

Thoughts about the Lord's Supper at TACC

Key Texts: 1 Corinthians 10:14-22; 11:17-34; Matthew 26:26-30; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-38

TACC [Taft Avenue Community Church], is a member of the EFCA [Evangelical Free Church of America] which means we adhere to the ten point doctrinal statement from the EFCA. Here are the pertinent statements found in article 7 that address communion.

*7. We believe that the true church comprises all who have been justified by God's grace through faith alone in Christ alone. They are united by the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ, of which He is the Head. The true church is manifest in local churches, whose membership should be composed only of believers. **The Lord Jesus mandated two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper, which visibly and tangibly express the gospel. Though they are not the means of salvation, when celebrated by the church in genuine faith, these ordinances confirm and nourish the believer.***

Here is a summary of TACC's celebration of the Lord's Supper. [The use of the terms Communion, Lord's Supper, Celebration, all refer to the same event, the change in terms is simply for variety's sake] :

1. Communion is to be administered under the authority of the elders. They know about and approve of the officiant and the occasion for celebration.
2. The eating and drinking of bread and grape juice or wine are symbolic of Jesus' body and blood - it is not salvific, grape juice will be the norm unless specifically ordered.
3. The Lord's Supper is a means of proclaiming and remembering Jesus's death and coming again. Participation in the Lord's Supper is a means of nurturing and confirming grace. This will be the central emphasis of the celebration each and every time.
4. Communion is a community rite meant for the body of Christ, or portion of the body at TACC.
5. The Lord's Supper should be celebrated with decorum and joy.
6. The Lord's Supper should consist of prayer, contemplation, confession, repentance, and instruction/warning according to the teaching in 1 Corinthians 11.
7. Communion is to be celebrated by only true Christians who are not in conflict with other believers.
8. Communion is a unifying rite. We have humbled ourselves before our King who died for humbled sinners and is coming again.
9. The celebration should not be rushed.
10. It is not necessary to be a member at TACC to participate.
11. Children should follow the instructions of their parents.

12. We typically celebrate the Lord's Supper the first Sunday morning of every month in our worship service. We allow for other times of celebration as deemed necessary.
13. The elders will work to ensure that the Sunday morning Lord's Supper remembrance is done with care to ensure that all believers are included in the community aspects of the celebration and prayer.

The following is a cut and paste from the EFCA (Evangelical Free Church of America) web site www.EFCA.org. Although none of these distinctives addresses communion in particular they do instruct us on how we approach our practices and preferences in the EFCA.

Distinctives of the Evangelical Free Church of America

"In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, charity. In all things, Jesus Christ."

1. The Evangelical Free Church of America is a believers' church—membership consists of those who have a personal faith in Jesus Christ.

The great heritage of EFCA people around the world includes the fact that fellowship and ministry opportunities in the local church are based solely on one's personal faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and trusting in Him alone for salvation. Membership requires commitment to sound doctrine as expressed in our [Statement of Faith](#). However, a person is not excluded from membership because he or she does not agree on every fine point of doctrine. Within the EFCA, there is allowance for legitimate differences of understanding in some areas of doctrine.

2. The Evangelical Free Church of America is evangelical—we are committed to the inerrancy and authority of the Bible and the essentials of the gospel.

The EFCA was born out of a heritage of commitment to the authority and inerrancy of Scripture. We have deep convictions based on the authority of God's Word, but we do not draw battle lines over minor points. Nor do we make minor issues of doctrine a test of fellowship in the local church. We are evangelical. We believe in separated living and personal holiness, but we are not separatists.

3. The Evangelical Free Church of America embraces a humble orthodoxy in partnership with others of like faith.

We believe in the spiritual unity of the Church though not necessarily in structural union. We join with other Christians and other denominations of like, precious faith in common goals and ministries to accomplish the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. But we believe that there is strength in diversity and that it is important to preserve our distinctives. We recognize that union in structure does not guarantee unity of spirit. Our foremost concern is unity of spirit with our Lord, with each other and with other Christians.

4. The Evangelical Free Church of America believes in Christian freedom with responsibility and accountability.

We believe in Christian liberty, but freedom always has its limitations. Responsible Christians do not abuse freedom. The apostle Paul wrote forcefully about Christian liberty in the Book of Galatians. He shattered the legalists with the doctrine of grace. But in First and Second Corinthians and Romans, the

apostle also rebuked believers when liberty was abused. He declared boldly the principles of Christian liberty, but spoke with equal forcefulness about Christian accountability. The EFCA desires to preserve our freedom in Christ. We encourage our people to be responsible, godly men, women and young people who desire to live under the control of the Holy Spirit in obedience to the principles and precepts of God's Word, and in harmony with God's will for life as revealed in the Scriptures.

5. The Evangelical Free Church of America believes in both the rational and relational, i.e. the head and the heart, dimensions of Christianity.

We believe the Scriptures must be applied to our individual lives with warmth of heart, warmth of message and warmth of concern. We believe it is essential to have solid, biblical content in our doctrinal understanding of faith, but it is equally important to have a dynamic, vital relationship with God the Father through Jesus Christ the Son and to live by the power of the Holy Spirit. Sound Christian doctrine must be coupled with dynamic Christian experience. Ours is a ministry of love and spiritual reconciliation.

6. The Evangelical Free Church of America affirms the right of each local church to govern its own affairs with a spirit of interdependency with other churches.

The EFCA is committed to a congregational form of government as stated in our Articles of Incorporation: "The Evangelical Free Church of America shall be an association and fellowship of autonomous but interdependent congregations of like faith and congregational government..." Strong pastoral leadership coupled with discerning and well-equipped Christian lay people can produce spiritual growth as well as significant church growth. While the EFCA affirms the right of each local church to govern its own affairs, we also believe in the biblical values of interdependence and cooperation.

We are a movement of churches committed to working with one another in order to fulfill the Great Commission in the United States and abroad. This is only possible when there are strong ties with other EFCA churches, with local district organizations and with the national EFCA ministries.

Evangelical Convictions

The following is commentary from the national office on our Statement of Faith article #7, a copy and paste from "**Evangelical Convictions**" (Kindle Locations 3853-4117). Free Church Publications. Kindle Edition. The publication is available in its entirety for \$25.00 hardback, and \$9.99 Kindle with Amazon. The numbers following some sentences are footnote references that have not been included at the end of this cut and paste, for example "Reformers²³, sacraments²⁴."

II. The Ordinances of the Church

The gospel creates the church. In their efforts to reshape the church that emerged from the Middle Ages, the Evangelical Reformers²³ of the sixteenth century affirmed this principle by insisting that an essential mark of a church must be a true proclamation of the gospel. But the church is to be a visible community, and so they also declared that a further identifying mark of the church was the proper administration of the ordinances (or sacraments²⁴).²⁵ These ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper,²⁶ help to define who are part of the church as they visibly and tangibly express the gospel. We

will discuss the nature of the ordinances, considering their source and purpose, before describing each more specifically.

A. The Nature of the Ordinances

1. Their Source: The Ordinances Are Mandated by the Lord Jesus The description of the practices of baptism and the Lord's Supper as "ordinances" reflects their source—they come to us by way of an authoritative order, a mandate, from the Lord Jesus himself. Jesus' Great Commission found in Matthew's Gospel mandates that in making disciples we are to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19). The Book of Acts records how baptism was a practice of the church from the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38-41).²⁷ The church's practice of the Lord's Supper began with the disciples' last meal with Jesus on the night before his death. When he shared the Passover meal with them, he gave them bread and wine and said, "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). The early Christians took this to be a command with abiding significance, extending beyond that night to include all believers in the ongoing life of the church. When Paul instructs the church in Corinth regarding their conduct when they gathered to share the Lord's Supper, he says, "I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you" (1 Cor. 11:23). These two practices, baptism and the Lord's Supper, come to us as outward signs given by Jesus himself, and they have been practiced by the church in some form throughout church history. We accept only these two as ordinances with this divine warrant.²⁸ Their distinctiveness among the commands given by Christ to the church is reflected in their unique purpose.

2. Their Purpose: The Ordinances Visibly and Tangibly Express the Gospel

Why have these ordinances been given to the church? What purpose do they serve? Most significantly, baptism and the Lord's Supper visibly and tangibly express the gospel. Certainly, the mere application of water or the eating of bread and the drinking of the cup²⁹ do not have inherent meaning. For that reason, these acts must always be set within a context that includes the proclamation of the Word of God. When the gospel is preached in conjunction with these ordinances, they become, in the words of Augustine, "visible words." These observable acts speak to us of the wonderful truths of the gospel—Christ's sacrificial death, our union with him, the new life that is ours and his glorious coming by which God's saving purpose will be brought to completion. Yet the ordinances are not only seen, they are also experienced physically—we "eat and drink" and we are "washed," hence, the term "tangibly" in our Statement. In our participation in baptism and the Lord's Supper, the preached gospel is personalized, and we are individually engaged in a tangible response. These are God-given means by which we respond to the gospel personally as it is set before us in these visible and tangible ways.

a. The Ordinances Are Not the Means of Salvation

The biblical story amply illustrates the common human fallacy of confusing the sign with the reality it signifies. Israel was prone to confuse the physical temple in Jerusalem with the God who was to be worshipped there, assuming that the presence of the former assured them of the saving presence of the latter. Jeremiah warned them that that was not the case (Jer. 7:1-29). Or they trusted in the outward act of animal sacrifice and ignored the inward commitment to the Lord and his ways that such an act was meant to express (cf., e.g., Isa. 1:2-20). Such confusion has also often plagued the church. Our Scandinavian Free Church forebears lived in a Christian culture in which participation in the ordinances was too often devoid of spiritual commitment.³⁰ It was commonly believed that a person experienced forgiveness of sin and was brought into a right relationship with God merely through the act of baptism or through participating in the Lord's Supper. Our Statement is explicit in rejecting that

misunderstanding. These ordinances are signs, pointing us to the reality of Jesus' saving work in his death and resurrection. We are saved by God's grace through faith alone in Christ alone.

b. When Celebrated by the Church in Genuine Faith The Ordinances Confirm and Nourish the Believer

The ordinances are not the means of our salvation, but this does not mean that they are devoid of any spiritual benefit. Far from it. They are given to the church³¹ by our Lord for our good as a God-ordained means of spiritual growth and edification. In that sense, though not "the means of salvation," they can nonetheless be considered "means of grace." Like the preaching of the Word, corporate worship, prayer and our fellowship with other Christians, these ordinances are means God uses to strengthen us in our faith. Because of their spiritual benefit coming through their connection to the gospel, the ordinances are to be "celebrated" by the church. We are to practice them with a spirit of thanksgiving and praise for the wonderful gospel they express. As we come in faith to be baptized or to share in the Lord's Supper, God the Holy Spirit works in our hearts to attest to the gospel of which they speak—the one confirms the new believer in the inaugural act of faith³² and the other nourishes³³ the believer in the ongoing Christian life.³⁴ Both serve to separate the believer from the world and to give a visible designation of those who belong to the body of Christ. Again, we stress that the ordinances are not efficacious in and of themselves.³⁵ They do not edify apart from the subjective spiritual response which they both presuppose and foster—what we call here "genuine faith."³⁶ These are signs which point us to the reality of the gospel. We must not confuse the two.³⁷ It is through faith in Christ alone, not our participation in these ordinances, that we are saved.

B. A Description of the Ordinances

[baptism discussion has not been included]

2. The Lord's Supper

When Jesus gathered with his disciples in that upper room on the night he was betrayed, they celebrated the traditional Jewish Passover meal together. Through this meal the Jews renewed the memory of that single, defining moment in the history of the people of Israel when the angel of death "passed over" the houses of Israel without harm but brought death to every firstborn in the houses of the Egyptians. The families of Israel were spared because by faith in God's gracious provision, they had sacrificed a lamb and had dabbed the blood of the sacrificial lamb on their doorposts. On the next day the Israelites were set free from their many long years of bondage and began their exodus from Egypt and their movement toward the land of God's promise. Moses declared: "This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD—a lasting ordinance" (Exod. 12:14). And so every year in every Jewish home those events would be re-lived; they would come alive in their minds; and the Jews of each new generation would understand themselves as the ones whom God had rescued.

a. The Lord's Supper Is a Remembrance of Christ's Death Jesus took that Passover meal and gave it a new significance, pointing it to himself. As he broke the bread, he gave it to his disciples and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). Offering them the cup he said, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:27-28). Jesus was giving up himself for his people, like that Passover lamb whose death substituted for the death of the firstborn of Israel.⁶⁶ This Christian meal is meant, in Paul's words, to "proclaim the Lord's death" (1 Cor. 11:26). In the Lord's Supper, Jesus was providing a symbolic picture to help us keep in mind forever what he was doing for us. How many men in previous generations, when going off to war, gave their wives or fiancées pictures of themselves as a

remembrance until they returned. Referring to a picture prominently displayed by her bedside, a woman might have said, “This is Richard, my husband.” The picture helped to keep him present in her mind and heart. So Jesus Christ has left such a memento of himself for his bride—the bread and the cup, which set before our eyes his broken body and shed blood. The Lord’s Supper is a remembrance of Christ’s death—it vividly reminds us of the cross, and in celebrating this meal, Christians of each new generation understand themselves as those for whom Christ died.

b. The Lord’s Supper Is a Communion with Christ’s Life

The Lord’s Supper is an act of remembrance, but the eating and drinking in the context of a fellowship meal suggests that it may entail more than that. After all, what bride ever ate the photograph of her absent husband? In addition, why did the early Christians choose Sunday and not Friday on which to celebrate this meal, for it was on a Friday that he died? The bread and the cup point us to Christ’s atoning death, but our eating and drinking what Jesus describes as his body and blood symbolize that we also share in Christ’s resurrection life. The words of Jesus himself point to this connection, expressing it in such a graphic way that many found it offensive— “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (John 6:53).⁶⁷ Elsewhere Jesus used organic imagery to describe our vital relationship with him— “I am the vine, you are the branches” (John 15:5). His very life flows through us, and the Lord’s Supper displays this vital union with Christ. We call this meal the Lord’s Supper, and in it we “commune” with Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 10:16). The precise nature of this communion with Christ has been understood in various ways through church history. Roman Catholics have so identified the sign (the bread and the wine) with what is signified (the body and blood of Christ) that the sign, when consecrated by the priest, essentially ceases to exist and only appears to be bread and wine.⁶⁸ The Protestant Reformers of the sixteenth century—including Martin Luther, John Calvin and Huldrych Zwingli—rejected this view, along with other attendant aspects of Roman Catholic sacramental theology,⁶⁹ and so do we. We insist that the sign and what is signified must be distinguished and that failing to do that distorts the gospel. However, the Evangelical Reformers were not in agreement among themselves about how the sign and what is signified were related and about how we commune with Christ at the Lord’s Supper.⁷⁰ The Lutherans contended that Christ is truly present “in, with, and under” the physical elements of the bread and the wine (though “in a supernatural and heavenly manner”⁷¹), followers of Zwingli understood the language regarding Christ’s body and blood metaphorically and the Lord’s Supper primarily as a meal of remembrance,⁷² while the Calvinists sought a real, though spiritual, presence of Christ in the communion elements.⁷³ Most in the Free Church would be closest to Zwingli in their understanding.⁷⁴ Nonetheless, these Evangelical leaders agreed, and this Statement affirms, that the Lord’s Supper is not a means of communicating God’s grace apart from the “genuine faith” of those who share in this meal. We give latitude in how our communion with Christ in the Lord’s Supper is understood⁷⁵ and in what sense those who celebrate this ordinance in genuine faith are “nourished.” We must be clear, however, that in our celebration of the Lord’s Supper, our communion with Christ in whatever manner is by God’s grace and spiritual benefit can only come as we subjectively appropriate the meaning of this meal (that is, the gospel) through faith.

c. The Lord’s Supper Is a Fellowship in Christ’s Body

The Lord’s Supper is not something that we do alone. It is a practice of the church. As a fellowship meal, at least in symbolic form, it speaks not only of our communion with Christ but also of our communion with one another as believers. Paul writes to the Corinthian Christians, “Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf” (1 Cor. 10:17). Our unity as a church is to be evident in our sharing in the Lord’s Supper, for it is precisely there that we focus on what Christ

has done for us all.⁷⁶ The Lord's Supper is "a participation in the body of Christ" (1 Cor. 10:16), visibly displaying our unity with other Christians (v. 17). For that reason this meal is for Christian believers, signifying our unity in Christ as those who come in faith before God, confessing their need of forgiveness, and professing Jesus as their Lord and Savior. In other words, it is the same requirement for those who present themselves to be baptized. And whereas baptism is to be the once-and-for-all, formal point of visible admission into Christ's body, the Lord's Supper is to be the ongoing affirmation of it. So most churches through history have affirmed that this meal is to be shared by baptized believers who come in faith,⁷⁷ and church discipline often entailed the exclusion of an unrepentant member from participation.

d. The Lord's Supper Is a Foretaste of Christ's Coming

In our celebration of the Lord's Supper, not only do we look back in remembrance of what Christ has done, experience his presence with us now, and affirm our present connection to his body, the church, as we come to this table we also look forward to what is yet to come. Jesus told his disciples at that Last Supper that he would not drink from the fruit of the vine until that day when he would drink anew with them in his Father's kingdom (Matt. 26:29). Paul says that in the Lord's Supper "we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11:26). One of the biblical pictures of that glorious future is that of a great banquet—a messianic wedding feast, at which the church as the bride of Christ is received by her husband (cf. Isa. 25:6; Matt. 8:11; 22:4; 2 Cor. 11:2; Rev. 19:7; 21:2,9). A small morsel of bread and a sip of wine or grape juice is no feast, but it is to be a token of one—a taste, a glimpse, a pointer to our great hope. Even today when Jews celebrate Passover, they end the meal by looking forward, saying, "Next year in Jerusalem," signifying their hope in the coming of the Messiah. When Christians celebrate the Lord's Supper we look back to Jerusalem, and Jesus' death and resurrection there, and we look forward to what is yet to come, saying, "Next year in the glorious kingdom of God."⁷⁸ For when we eat and drink, our souls are nourished in faith as we anticipate that glorious future when our faith will become sight. C.

A Summary of the Ordinances To summarize our understanding of the ordinances, our Statement affirms:

1. Christ has given his church two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper, and the practice of these ordinances is an essential distinguishing mark of a church;
2. these ordinances are signs, that is, visible and tangible expressions, of the gospel, and as such they serve to strengthen our faith— "confirming and nourishing the believer";
3. the signs (water in baptism, the bread and grape juice or wine in the Lord's Supper) must be distinguished from what they signify (God's saving work in the gospel and Christ's presence with us);⁷⁹
4. the practice of these ordinances does not save us, and we receive spiritual benefit from them only when they are celebrated in "genuine faith" in Christ.
5. the ordinances serve to separate the believer from the world and to give a visible designation of those who belong to the body of Christ. Our Statement denies that:
 1. either baptism in water or participating in the Lord's Supper is the instrumental cause of regeneration;

2. the grace of God is automatically and effectually conveyed through the administration of the ordinances themselves. In addition, our Statement does not prescribe the “time” or “mode” of baptism (allowing for both credo- and paedobaptist practices) nor does it define the precise manner in which Christ is present in the Lord’s Supper (allowing for a variety of historic Evangelical views).

III. Conclusion: The Church and the Gospel God’s gospel is now embodied in the new community called the church. This means not only that the gospel creates the church, but also that the church proclaims the gospel. And the church proclaims the gospel not simply in what the church is called to do,⁸⁰ but in what the church is. The church is the centerpiece of God’s purposes for humanity. For the promise of the gospel is that God will redeem a people composed of those from every nation, tribe, people and language who will find their unity solely in their common relationship with Jesus Christ as they are united to him by the Spirit (cf. Rev. 5:9; 7:9). And it is in the church that this people-to-come is now being made visible to the world.

In a sense, in the church the gospel message finds its initial realization. Paul in Ephesians 2:11-3:13 describes the creation of the one new humanity united in Christ as the purpose of God in all ages now revealed: “[God’s] intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph. 3:10-11).⁸¹ In this way, the church is the “first fruits” of what is to come. As one writer put it, “The church does communicate to the world what God plans to do, because it shows that God is beginning to do it.”⁸² In Christ a new age has dawned, and the church is to be an anticipatory presence of that new age and an initial signpost of its coming. The church is not just the bearer of the message of reconciliation, the church is a part of the message itself. The church’s existence as a community reconciled to God and to one another is what gives the message its credibility, for such a community is itself the manifestation of the gospel it proclaims. Jesus said as much. In speaking to the Father of his disciples in John 17, Jesus prayed, “I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (17:22-23). One way the gospel is to be declared to the world is through the loving unity of Christians. The church is to be a provisional expression of that new humanity united in Christ which God has graciously purposed to create for his own glory. So the church is missional in its very nature—who we are is an important part of our proclamation of the gospel to the world. For God’s gospel is embodied in this new community called the church. If this is so, then shouldn’t every Christian be a committed member of a church? If you believe, then you must belong. Many still persist in church-hopping, always searching for something that might satisfy their desires. Evidently this is not a new problem, for a colleague of Martin Luther in the sixteenth century, Philip Melancthon, made this remark: “Let us not praise those tramps who wander around and unite with no church, because they nowhere find their ideals realized [because] something is always lacking.”⁸³ We must not be church dabblers. We must dig in and discover the riches that can be had as we live out God’s purpose in real fellowship in the life of a local church. For without a commitment to the local church, we haven’t rightly understood God’s gospel.