or Words of Institution, and the distribution and reception or oral partaking of the consecrated bread and wine, Christ's body and blood. Apart from this practice it is not to be regarded as a sacrament — for example, when in the papistic Mass the bread is not distributed but is made into a sacrifice, or enclosed [in a tabernacle], or carried about in a procession, or displayed for adoration.<sup>19</sup>

This is very much pertinent to this conversation about online Communion. The “useful rule and guide” offered here is that “when Christ's institution is not observed as he established it, there is no sacrament.” It has to do with “the entire external, visible administration of the Supper” and includes consecration, distribution and reception according to Christ's institution. CC19 is concerned with the “external, visible administration of the Supper” and nothing less.

<sup>15</sup> SA II, 2, §8–9, KW 302. Emphasis added.

<sup>16</sup> We are indebted to an unpublished paper written by Pr. Trevor Sutton (LCMS) for this quotation and the preceding line of thought. His paper is “Making Sense of Online Communion: A Certain and Best Celebration of the Lord's Supper,” dated January 17, 2020, available from the author.

<sup>17</sup> CIH, 6.

<sup>18</sup> CIH, 6–7.

<sup>19</sup> FC SD VII, §85–87, KW 607–8.

### 3. Holy Communion is to be celebrated in community with God's gathered people.

WE EARLIER NOTED THAT CIH does not deny the power of the Word at work in the Lord's Supper. We also hope that the authors of CIH would not deny that the Sacrament of the Altar is intended by Christ for the gathered community — the congregation. Rather, CIH's central disagreements with CC19 seem to be due to its apparent understanding that (1) the CTCR opinion may be falsely asserting that the Sacrament is "bound" to a particular time and place<sup>20</sup> and (2) that the CTCR is wrong to question the propriety of online Communion which is jointly consecrated by the pastor and the household (or a designated worship leader in the household), and administered, presumably, by parents.<sup>21</sup> We are less clear about whether CIH holds that the CTCR is itself denying the power of the Word of God, but that may be implied. This same implication may underlie CIH's references to the ongoing LCMS use of electronic means to proclaim the Gospel:

The history of our own Synod shows that we have made use of nearly every imaginable technological resource available to us — from radio to television to, now, online streaming — to share Christ's Word with our world. A faithful permutation of Christ's Word — whether this be in the form of a translation of the Scriptures, or in the form of an interpretation of these same Scriptures in a sermon, or in the form of an electronic proclamation of the Scriptures — does not blunt the force of Christ's Word. His Word is powerful and carries with it all of God's promises wherever and however it is spoken or, for that matter, written.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> CIH does not say this expressly but offering such a thesis in their rebuttal of CTCR's CC19 seems to imply or suggest it. In its introductory paragraph it indicates that the Sacrament can be provided in a home by quoting Luther and the institution of the Passover in Exodus 12. Luther is quoted from *The German Mass and Order of Service*, in Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, eds. *Luther's Works*. Vol. 53. *Liturgy and Hymns*. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965), 63–64. Future references to *Luther's Works* will be abbreviate as LW with volume number and page (e.g., LW 53:63–64).

<sup>21</sup> CIH 3–5 defends its practice against CTCR objections to it, asserting that the words of institution are portrayed in Scripture as a blessing spoken by the whole people of God (p. 4), quoting Luther from *Concerning the Ministry* (LW 40:34–35), and arguing that the pastors engaged in the practice do so after inviting congregants to consecrate "with him" (p. 5) and to administer the Supper only to those who are properly prepared (pp. 5–6).

<sup>22</sup> CIH, 7. We should note that previous efforts of the sort mentioned here did not produce division in the Synod. We are unaware of anyone

who held that when the Gospel was preached via radio it was perhaps invalid.

Let us simply state that we do not disagree in any way with CIH's position in this paragraph. The CTCR opinion certainly does *not* question the power of God's Word. Nor does it deny the validity of sharing the Word by electronic means, for such means are all perfectly consistent with the nature of the Word itself as a unique and foundational means of grace.

Indeed, the CTCR's opinion is grounded in its conviction about the power of the Gospel — as we have already indicated in reason one above. Our concern is with the right understanding and use of God's Word — specifically with reference to the Lord's Supper. Our questions flow from that and only that. On the one hand, is CIH unwittingly diminishing the power of the foundational means of grace — the Word of the Gospel — in its attempt to emphasize the importance of another means of grace, the Lord's Supper? On the other hand, is CIH fully engaging with what Scripture — the Word of God — teaches about the Lord's Supper and how it is conducted? We are largely in agreement with CIH's first assertion, that the Sacrament is not bound to a particular time and place and are not suggesting that one could not celebrate the Sacrament in any place but a church building. However, the arguments in CIH to defend the time and place they are advocating — communion in member family homes with the consecration and guidance of an online pastor — are unconvincing.

In the introductory portion of the CIH, the document quotes Luther and Exodus 12 as support for their invitation to their members to commune in their homes. The quotation of a single paragraph from Luther's *The German Mass and Order of Service*, stating that "a truly evangelical order" for "earnest" Christians who meet privately in a home, in no way supports the practice of online family Communion. Luther is envisioning (literally, imagining) an elite group of Christians under an ideal set of circumstances (certainly not an "emergency") whose meeting in a house is purely incidental. It is relevant to the pristine situation he is imagining only because a home is private and it is *not* open to others. This is not in any sense a prescription for family-by-family home Communion. Moreover, Luther never developed this idea, repeated it or implemented it ("as yet I neither can nor desire to begin such a congregation or assembly or to make rules for it," says Luther<sup>23</sup>). Nor was it endorsed by

who held that when the Gospel was preached via radio it was perhaps invalid.

<sup>23</sup> LW 53:64.

confessional Lutherans.<sup>24</sup> Next, to quote the practice of the Passover, which was indeed a family meal, is not a convincing argument for the novel idea that the “new covenant” in our Lord’s blood is also to be celebrated as a Sacrament by individuals and families at home.<sup>25</sup> Both the Last Supper and Corinthian practice show that the New Testament does not allow Old Testament Passover customs to dictate the practice of the Lord’s Supper. Later CIH adds an additional Luther quote from *Concerning the Ministry* to suggest that Luther advocates home celebrations.

After the first of its three assertions, CIH suggests additional biblical, historical and confessional references for online family Communion. Under closer examination, they too fail to support CIH’s contention. Neither Matthew 18:20 nor 28:20, nor their contexts, provide any support for any particular Communion practice, including family Communion. The Marburg debate and, for that matter, the later Calvinist view that Christ’s body is only in heaven, also simply do not apply to this discussion. (The CTCR does not in any way deny the teachings of Article VIII of the Formula.) And, finally, CIH’s quotation (on pages 2 and 3) from the Large Catechism, in which Luther says the “new Passover” is “bound to no place or appointed time,” provides no more support for online Communion than did the earlier references in this section of CIH. An examination of the context shows that Luther’s concern at this point of the Large Catechism is to urge people not to despise the Sacrament, but to commune more frequently and not to think of the Supper as “bound to a special time like the Passover” of the Old Testament.<sup>26</sup>

The CTCR *does* have concerns about time and place, but they have to do exclusively with the matter of *appropriate* times and places — of “right use.”<sup>27</sup> Any building, including a house, *could* be the right place for the Sacrament. Any place — an outdoor park or

cemetery (common settings for many Easter sunrise services) — *could* be the proper setting for celebrating the Sacrament. Any time, including 3 a.m. on a Tuesday *could* be the right time for the Sacrament. It is our common practice in the church to schedule services on the Lord’s Day and on other occasions at *set times*. We schedule our celebrations at *set places* — places where the congregation can gather most easily. We do these things not because we believe the Sacrament is bound to be given *only* then and in those places, but because those times and places are the best times available for God’s people to “assemble themselves together” for public worship (SEE **HEB. 10:25**).

The sole questions that concern us are how one can commune *with certainty* and *in the best way*.<sup>28</sup> Lutheran practice has never used its doctrinal assertion against Zwingli — that Christ is not bound by time and place but is able to be present bodily in many places — including in the Sacrament, when and where it is properly administered (FC SD VII, §9–15, KW 594–95; §88–103, KW 608–11; §119, KW 614; FC SD VIII, §92, KW 633–34) — as an argument for family Communion at home. Luther’s occasional statements about offering the Lord’s Supper in homes do not have “family communion” in view and are not reflective of Luther’s more common view, nor of Lutheran practice. More significantly, they do not reflect or represent the positions of the Lutheran Confessions.

Therefore, it remains our opinion that the practice advocated in CIH is problematic in many ways. The Scripture speaks of the whole church (congregation) coming together. The Lord’s own Communion with His disciples at the Last Supper was a gathering of the church, not a family. It was conducted in a borrowed room where all could gather. It was not a family meal at home. In Acts and the epistles, we read about breaking of bread together in homes (**ACTS 2:46**) and about churches meeting in a member’s house (**ROM. 16:5**; **1 COR. 16:19**; **COL. 4:15**; **PHM. 1:2**). But the mention of breaking bread in Acts 2:46 is connected with sharing food with thanksgiving, so it is by no means conclusive that it refers to Communion. But, even if this is Communion, the third person plural pronoun used both for temple gatherings and home gatherings implies that this is part of congregational, not familial, activity. Similarly, the many references to churches meeting in homes indicates that the homes in question were where congregations gathered, together with the apostles and/or those appointed

<sup>24</sup> Why? It is, in truth, a bad idea in which a hierarchy of “earnest” Christians purposefully excludes “all sorts of people” not only from the Sacrament, but from the whole of the means of grace. One might question even this rather strange notion of “private” vs. “public” congregational worship — frankly, it is hard to know exactly what Luther had in mind here. (Even Luther could have bad ideas on occasion!)

<sup>25</sup> See the next paragraph that shows that Luther actually condemns such a practice in the fifth part of the Large Catechism. A type of home Communion to celebrate Passover was the background for the CTCR’s opinion on DVD consecration. See “Texas District President Request concerning ‘DVD Consecration’” at [files.lcms.org/wl/?id=7ZiqCqGn-3FiMMtQcbrcFQuPjfn9AoMQ](https://files.lcms.org/wl/?id=7ZiqCqGn-3FiMMtQcbrcFQuPjfn9AoMQ).

<sup>26</sup> LC Sacrament of the Altar, §39–48, KW 470–72. He accuses the pope of having turned the Lord’s Supper “back into a Jewish feast.”

<sup>27</sup> SA, Preface of Martin Luther §10, KW 299.

<sup>28</sup> SA, Second Article, §8–9, KW 302.

to the task of “preaching the word of God” (ACTS 6:2) and devoted to “prayer and the ministry of the word” (ACTS 6:4). The fact that Communion occurred in these houses is evidence only of the vitality and adaptability of the church as assembly. It needs no dedicated structures, as much as that may be convenient and beneficial. It is a welcoming community of believers, marked less by earthly family ties than by the common confession of children of God from diverse backgrounds bound together by faith.

Finally, in 1 Corinthians, the apostle Paul writes specifically about the importance of the church’s gatherings for the Sacrament (SEE 1 COR. 10–14). In 1 Corinthians 11:20 and 33, Paul insists that the Corinthians reform their practice of the Lord’s Supper, with part of that reform being that they not neglect the whole congregation by excluding some members of the body of Christ (in that case, the poor). Paul adds that the home is the place not for the church’s Sacrament, but for eating (1 COR. 11:34). Paul’s approach in 1 Corinthians is thoroughly centered in the principle that the Sacrament is for the whole of the local congregation as it gathers.

#### 4. Emergency Baptism? Yes. Emergency Communion? No.

AS WE HAVE NOTED, both Baptism and the Lord’s Supper have much in common. Both are instituted by Christ and depend entirely on the Gospel Word that empowers them and that defines their benefit — that both bestow forgiveness, life and salvation.

Yet, the different Means of Grace are also unique. The written Word can be disseminated in a variety of forms, while always retaining its character of divine inspiration and truth and offering throughout its pages the Gospel of salvation (E.G., JOHN 5:39; ACTS 17:1–2, 10–11; ROM. 1:1–3; 2 TIM. 3:16). The spoken Word of the Gospel, proclaimed individually by countless members of the royal priesthood and preached from pulpits as well as scattered abroad (“broadcast”) as far and wide as sound can be carried and without any restrictions on who would hear it, always retaining its character as the power of God for salvation (E.G., MATT. 13:3–9; ROM. 10:17; LUKE 24:34). Baptism, administered always with water and always to a particular individual (even if thousands are baptized on the same day), retains its individual character as a means by which we receive discipleship, adoption, the Holy Spirit and new birth. And, in an emergency, any Christian baptizes (E.G., MATT. 3:11; 28:19; JOHN 1:33; ACTS

2:38–41; ROM. 6:3–4; TITUS 3:5; 1 PETER 3:21).

So also, then, we receive the Lord’s Supper as a unique means of grace. It is not received by meditative reading alone, like the written Word. It is not scattered abroad, like the spoken Word. Unlike Baptism, it is not administered to the isolated individual except for when the pastor, who is called by the assembled church, carries the Sacrament on behalf of the assembly to the sick member. We value the Sacrament highly, but we restrict its administration rather than sharing it freely, having those with doubts and questions, visitors from other confessions and even our own children wait until they can share our confession (1 COR. 1:10), examine themselves and rightly discern Christ’s body and blood. This is especially true in view of the sobering fact that the apostle’s instructions for the right use of the Supper contain a unique warning that its misuse can actually be harmful to the uninstructed and unprepared communicant both physically and spiritually (1 COR. 11:27–32; SEE BELOW UNDER #5). Each of the Means of Grace is rightly used in a manner appropriate to it.

The LCMS at its 2019 convention vigorously affirmed the importance of the royal priesthood and the high calling of royal priests at all times to share the Word in their vocations and to forgive sins in their relationships, as well as to baptize in emergencies. The Synod also strongly affirmed the complementary nature of the royal priesthood and the office of public ministry. The CTCR opinion is informed by these biblical views. However, as noted above, the Lord’s Supper’s uniqueness leads to its administration by one who is called and appointed publicly to exercise the kind of pastoral care that enables the communicant to be rightly prepared for the Sacrament and certain of the gift received therein. So, we again reaffirm that the Lutheran church has not viewed the Sacrament of the Altar as an “emergency sacrament,” unlike Baptism or something any member of the royal priesthood can or should do, like proclaiming “the excellencies of him” who has called us “out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 PETER 2:9).

Luther, for example, vigorously defended the propriety of the laity’s engagement with the Word of God devotionally, the need for families to gather for the Word and prayer, for the royal priest’s vocational proclamation and for Baptism in emergency situations. Indeed, he preferred a vigorous devotional life in the home over the acceptance of an unfaithful pastor. He addressed just such a problem — just such an emergency — in his letter to the Bohemians, *Concerning the Ministry*. Although for

Luther, “emergency knows no rule,” he offered careful counsel to the Christians in Bohemia with these words:

For it would be safer and more wholesome for the father of the household to read the gospel and, since the universal custom and use allows it to the laity, to baptize those who are born in his home, and so to govern himself and his according to the doctrine of Christ, even if throughout life they did not dare or could not receive the Eucharist. For the Eucharist is not so necessary that salvation depends on it. The gospel and baptism are sufficient, since faith alone justifies and love alone lives rightly.<sup>29</sup>

One can hardly accuse Luther of neglecting the importance of the Sacrament of the Altar, yet he rightly reminds us that it “is not so necessary that salvation depends on it.” Unlike Baptism, the Lord’s Supper is not an “emergency sacrament.”<sup>30</sup>

But what of the quote from Luther on page 4 in CIH?

There is no other Word of God than that which is given all Christians to proclaim. There is no other baptism than the one which any Christian can bestow. **There is no other remembrance of the Lord’s Supper than that which any Christian can observe and which Christ has instituted.** (AE 40 34–35) [Emphasis in CIH.]

This, too, must be read in context. Luther is establishing the fact that the keys belong to the whole church and that, when no recognized (ordained) minister is to be found, the church may establish the ministry on its own, even without the approval of bishops, which was the situation in Bohemia.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> *Concerning the Ministry*, LW 40:9.

<sup>30</sup> At no point does CIH refer to the Lord’s Supper as an emergency sacrament. At the same time, however, the apparent rationale for offering the Lord’s Supper in an online family setting is that “our current situation,” that is, the Covid-19 crisis is leaving Christ’s people “without the blessing of the Lord’s Supper” (CIH, 1). We can only understand this to mean that the availability of the Lord’s Supper is essential in the present medical emergency — that the emergency requires this innovative administration of the Eucharist.

<sup>31</sup> CIH might have added quotations of Lutheran fathers from C. F. W. Walther’s *Church and Office*. Walther provides the same Luther quote from *Concerning the Ministry*. He follows it with quotes from Johann Gallus, Tilemann Heshusius, and Johann Müller, to say that at times “ordinary Christians ... may proclaim the Gospel, remit sins, baptize, and administer the Lord’s Supper.” That might seem to cement CIH’s position, but the elision in the preceding sentence leaves out the all-important qualification “in such cases when no upright minister of the Church is to be had.” Examples provided are groups of Christians stranded or imprisoned, who therefore appoint the most well-prepared man from among them to be their pastor. C. F. W. Walther, *The Church & the Office of the Ministry: Kirche und Amt: The Voice of Our Church on the Question of Church and Office*, J. T. Mueller, trans., Matthew

Lastly, we should remember that the frequency of the Lord’s Supper has always been an adiaphoron. In many congregations of the LCMS the Sacrament is not offered on a weekly basis. In times past it has been offered monthly or even quarterly in Missouri Synod congregations, while preaching and baptisms continued weekly. While that is not by any means ideal, it indicates that the Sacrament of the Altar has and ought to be viewed from its own proper perspective, and that orthodox Lutherans have never viewed weekly access to the Lord’s Supper as a *iure divino* command or practice or as essential to the survival of the church.

## 5. Responsible pastoral care is essential for the proper scriptural and confessional administration of the Lord’s Supper.

FIRST CORINTHIANS NOT ONLY emphasizes the gathered community, but it also shows that wrong practices may invalidate the Lord’s Supper and that it may be received not as a means of grace but as a means of judgment. Note Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 11, where he says of the practice in Corinth, “It is not the Lord’s Supper that you eat” (v. 20) and warns about the possibility of eating and drinking to one’s judgment (v. 29). The potential for such judgment is directly related to the question of responsible pastoral care.

Responsible pastoral care is required for right use of the Lord’s Supper. There can be no proper scriptural and confessional administration of the Lord’s Supper without it. CIH recognizes this and states as much:

In the Divine Services that have been celebrated online among our Synodical congregations, a rightly called minister of the Gospel has presided over the Sacrament, inviting his congregants to speak the Words of Institution *with* him — not *instead* of him. Careful pastoral care and responsible pastoral oversight has been exercised as our pastors have called upon their people to follow the apostle Paul’s guidance and heed his warning to the Corinthians:

*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 11:28-29)*

C. Harrison, ed. (St. Louis: Concordia, 2012), 271, 275–77, 282. The quotation is from Heshusius on 277.

If a person has not been properly prepared to receive Christ's body and blood through repentance, discernment, and faith, or if they have been reluctant to receive the Sacrament in their home, they have been invited to receive a blessing instead.

Pastors who have led their congregants in the reception of Communion in their homes have taken extensive measures to be responsible to their vocations as "stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 CORINTHIANS 4:1) by exercising faithful pastoral care. We do not see any reason, therefore, why a congregation cannot join in saying Christ's words, which He has given to His whole Church, with its pastor.<sup>32</sup>

We commend the authors of CIH for the desire to offer pastoral care. As commendable as these efforts are, however, it seems to us, first of all, that this important matter is not treated adequately. The exercise of "careful pastoral care and responsive pastoral oversight" is difficult and challenging under normal circumstances — indeed, it is one of the most difficult and challenging tasks entrusted to undershepherds of the Good Shepherd. The possibility of exercising such "careful pastoral care and responsible pastoral oversight" seems questionable given the many different circumstances that would inevitably arise (many likely unknown to the pastor) in communion services held in scores or hundreds of homes. Secondly, the very nature of the pastoral care that is described and envisioned in the document is inadequate. Indeed, we believe it is impossible to carry out pastoral care in a *responsible* way in the online home/family Communion endorsed by CIH. In the description as provided, the pastor delegates much of Communion practice to the household. Since the household provides the elements, what will they use if there is no bread or wine?<sup>33</sup> Who is consecrating in this scenario in which everyone speaks together "with the pastor"? Is the pastor consecrating from afar? Or, is the family consecrating for themselves? Or, is this some sort of "co-consecration?" (As discussed above, the issue of proper consecration is no small matter to the Confessors.) And what of single individuals who

<sup>32</sup> CIH, 4–5.

<sup>33</sup> Descriptions of online Communion in several congregations indicated that grape juice was commended as an alternative to wine. Actual reports from participants in Lutheran online services indicated that in certain cases other beverages in place of wine and other foods in place of bread have been employed. While the authors and supporters of CIH would hopefully frown on such an aberration, this demonstrates the difficulty of exercising pastoral oversight when there is no single meal but many individual meals in private homes.

live alone? Who consecrates in their setting? Are they to commune themselves, or should they refrain from the Sacrament?

Is the whole of pastoral oversight in such cases simply the verbal or written instruction from the pastor that whoever is leading the family communion service at home (assuming there is such a leader) should follow Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 11:28–29? In the case of blessing those who have "not been properly prepared," who is to determine what makes one unprepared? Those who are not instructed and prepared *should* be excluded, out of Christian love and concern. Will uncatechized children or family members be asked to refrain from the Sacrament — or will (unknown) "exceptions" be regularly granted? Will those who do not share the Synod's beliefs be excluded since they are not in agreement with the confession of this church? Are moms and dads at home to be expected (unfairly and unreasonably burdened) with "being the pastor" in these situations, which even for ordained and experienced pastors are some of the most difficult and sensitive pastoral care decisions to make? Who is presiding over all of this?

If this is a congregational Communion by virtue of the pastor's online presence, then what about nonmembers who log in to the service? Does this practice include those guests who should be welcomed to commune? Worthy and well-prepared guests should always be (and feel) welcome at a sister congregation. Is that done? Can it be done?

Lastly, in this case many worthy and well-prepared individuals, visitors as well as members, would be excluded by reason of conscience. CIH itself indicates this on page 5, which speaks of blessing those who are "reluctant to receive the sacrament in their home." Here CIH seems to recognize that their practice does create uncertainty and doubts — so much so that some will be reluctant to commune. Does that reluctance on the part of congregational members and others from the Synod trouble the pastors who endorse this practice? Isn't it problematic that many (most?) from their own church body — with whom they are in fellowship — could not conscientiously participate with them because this practice makes them uncertain that they would receive Christ's body and blood by these means? Is that truly responsible pastoral care? These are important and troubling questions.

We repeat the issue raised in CC19 — is there "any uncertainty being created regarding what is being received?" Some evidently believe there would be none,

but we strongly and respectfully disagree. Many could not participate in this practice in good conscience precisely because they are uncertain about the validity of the Sacrament when the witness of the Word of God about sacramental practice is seemingly ignored.

## 6. “I Want It All and I Want It Now”: Discerning the influence of culture on our theology and practice.

PASTORS, BOTH THOSE who are part of the CTCR and others, are grateful for the level of supportive self-sacrifice among those they serve. Most of their members have graciously adjusted to the challenges we are facing in this time of Covid-19. Members have been more than understanding that pastoral care must be different temporarily — that there can be no visits to nursing homes or hospitals, that sermons and services must be offered online, that their family or individual times of Scripture and prayer have never been more important, that each member of the royal priesthood has both an opportunity and an obligation to reach out to other members by phone, email or notes.

Nearly everyone we serve recognizes that part of the adjustment we must temporarily make is that the Lord’s Supper cannot be offered at all or that it can be given only in a highly restrictive manner.<sup>34</sup> Here and there, however, pastors have had individuals strongly object to the suspension of public worship and to the “denial” of the Sacrament. It seems evident that CIH was not in any way motivated by objections to suspending public worship. We do wonder, however, if there is not some sense that without the Lord’s Supper the church cannot survive. The authors declare: “Out of an abundance of concern for God’s people, who *should not be* left bereft of this sacred gift, some pastors in our Synod have invited their congregants to partake of the Lord’s Supper in their homes.”<sup>35</sup> The underlying concern here — the desire for God’s people to receive His precious gifts — is highly commendable and we share it. But the phrase “who should not be left bereft of this sacred gift”

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<sup>34</sup> For example, in a few congregations Communion is offered by having separate families or individuals come on a set schedule to receive. This practice has not been considered by the CTCR. We should note, however, that it invites a disparity between those who are fearful or too vulnerable to come for the Sacrament and those that feel more confident about the practice. It potentially risks disease transmission from the pastor to communicants while it places the pastor (and therefore his spouse or family if he is married) at an even more significant risk of exposure.

<sup>35</sup> CIH, 1, emphasis added.

used in reference to the Lord’s Supper gives us pause. To be without the Sacrament is a harsh burden for a believer. To be bereft of it is to be without a treasure our Lord intends for the church. Yet, it is not a treasure that is to be treated lightly. It is also not a treasure to be demanded.

“I Want It All and I Want It Now,” Queen’s classic rock song, is reflective of much of American culture. We are all, at our worst, a demanding people who believe we deserve (or at least need) all that we want. When we lack something, we often share the sentiment, if not the words, “I want it all, and I want it now.” This is not the attitude for a Lutheran communicant. St. Paul soberly instructs us to examine ourselves before we eat of the bread and drink of the cup (1 COR. 11:28). We ask, in all sincerity and Christian charity, whether one worthy question for self-examination in this context might be the following: is it possible that our God-pleasing *desire* for the Sacrament can become a less-than-God-pleasing *demand* for the Sacrament that is informed more by the spirit of our culture than by the Holy Spirit and His fruits of self-control, self-discipline, self-denial and self-sacrifice?

Think, for example, of the times when Judah and Israel were deprived of the presence of Yahweh at the temple. They longed for the courts of the Lord (Ps. 84), but God’s own judgment meant that they could not rejoice in God’s dwelling place or witness the atoning sacrifices offered there until God Himself relented and brought them back (SEE 2 CHRON. 6:36–39). Still more trying was the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple (SEE Ps. 137). These judgments were harsh and the loss of the comfort of the temple a great burden, but God was working repentance and faith. His grace — the Word — was sufficient for His suffering people. It was in that very time that Israel was given the Word through the prophets Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Micah and others. The exile led to a new appreciation and reliance on the Word, the Scriptures and their teachings (SEE EZRA 8).

Our circumstances are different from Israel’s, but not entirely dissimilar. We seek no earthly temple (JOHN 4:21–21) and the sacrifices of Israel have been fulfilled in the atoning sacrifice of our Lord on Good Friday (1 JOHN 2:1–2). But we should not deny that this deadly pestilence is a call to repentance (LUKE 13:1–5) and a call to return to the Lord (JOEL 2:13). We look to no hills (Ps. 121; JOHN 4:20–21) and demand nothing from God, but we flee for refuge to His mercy (Ps. 30:10; MATT. 15:22; LUKE 18:13).

Christians throughout history have suffered similar times during which the Means of Grace were limited. The church in China survived Maoist oppression meeting in homes for five decades, often without a Bible, on the power of remembered words of Scripture. Our great-grandparents in the Missouri Synod survived the three-year trial of the influenza epidemic from 1917–1919, often going months without any public worship (including the Sacrament).

As we await His mercy on us, our country and our world at this time, we may all be bereft of the Sacrament for a time, but we will not lack God’s Word. It will not be bound. Its Gospel is proclaimed and it will sustain us. And through it all, by God’s grace, may our appreciation of and longing for the precious Sacrament of the Altar grow.

## 7. “Online Communion” has questionable roots.

The practice of Communion via online means did not arise with Covid-19. Trevor Sutton points out that it has been practiced for some time by evangelical churches. Its purpose in those circles has been to offer a way to gather wider audiences than Communion within even very large sanctuaries would allow. It is part of what Tim Hutchings calls *Creating Church Online*.<sup>36</sup> By having online Communion, the megachurch — or any church for that matter — is able to claim more members — members who can get anything a local church would offer.

The notion of an “online church” may have some immediate appeal, especially during this time. Some might say that is what every church with services or sermons available online is doing. We do not believe that is accurate. The many steps congregations are taking to proclaim the Word are often adapting to this emergency alone. Others have been using the internet as a regular part of their ministry. Electronic means of communication are a worthy and time-tested aspect of a church’s ministry — but they are not an adequate approach to “creating church.”<sup>37</sup> The church is the *body* of Christ. It is physical people who hold to Christ in faith. The church is both catholic — scattered throughout the world — and local, and locatable, gathered physically in particular

<sup>36</sup> We are again indebted to Sutton, who documents these sources. Tim Hutchings, *Creating Church Online: Ritual, Community, and New Media* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

<sup>37</sup> The CTCR addressed the topic of social media, a significant form of electronic communication, *A Snapshot of Trending Tools* (2019), files. [lcms.org/wl/?id=ntp6kcGZ6krg44AtLFGHaRY7SfoWJp2L](https://lcms.org/wl/?id=ntp6kcGZ6krg44AtLFGHaRY7SfoWJp2L).

places. As AC VII says, is a gathering of believers, meeting together, assembling, congregating for the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments. It does all these things in conformity with the Word.

The evangelical churches that have pioneered online “church” and online Communion have done so with different understandings of the church and, even more, of the Sacraments, than those of the Lutheran church. There is no question that Lutherans can learn and benefit from some of the work that the Lord is doing through evangelical brothers and sisters in Christ. At the same time, however, we have to test the spirits. We can understand quite well why a common evangelical understanding of the Lord’s Supper — one that views it merely as a symbolic expression of welcome and openness to one another without any actual presence of the body and blood of Christ — can be content with online Communion. We are concerned that when Lutheran churches employ this evangelical innovation it may also encourage an evangelical perspective on the Sacrament.

## 8. Novel practices often establish dangerous precedents.

Some congregations practicing online Communion have indicated that this is only a temporary, “emergency” measure, implying that they will cease the practice when the Covid-19 crisis is over. Nevertheless, the precedent of online home Communion troubles us. What happens after this crisis is over remains to be seen. If this is endorsed now as something that is truly “good, right, and salutary,” why would it necessarily be questioned or discarded later — especially if an essential part of the argument for this practice is that it is simply another wonderful, creative, innovative means of sharing God’s Gospel gifts? Is there any reason why congregations should not at any future point treat online family Communion as an acceptable alternative method of Communion? Why would we not?

Should we now, because of the challenging (but temporary and ever-changing) Covid-19 situation, change our longstanding teaching and practice and conclude that Luther and Lutheran teachers were wrong to hold that only Baptism is an emergency sacrament? Should their view that while Baptism *is* to be conducted in an emergency, but the Lord’s Supper *is not* to be administered as an emergency Sacrament, now be acknowledged as a doctrinal error? And, if the Lord’s Supper is required in a time of emergency, when is it

not required? Should every service be a Communion service? Have we substituted “Luther’s emergency knows no rule” with “Emergency establishes the rules?” Further, since technology is so decisive in this practice, are we saying now that past teachers and positions no longer hold simply because technology and the desire for innovation supersedes them?

## 9. Walking Together: Does it even matter anymore?

**B**ecause “the Synod is not an ecclesiastical government exercising legislative or coercive powers, and with respect to the individual congregation’s right of self-government it is but an advisory body” (LCMS Constitution Article VII), congregations are not bound by anything but the Word of God and need not follow even a convention resolution that is “inexpedient.” We realize (and emphasize) that this does not apply to a doctrinal resolution based on God’s Word (Bylaw 1.6.2.a), but at question in this case is a CTCR opinion, not a resolution of Synod, doctrinal or otherwise.

Some have asked whether CC19’s opinion is binding on congregations or districts. It is not. The next question is no doubt this: If not, then is there any reason why congregations are not able to exercise their Christian freedom and make use of such means as streaming home Communion services with a clear conscience? Clearly, some will do so. That is explicitly stated in CIH:

We are left with a choice. On the one hand, we can cease celebrating the Lord’s Supper during this pandemic because our Synod’s Commission on Theology and Church Relations has issued an opinion that celebrating the Supper in homes while a pastor speaks Christ’s words over an online stream while his congregation joins in is inappropriate — a practice that, in our own opinion, is nowhere forbidden by Scripture or the Confessions. On the other hand, while respectfully engaging with and listening to those who disagree with our position, we can continue celebrating the Lord’s Supper so that God’s people may receive with joy all that this meal promises and delivers, heeding Christ’s clear command:

*Do this in remembrance of Me. (LUKE 22:19)*

For these reasons, after thoughtful contemplation and prayerful consideration, we humbly, confidently, and faithfully intend to continue to obey Christ’s command to celebrate His Supper.

It is indeed true that the CTCR opinion in this matter is not binding. It is also true that during these trying times we ought to be especially generous toward one another and with those with whom we disagree. For these reasons, we want to repeat that our concern is offered in a desire to foster discussion and prayerful consideration. We are members together in the Synod and on that basis are prayerfully asking that those who read and contemplate this document not take a step that is already dividing us simply by being proposed. It will divide us even more if it is implemented and no doubt provoke dissension and controversy that will reach beyond this present health crisis. We ask that all concerned act in a way that reflects the concerns we have raised in love for LCMS pastors and church workers and for all of Christ’s holy people in our Synod.

## 10. A final word: The *purpose* of this precious Sacrament is to create *faith*, not raise *doubts*.

**W**e recognize in the authors of CIH the deep desire, expressed so clearly, to minister faithfully to their flocks. We appreciate and share the high value they place on the Lord’s Supper. We rejoice in our fellowship together in the LCMS. It grieves us to write these pages. We do not offer these thoughts to fellow pastors as their “ecclesiastical supervisors” for that is not the calling of the CTCR or its staff. Our intention is to speak to one another as peers. We speak as representatives of both seminaries, fellow ministers and brothers and sisters in Christ in the royal priesthood. We speak out of deep, conscientious concern over a practice that we cannot endorse and that we fear may produce division (and, sadly, already has). We speak on behalf of the many in our Synod who could not participate in good conscience in this practice — as pastors, congregations or communicants. Their participation would be impossible because they could not commune in good faith. Rather than such Communion strengthening their faith, it would do the opposite and raise doubts.

We are not able to say with certainty that this would be an invalid Sacrament, but that is precisely the problem: we cannot be confident of it either. We would instead be troubled with the question whether this manner of communing is according to Christ’s institution, as these 10 reasons attest. We seriously and sincerely wonder whether (in the language of the Formula) “the entire external, visible administration of the Supper” is

indeed “as Christ established the administration of the Supper” (FC SD VII, §86, KW 608). With such serious doubts we ourselves would be unprepared to commune worthily in this manner, just as, evidently, are those other individuals who are “reluctant to receive the Sacrament in their home” (CIH, 5).

*God's Word forever shall abide,  
No thanks to foes, who fear it;  
For God Himself fights by our side  
With weapons of the Spirit.  
Were they to take our house,  
Goods, honor, child, or spouse,  
Though life be wrenched away,  
They cannot win the day.  
The Kingdom's ours forever!  
(LSB 657:4)*

The Commission on Theology  
and Church Relations  
Holy Week 2020