

To Expect the Doctrine of Closed Communion to be Practiced

Doctrine and Practice

Whereas, Article II of the Constitution of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod expects not just agreement in doctrine, but also agreement in practice, when it says that “The Synod, and every member of the Synod, accepts without reservation: 1. The Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament as the written Word of God and the only rule and norm **of faith and practice...**”; 2. All the Symbolic Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God...;” and

Whereas, the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church(that is, the Lutheran Confessions) state in Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, X, 31, “churches will not condemn one another because of dissimilarity of ceremonies when, in Christian liberty, one has less or more of them, **provided they otherwise are in unity with one another in doctrine and all its articles, and also in the right use of the Sacraments;**” and

Whereas Synodical President, Dr. A.L. Barry said, “It is precisely **for the sake of unity in both doctrine and practice among us, that our Synod adopts doctrinal resolutions** that affirm and carry out our commitment to the truth of the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions” (Convention Proceedings, 1998, Report of the President, Part III, p.61); and

Whereas Synodical President, Dr. A.L. Barry said, “When I am made aware of a doctrinal concern with one of our congregations or church workers, I make every effort to inform the District President **and encourage him to take appropriate action to resolve the concern in a manner in keeping with our scriptural and confessional positions. I have repeatedly underscored with our District Presidents how important it is for all of us to uphold the Synod’s doctrinal positions. Not to do so will only result in division among us and will detract from our desire to reach out boldly with the Gospel**” (Convention Proceedings, 1998, Report of the President, Part I, p.54); and

Synod’s Position on Closed Communion

Whereas, **our Synod in Convention still maintains in its official writings a Scripturally correct position on closed communion.**

1. In the CTCR document, Theology and Practice of The Lord’s Supper, 1983, it says, “The practice of refusing Communion to certain Christians and the general population at Lutheran altars is called close Communion. This practice serves the Gospel, and even those refused, by its reverence for our Lord's last will and testament.... Since fellowship at the Lord's Table is also confession of a common faith, it would not be truthful for those who affirm the Real Presence and those who deny it to join one another. Their common Communion would indicate to the non-Christian community that the last will and testament of Christ could be interpreted in contradictory ways. Indeed, the non-Christian might rightly ask whether it was Jesus' word which determined the church's position and practice or simply a human consensus.... Close Communion seeks to prevent a profession of confessional unity in faith where there is, in fact, disunity and disagreement. It would be neither faithful to the Scriptural requirements for admission to Holy

45 Communion (1 Cor. 11:27 ff.; cf. 10:16-17) nor helpful to fallen humanity if the
46 Christian church welcomes to its altars those who deny or question clear
47 Scriptural teachings.”
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49 2. In doctrinal statements from Synodical Conventions:

50 A. 1995 Res. 3-08

51 B. 1998 Res. 3-06A “To Recognize Action of Florida-Georgia District as Null and
52 Void.” The 1997 Florida-Georgia resolution(supporting, “A Declaration of Eucharistic
53 Understanding and Practice”) was rejected because it stated that their district affirmed
54 “the right of its pastors and congregations to welcome to the Lord’s Table those who,
55 regardless of denominational affiliation, share our confession of Christ and our
56 conviction of what He freely offers in the eucharist.”

57 C. 1998 Res. 3-05 “To Reaffirm Our Practice of Admission to the Lord’s Supper.” In
58 stated, “Foremost among our concerns with *A Declaration{of Eucharistic Understanding*
59 *and Practice}* is its failure to recognize the following two essential elements of our
60 practice: 1. Pastoral Oversight... and 2. Public Confession of the Faith Is Reflected by
61 Participation in the Sacrament.... That the Synod pleads with its members by the mercies
62 of God to abide by the historic practice of the church and The Lutheran Church—
63 Missouri Synod concerning admission to the Lord’s Supper.”

64 (Notably absent are resolutions affirming our practice of closed communion in the
65 Convention years of 2001 and 2004. On a side note, 2001 Resolution 3-16, “To Encourage Use
66 of Only Wine in Administration of Lord’s Supper,” is an exceedingly weak resolution at best,
67 since the Holy Scriptures absolutely and unconditionally require the use of wine, but our Synod
68 saw fit to only encourage its use.); and
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70 Disconnect Between Official LCMS Doctrine and Actual LCMS Practice

71 Whereas, Franz Pieper states in *Christian Dogmatics*, Volume III, under the title, “Orthodox and
72 Heterodox churches,”

73 “A church body is orthodox only if the true doctrine, as we have it in the
74 Augsburg Confession and the other Lutheran Symbols, is actually taught in its
75 pulpits and its publications and not merely ‘officially’ professed as its faith. Not
76 the ‘official’ doctrine, but the actual teaching determines the character of a church
77 body, because Christ enjoins that all things whatsoever He has commanded His
78 disciples should actually be taught and not merely acknowledged in an ‘official
79 document’ as the correct doctrine. It is patent that faith in Christ will be created
80 and preserved through the pure Gospel only when that Gospel is really
81 proclaimed;” and
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83 Whereas, it is undeniably evident that **the actual teaching and practice of many Missouri**
84 **Synod congregations and pastors do not follow our “official” teaching on closed**
85 **communion:**

86 1. Former 1st Vice President of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, The Rev. Daniel Preus,
87 wrote in a paper, entitled, “Lord, Have Mercy,” (presented at “Confession and Christ’s Mission:
88 Challenges to the Future of the LCMS, Melrose Park, Illinois, October 23, 2003),

89 “The first is obvious. It is the increasingly common practice among many LCMS
90 churches to open the Lord’s Supper to those with whom we are not in altar and
91 pulpit fellowship” (p.4).

92 He also wrote,
93 “But there is simply no question that many pastors of the Lutheran Church—
94 Missouri Synod have departed from the historic Christian and Lutheran practice
95 of closed communion. Many in our LC-MS are no longer adhering to our long-
96 held position that the Lord’s Supper (except under exceptional circumstances)
97 should be given by our pastors only to members of our own congregation and to
98 those who belong to churches with which we are in pulpit and altar fellowship.
99 Already over ten years ago, in 1993, President Barry pointed to the disunity
100 among us in the area of our communion practice by alluding to the, ‘...numerous
101 letter and telephone calls from pastors and laity in our Synod wondering if our
102 Synod still affirms the confessional practice of close communion” (A.L. Barry,
103 “The President’s Newsletter,” November 1993).

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105 2. In May of 1997, the Florida-Georgia District in Convention approved *A Declaration of*
106 *Eucharistic Understanding and Practice (DEUP)*, in which it stated that there should be no
107 “denominational requirement of baptized Christians who desire to receive the body and blood of
108 Christ offered in the Lord’s Supper.” This unguarded admission of open communion by an
109 entire district generated some 30 Synodical overtures in 1998. Most sought to reaffirm Synod’s
110 position or reject this document, but five were in support of open communion. The Northwest
111 District declared, “A practice congruent with Scripture and the Confessions calls for the
112 Sacrament to be shared with baptized Christians who repent of their sins, believe the real
113 presence, and sincerely intend to amend their sinful lives” (Rev. 3-04);

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115 Synodical President, Dr. A.L. Barry directed his words before the 1998 Convention saying,
116 “First, at our last convention {1995}, the Synod adopted a magnificent resolution
117 concerning close(d) Communion, Res. 3-08. **I believe this resolution needs once**
118 **again to be affirmed....** Second, there are a number of overtures before you
119 commenting on a resolution adopted by our Florida-Georgia District which is
120 clearly at odds with the position of our church body. The resolution quotes
121 approvingly from a document titled, “A Declaration of Eucharistic Understanding
122 and Practice.” The resolution that the District adopted departs from the position
123 of our church body. **It will be very important for our Synod at its 1998**
124 **convention to state fraternally and clearly that the Florida-Georgia District’s**
125 **decision in this matter is not in keeping with the biblical and confessional**
126 **position of our Synod, and is, therefore, null and void”** (Convention
127 Proceedings, 1998, Report of the President, Part II, p.57).

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129 At the 1998 Synodical Convention, a resolution was passed “To Recognize Action of Florida-
130 Georgia District as Null and Void” (3-06A), “because it is contrary to the resolutions of the
131 Synod which have consistently upheld the truth, **“that pastors and congregations of The**
132 **Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, except in situations of emergency and in special cases**
133 **of pastoral care, commune individuals of only those Lutheran synods which are now in**
134 **fellowship with us”** (1967 Res. 2-19; see also 1977 Res. 3-12; 1981 Res. 3-04; 1983 Res. 3-12;
135 1986 Res. 3-08; 1989 Res. B; 1992 Res. B; 1995 Res. 3-08). Though the Synod in 1998 turned
136 back this assault on closed communion and included a good critique of DEUP in the 1999 CTCR
137 document, “Admission to the Lord’s Supper,” the position expressed by these Districts has never

138 been rescinded by those Districts in question.

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140 3. Synodical President, Dr. Gerald Kieschnick shows us in his 2004 Report, that actual practice
141 has gotten even worse. He writes,

142 “In my travels across the Synod, I have not encountered disagreement in the
143 doctrine of what the Lord's Supper is. With unanimity, we believe, teach, and
144 confess the Real Presence of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ,
145 received in, with, and under the bread and wine of Holy Communion, for the
146 forgiveness of sin, the strengthening of faith, and the assurance of life eternal
147 through faith in Christ. I do not believe that fundamental doctrinal disagreement
148 concerning what the Lord's Supper is exists in the LCMS.

149 At the same time, **significant disagreement exists in the Synod regarding the**
150 **policies of admission to Holy Communion, namely, who should be allowed or**
151 **even encouraged to receive the Sacrament at the altars of our LCMS**
152 **congregations.** Some believe that all baptized Christians who believe in Jesus
153 Christ, who are penitent, who accept the Real Presence of our Lord's body and
154 blood, and who desire to amend their sinful lives should be welcome at our altars.
155 Others believe that only members of LCMS congregations and congregations of
156 other church bodies with whom the LCMS is in altar and pulpit fellowship should
157 be communed at our altars, with no exceptions.

158 The official position of our Synod, which welcomes members of LCMS
159 congregations and congregations of church bodies with whom we are in altar and
160 pulpit fellowship, also understands this policy to include "the necessity of
161 exercising responsible pastoral care in extraordinary situations and
162 circumstances" in the communing of "Christians who are member of
163 denominations not in fellowship with the LCMS" (1986 LCMS Convention
164 Resolution 3-08). **There is significant disagreement about what constitutes**
165 **"extraordinary situations and circumstances," which some pastors and**
166 **congregations interpret very broadly and others quite narrowly.**

167 **This disagreement in practice has resulted in dissension and disharmony**
168 **between pastors and congregations of the LCMS,** even though they are
169 otherwise agreed on the doctrine of the Lord's Supper.

170 It is important to recall the words of Francis Pieper, fourth President of the
171 LCMS:

172 Christian congregations, and their public servants, are only the administrators and not lords of the
173 Sacrament....On the one hand, they are not permitted to introduce 'Open Communion'; on the other hand, they
174 must guard against denying the Sacrament to those Christians for whom Christ has appointed it. (Christian
175 Dogmatics, III, p. 381). (Report of the President, *Convention Proceedings*, 2004, p.55).

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177 To avoid Logomachy

178 Whereas, concerning the administration of the Lord Supper, our Synod's doctrinal position is to
179 welcome to the table those with whom we are completely united in doctrine and practice, as
180 evidenced by their public membership held in a Missouri Synod congregation or a synod in
181 which we are officially in fellowship. There are some who refer to this teaching and practice as
182 “closed communion,” following in our German forefather's footsteps, who used the German
183 word, geschlossen. There are some who refer to our teaching and practice with the term “close
184 communion.” And rather recently it has been common to include both possible words, by

185 showing this in print with the letter “d,” in parentheses, so that it looks like this, “close(d)
186 communion” (though this spelling is not easily vocalized). In keeping with St. Paul’s command
187 not to “strive about words to no profit,” (2 Tim 2;14), this resolution will not concern itself with
188 these differences in words, provided that the doctrine taught is the same. However, be aware that
189 there are some who intentionally use the word, “close,” instead of the word, “closed,” in order to
190 deny our public teaching that we need to be **completely agreed** in doctrine and practice, and
191 **they assert by the word, “close,” that we only need to be somewhat united** in doctrine and
192 practice. That is, we only need to be “close” to each other in teaching and practice. Where this
193 false teaching is upheld, by the word close, we must abide by St. Paul’s command “to watch out
194 for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you
195 have learned. Keep away from them” (Rom 16:17); therefore be it

196
197 Resolved that the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, gathered in convention, direct her District
198 Presidents to initiate a visitation of every congregation and pastor in their respective Districts in
199 order to determine whether those congregations and pastors are actually practicing our
200 synodically-approved position on Closed Communion, which is founded on the Scriptures and
201 the Lutheran Confessions (Note: The District President always has the right to direct his vice-
202 Presidents and Circuit Counselors to assist him in the endeavor); and be it finally

203
204 Resolved that the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, gathered in convention, directs each
205 District President to present a report to the 2010 LCMS Convention concerning his findings and
206 the actions he has taken in order to restore our unity in doctrine and practice.

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