

Evangelical Lutheran COMMUNION THESES

(Appendix to the Evangelical Lutheran Communion Theses SUMMARY adopted 8/31/2017)

In DETAIL ...

THESIS VI

Pastoral Care in the Administration of the Lord's Supper

²⁸ Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, **but let him who has my word speak my word faithfully.** What has straw in common with wheat? declares the LORD. (Jeremiah 23:28 ESV)

⁷ “So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. ⁸ **If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand.** ⁹ But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, that person shall die in his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul. (Ezekiel 33:7-9 ESV)

²⁶ Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, ²⁷ for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. ²⁸ **Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock,** in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, **to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.** (Acts 20:26–28 ESV)

¹ This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. ² **Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.** (1 Corinthians 4:1–2 ESV)

Now I would remind you, brothers, of **the gospel I preached to you,** which you received, in which you stand, ² and **by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—**unless you believed in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:1–2 ESV)

We confess ... that “no one should publicly teach in the Church, or administer the Sacraments, without a rightly ordered call,”¹ and that, “No one is admitted to the Sacrament without first being examined,”² and that, “¹ Confession in the churches is not abolished among us. The body of the Lord is not usually given to those who have not been examined [1 Corinthians 11:27–28] and absolved.”³

And also that “when the called ministers of Christ deal with us by His divine command, in particular when they exclude openly unrepentant sinners from the Christian congregation and absolve those who repent of their sins and want to do better, this is just as valid and certain, even in heaven, as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself.”⁴

We reject all beliefs, teachings, and practices that diminish or deny examination by the Pastor of those he admits to Communion as essential to a right administration and reception of the

¹ *Concordia*, AC XIV, 39.

² *Concordia*, AC XXIV 6, 47.

³ *Concordia*, AC XXV 1, 50.

⁴ *Luther's Small Catechism*, CPH: St. Louis, 1986, p. 29.

37 Sacrament.⁵ Likewise, we reject that it is only incumbent upon the Communicant to examine himself
38 to determine whether he is “worthy and well prepared” to commune, and one who holds the
39 confession of and is reconciled with the orthodox (Lutheran) Church.⁶

40 *What does this mean?* As Evangelical Lutherans we hold that the Pastor is to know the name, faith,
41 and life of those whom he communes and is called to account and care for their souls,⁷ i.e. the
42 Communicant Members of his parish, and of those orthodox (Lutheran) congregations and church
43 bodies with whom altar and pulpit fellowship has been declared once permission is secured from the
44 Pastor of the orthodox (Lutheran) guest.⁸

45 If a person lies in their confession or covers over a life of sin from the Pastor and the fellowship of
46 believers, then his sin and judgment is upon his own head.⁹ But if the Pastor is aware of these things

⁵ Chemnitz, *Examination*, II:315. “There is no doubt that it is incumbent on all ministers of the church that they diligently and earnestly admonish their parishioners, and indeed set before them the very grave threats of guilt and divine judgment, lest they approach the Lord’s Supper without making the prior examination or preparation of which Paul speaks.”

Open Letter to Those in Frankfurt on the Main (1533), trans. Jon D. Vieker, *Concordia Journal* 16/4 (1990): 343 (§25). “It is quite true that wherever the preacher administers only bread and wine for the Sacrament, he is not very concerned about whom he gives it, what they know and believe, or what they receive. . . . **However, because we are concerned about nurturing Christians who will still be here after we are gone, and because it is Christ’s body and blood that are given out in the Sacrament, we will not and cannot give such a Sacrament to anyone unless he is first examined regarding what he has learned from the Catechism and whether he intends to forsake the sins which he has again committed.**”⁵⁹ For we do not want to make Christ’s church into a pig pen [Matthew 7:6], letting each one come unexamined to the Sacrament as a pig to its trough. Such a church we leave to the Enthusiasts!”

⁶ C. F. W. Walther, “Communion Fellowship,” 187. “Our tenth thesis is therefore aimed directly against the Union,¹⁴ that grave of the Lutheran Church, and particularly also against its admirers and supporters within our church [and] against the unionistic, syncretistic preachers. **We label them all as shameful, unscrupulously belly-server, who leave it up to the consciences of their Communion guests whether and what they believe and confess regarding this Sacrament,** thereby wrongly citing the passage, ‘Now let a person examine himself,’ and so on [1 Corinthians 11:28], as though this text did not apply only to the lay people, but the following to the preachers: ‘This is how one should regard us, as . . . stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful’ [1 Corinthians 4:1–2].” [¹⁴The forced union of Lutherans and Reformed in Prussia (1817) and other German states.]

⁷ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 53 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), “An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg,” 1523, edited by Ulrich S. Leupold, 32. “Here one should follow the same usage as with baptism, namely, that the bishop be informed of those who want to commune. They should request in person to receive the Lord’s Supper **so that he may be able to know both their names and manner of life.** And let him not admit the applicants unless they can give a reason for their faith and can answer questions about what the Lord’s Supper is, what its benefits are, and what they expect to derive from it. In other words, they should be able to **repeat the Words of Institution from memory and to explain that they are coming because they are troubled by the consciousness of their sin, the fear of death, or some other evil, such as temptation of the flesh, the world, or the devil, and now hunger and thirst to receive the word and sign of grace and salvation from the Lord himself through the ministry of the bishop,** so that they may be consoled and comforted; this was Christ’s purpose, when he in priceless love gave and instituted this Supper, and said, ‘Take and eat,’ etc.”

⁸ See Thesis IV. If there is no opportunity to secure the permission of the guest’s Pastor before the requested communing, the host Pastor *may* determine the “Communicant Member in good standing” status by examination and word of the guest, after which a follow up with the guest’s Pastor may be conducted for future reference.

⁹ *Open Letter to Those in Frankfurt on the Main*, 343–44 (§26). “In this way, those in need of instruction are to be examined and by their answers show that they know the parts of the Catechism, that they recognize the sin they again have done, and are willing to learn more and desire to do better. If they will do this, they may come to the Sacrament. **The pastor is there as Christ’s faithful servant, and as far as it is possible for him, he may never cast the Sacrament to swine or dogs [Matthew 7:6]. He is to hear the people out**

47 and says and does nothing, leaving the one in his error and impenitence, then he too *sins* and is
48 *judged*. **“If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn**
49 **the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will**
50 **require at your hand”** (Ezekiel 33:8).¹⁰

51 Not confessing or calling to account sins and divisions within the fellowship, including when known
52 by the Pastor (Jeremiah 8:8-12, “‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace”), is a sin,¹¹ and brings
53 spiritual harm to both the guilty and the fellowship within which it occurs (1 Corinthians 11:17-22),
54 contradicting the very essence of the Sacrament—the oneness and unity of the body of Christ in
55 communion with the Unity in Trinity and Trinity in Unity.

56 Thus, communing anyone whose faith and life the Pastor does not know, puts at risk the Pastor, the
57 Communicant, and the fellowship, professing a unity of faith and life where there may be none, as in
58 cases of those from heterodox and false fellowships, not marking their errors but treating them with
59 *indifference*. Such indifference leaves sinners secure in their false belief and in doing so leavens the
60 fellowship, tempting those in the fellowship to also treat differences with indifference, even to believe
61 the false beliefs. The risk and reality is not only a compromised confession and practice, but also
62 incurs *sin* and *judgment*.

63 Therefore the importance of proper instruction and examination¹² is evident. This is the duty of those

and how it is with them. If they deceive him and do not speak honestly, then he is exonerated. They have done the deceit upon themselves.”

¹⁰ C. F. W. Walther, “Communion Fellowship,” 184. “We cite Leviticus 19:17: **‘You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him.’** This is a noteworthy text. Rebuking is so often presented as loveless; but unjustly, for we hear here: If you do not love someone you will not rebuke him. So then, to warn your fellowman against a false and destructive way is certainly true love. . . . **Therefore to refuse a Reformed person admittance to our Communion is certainly a work of true love, and woe to him who will not perform it. For thus says the Lord (Ezekiel 3:18): ‘If I say to the wicked, ‘You shall surely die,’ and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, in order to save his life, that wicked person shall die for his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand.’”**

¹¹ *Open Letter to Those in Frankfurt on the Main*, 341 (§20). “*In summa*,⁴⁶ it is appalling to hear⁴⁷ that in one and the same church or at one and the same altar both sides should come for and receive of one and the same Sacrament, yet with the one side believing that it receives only bread and wine, while the other believing that it receives the true body and blood of Christ. **And I often doubt whether it is possible to believe that a preacher or pastor could be so hardened and malicious (and moreover remain silent) as to let both sides go, each one in their delusion that they receive one and the same Sacrament, each one according to his faith, etc.**⁴⁸ **If there is that kind of pastor, he must have a heart harder than any rock, steel, or even a diamond. He must certainly be an apostle of wrath;** . . . Therefore, whoever has such preachers or is deceived by them, let this be a warning for them as before the devil incarnate himself.”

Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 21 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), “The Sermon on the Mount,” 1532–34, translated and edited by Jaroslav Pelikan, 226. “**Here is what Christ intends to say: ‘If you see that someone despises your preaching and tramples it underfoot, have no fellowship with such a person but withdraw from him.’** He says the same in Matthew 18:17: “If he refuses to listen to you and the church, let him be to you as a heathen and a tax collector.” In other words, you tell them that they are not Christians but damned heathen, and you want them to hear no preaching and to have no part in our possessions, as Peter says to Simon Magus in Acts 8:21. **This is what I do, and what everyone does who takes the preaching of the Gospel seriously, in order not to make ourselves partakers of their sin. God does not want us to be hypocritical with our sectarians, as though their doctrine were correct.** We must regard them as our enemies, from whom we are separated by the Gospel, by Baptism, by the Sacrament, and by all their doctrine and life.”

¹² Martin Luther, “An Order of Mass and Communion,” 33. “But I think it enough for the applicants for communion **to be examined or explored once a year. Indeed, a man may be so understanding that he needs to be questioned only once in his lifetime or not at all.** For, by this practice, **we want to guard lest the worthy and unworthy alike rush to the Lord’s Supper,** as we have hitherto seen done in the Roman church.

64 called to be “stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Corinthians 4:1). The Pastor is entrusted with
65 administering these mysteries in accord with the Word of Christ. That he be found faithful (1
66 Corinthians 4:2), he is to know the faith and life of those whom he communes in order to administer
67 the Supper to their blessing and not to their judgment. Such faith and life is known by what is said
68 and done as that which reveals what is in the heart, and so reveals the worthiness and preparedness of
69 the Communicant. For these three agree, the *heart* and *faith* and *life*—that what is believed in the
70 heart (faith) is also spoken by the mouth (confession) and carried out in godly-living (life).

71 **THESIS VI ... Therefore we hold that the Pastor is to know the name, manner of life, and faith**
72 **of those he communes. Examination of the Communicant by the pastor for a “worthy and well**
73 **prepared” reception of the holy Communion in reconciliation with the orthodox (Lutheran)**
74 **Church is prerequisite to receiving the Lord’s Supper.**

There they seek only to communicate; but the faith, the comfort, the use and benefit of the Supper are not even mentioned or considered. ... **Those, therefore, who are not able to answer in the manner described above should be completely excluded and banished from the communion of the Supper**, since they are without the wedding garment [Matt. 22:11–12].”

Martin Luther, “An Order of Mass and Communion,” 33. “When the bishop has convinced himself that **they understand all these things, he should also observe whether they prove their faith and understanding in their life and conduct.** For Satan, too, understands and can talk about all these things. Thus if the pastor should see a fornicator, adulterer, drunkard, gambler, usurer, slanderer, or anyone else disgraced by a manifest vice, he should absolutely exclude such person from the Supper—unless he can give good evidence that his life has been changed. **For the Supper need not be denied to those who sometimes fall and rise again, but grieve over their lapse.** Indeed, we must realize that it was instituted just for such people so that they may be refreshed and strengthened. “For in many things we offend all” [Jas. 3:2]. And we “bear one another’s burdens” [Gal. 6:2], since we are burdening one another. But I was speaking of those arrogant people who sin brazenly and without fear while they boast glorious things about the gospel.”