

*From the Worship Center at St. John to your Living Room
Guidance for Celebrating Holy Communion During the COVID-19 Shutdown*

FAQ's for Household Communion

At St. John Lutheran Church | Cypress, Texas

Due to the extraordinary circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, and in order that the people of God at St. John may enjoy the gift of Holy Communion, we are providing a way for people to celebrate the Lord's Supper in their homes.

You will need to prepare bread and wine so that you have the elements for the Lord's Supper. You will find this document helpful to prepare your hearts for this sacred feast. Here are some questions to guide you to do this in the most edifying manner.

Is it acceptable that the Head of the Household serve communion in his or her home?

We do not suggest doing this apart from the celebration of the body of Christ at St. John. The Passover Seder, the meal at which Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, was celebrated in a home.

We are celebrating the Lord's Supper during our 8:15 & 11 AM online services. During these celebrations, the Body of Christ at St. John, scattered throughout Cypress and beyond, is connected to one another and to the gifts of God in the Sacrament. God is not hindered by barriers, disease, government decrees, or time and space. He is with us, as Jesus promises: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am in their midst." This is a true communion. We are asking that you not continue this practice outside of the regular gathering times, or without the context and connection with the St. John pastors and congregation.

Why don't we do this all the time?

These are truly extraordinary circumstances. For the sake of our neighbor we are practicing social distancing and refraining from large public gatherings. This is not our preference. But because we do have the means to connect with one another in this manner, we are offering this opportunity to receive this precious gift of God. We are acknowledging God's presence with us, and as a body though we are scattered we are one with Christ.

What do I actually need in order to celebrate this in my home?

Bread: Jesus used unleavened bread, and in as much as possible we seek to follow his example. But it is not essential that it be unleavened. Pita bread, or tortilla, or if you wish, you can follow the recipe to make unleavened bread.

Wine: Any kind of wine is acceptable. Jesus used wine, "the fruit of the vine." The use of grape juice (preferably non-alcoholic wine) is acceptable if wine is not available.

Word of God: We will speak Jesus' words together:

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."

We will celebrate and receive the Lord's Supper together at the same time, as led by the pastor during the service.

If you have children in your home who have not been confirmed, please include them by putting your hand on their head or shoulders and offering a blessing: "May Jesus' love be yours now and forever" (or some similar blessing you might wish to offer them).

Doesn't the pastor have to be there live, and say the words in our presence in order to have the Lord's Supper?

Pastors are tasked with the public exercise of the ministry for the sake of God's people. But the pastors have no special magical effect in the Lord's Supper celebration. Jesus' words give the Sacrament its power and blessing. Jesus is live and present with us, as Jesus says, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am in their midst" (Matthew 18:20).

I don't think I'm prepared to receive the Lord's Supper. Should I still do it?

No. Please spend this time in prayer and meditation, asking God for strength, understanding, a clear conscience, and a spirit of humble faith.

I have doubts about whether it is truly acceptable to take the Lord's Supper at home. Should I still do it?

No. Please spend this time in prayer and meditation, asking God for strength, understanding, a clear conscience, and a spirit of humble faith.

How am I to prepare for this?

Questions and Answers as taught in Martin Luther's Small Catechism:

What is the Sacrament of Holy Communion? *It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ Himself for us Christians to eat and to drink.*

What is the benefit of this eating and drinking? *These words, "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins," shows us that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given to us through these words. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.*

How can bodily eating and drinking do such great things? *Certainly not just eating and drinking do these things, but the words written here: “**Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.**” These words, along with the bodily eating and drinking, are the main things in the Sacrament. Whoever believes these words has exactly what they say: “forgiveness of sins.”*

Who receives this Sacrament worthily?

*Fasting and bodily preparation are certainly fine outward training. But that person is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words: “**Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.**” But anyone who does not believe these words or doubts them is unworthy and unprepared, for the words “for you” require all hearts to believe.*

Receiving the Lord’s Supper, I believe and confess:

- I am a sinner in need of God’s mercy, grace, and forgiveness.*
- Jesus died for the sins of the world; through faith in him I receive his gift of forgiveness and salvation.*
- Jesus’ body and blood are truly present under the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper.*
- With God’s help I will live in faithful obedience to his commands.*

Christian Questions and their Answers

Prepared by Dr. Martin Luther for those who intend to go to the Sacrament

After confession and instruction in the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, and the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, the pastor may ask, or Christians may ask themselves these questions:

1. Do you believe that you are a sinner?

Yes, I believe it. I am a sinner.

2. How do you know this?

From the Ten Commandments, which I have not kept.

3. Are you sorry for your sins?

Yes, I am sorry that I have sinned against God.

4. What have you deserved from God because of your sins?

His wrath and displeasure, temporal death, and eternal damnation. See Rom. 6:21, 23.

5. Do you hope to be saved?

Yes, that is my hope.

6. In whom then do you trust?

In my dear Lord Jesus Christ.

7. Who is Christ?

The Son of God, true God and man.

8. How many Gods are there?

Only one, but there are three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

9. What has Christ done for you that you trust in Him?

He died for me and shed His blood for me on the cross for the forgiveness of sins.

10. Did the Father also die for you?

He did not. The Father is God only, as is the Holy Spirit; but the Son is both true God and true man. He died for me and shed His blood for me.

11. How do you know this?

From the holy Gospel, from the words instituting the Sacrament, and by His body and blood given me as a pledge in the Sacrament.

12. What are the words of institution?

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."

13. Do you believe, then, that the true body and blood of Christ are in the Sacrament?

Yes, I believe it.

14. What convinces you to believe this?

The word of Christ: Take, eat, this is My body; drink of it, all of you, this is My blood.

15. What should we do when we eat His body and drink His blood, and in this way receive His pledge?

We should remember and proclaim His death and the shedding of His blood, as He taught us: This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.

16. Why should we remember and proclaim His death?

First, so that we may learn to believe that no creature could make satisfaction for our sins. Only Christ, true God and man, could do that. Second, so we may learn to be horrified by our sins, and to regard them as very serious. Third, so we may find joy and comfort in Christ alone, and through faith in Him be saved.

17. What motivated Christ to die and make full payment for your sins?

His great love for His Father and for me and other sinners, as it is written in John 14; Romans 5; Galatians 2; and Ephesians 5.

18. Finally, why do you wish to go to the Sacrament?

That I may learn to believe that Christ, out of great love, died for my sin, and also learn from Him to love God and my neighbor.

19. What should admonish and encourage a Christian to receive the Sacrament frequently?

First, both the command and the promise of Christ the Lord. Second, his own pressing need, because of which the command, encouragement, and promise are given.

20. But what should you do if you are not aware of this need and have no hunger and thirst for the Sacrament?

To such a person no better advice can be given than this: first, he should touch his body to see if he still has flesh and blood. Then he should believe what the Scriptures say of it in Galatians 5 and Romans 7. Second, he should look around to see whether he is still in the world, and remember that there will be no lack of sin and trouble, as the Scriptures say in John 15–16 and in 1 John 2 and 5.

Third, he will certainly have the devil also around him, who with his lying and murdering day and night will let him have no peace, within or without, as the Scriptures picture him in John 8 and 16; 1 Peter 5; Ephesians 6; and 2 Timothy 2.

Note: These questions and answers are no child's play, but are drawn up with great earnestness of purpose by the venerable and devout Dr. Luther for both young and old. Let each one pay attention and consider it a serious matter; for St. Paul writes to the Galatians in chapter six: "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked."

- From Luther's Small Catechism © 2019 Concordia Publishing House, cph.org

It should be noted that it is not essential to receive Holy Communion in order that our sins be forgiven or to be saved. Yet this meal is a gift, and Jesus commands us to "do this" so that we may experience his grace, forgiveness, and love. Holy Communion is not a reward for the virtuous, but a feast for starving souls. And our worthiness is based on faith in Jesus' words, "given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." The validity of the Sacrament is based on those same words of Jesus who said this is my body, this is my blood given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Whoever believes these words have what they say, forgiveness, life, and salvation. For where there is forgiveness, there is life and salvation.

Your Pastors,
David Bahn & Jeff Doria