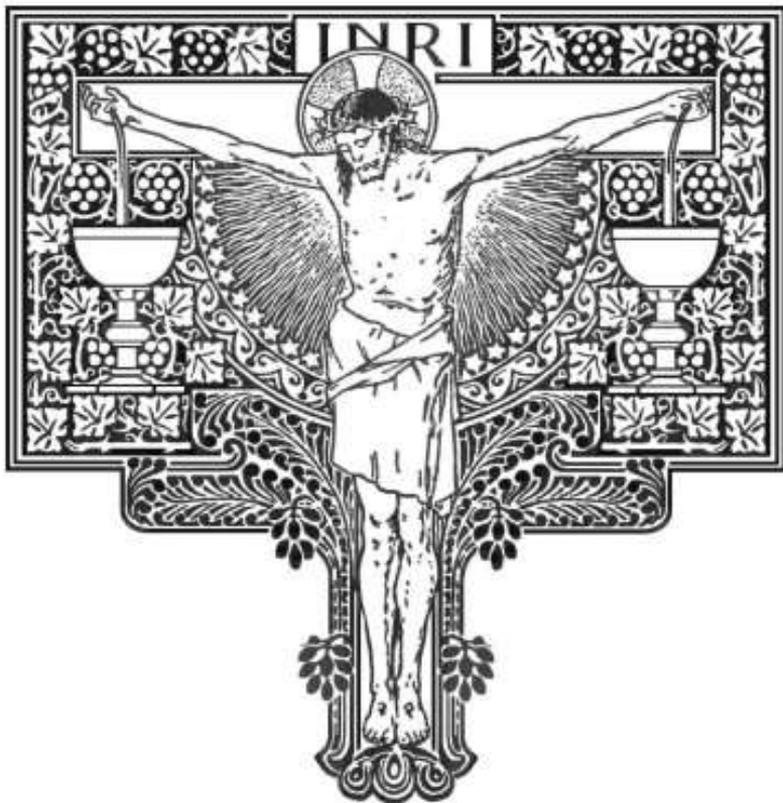


*A Catechism on Weekly  
Communion*



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*“Now, whoever does not highly value the Sacrament thereby shows that he has no sin, no flesh, no devil, no world, no death, no danger, no hell; that is, he does not believe any such things, although he is in them over head and ears and is doubly the devil's own.*

*On the other hand, he needs no grace, life, Paradise, heaven, Christ, God, nor anything good. For if he believed that he had so much that is evil, and needed so much that is good, he would not thus neglect the Sacrament, by which such evil is remedied and so much good is bestowed. Neither will it be necessary to force him to the Sacrament by any law, but he will come running and racing of his own accord, will force himself and urge you that you must give him the Sacrament.”*

Martin Luther, Preface to the *Small Catechism*

## **A CATECHISM ON WEEKLY COMMUNION**

*Beginning with Easter Sunday of this year, it was decided by the Board of Elders and Pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church that the Lord's Supper would be offered every Sunday, following the example of the Early Church and the Lutheran Reformation. The following Catechism has been prepared by Pastor Beisel to help members of Immanuel understand the reasons for this change, and to address some of the most common questions that people have about it.*

### **1. What is “Weekly Communion”?**

Weekly Communion is the practice of offering the Lord's Supper every Sunday in the main service of the Church.

### **2. Is this a new practice?**

For many in the Church today, it is a new practice. But it is actually a very old one, with roots in the New Testament.

### **3. Can you explain this?**

In the Book of Acts, we are told that the first Christians “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). Also, in Acts 20:7, Luke writes: “On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread...” “Breaking bread” is a New Testament term for Holy Communion. The first Christians, led by the apostles, met regularly on the first day of the week (Sunday) to learn the doctrine of the Apostles and to receive Holy Communion. This practice continued unbroken in the Christian Church for many centuries, even up to the time of the Reformation.

### **4. How do we know that the Church continued to “break bread” on the Lord's Day?**

This is confirmed in the writings of various Church Fathers. For example, the *Didache*, written about the year 100 A.D., directs the

people to “assemble in common on the Lord’s own day to break bread and offer thanks; first confess your sins so that your sacrifice may be pure.” From these and other writings, it is clear that the Lord’s Supper was offered weekly on the “Lord’s Day.”

## **5. And this was also the practice of the Church at the time of the Reformation?**

Yes! The Augsburg Confession (1530) states, for example: “For among us Masses are celebrated every Lord’s Day and on other festivals in which the Sacrament is offered to those who wish to use it, after they have been examined and absolved” (Apology to the Augsburg Confession, Article 24).

## **6. Was there ever a time that the Lord’s Supper was not offered on Sunday?**

Yes—when there were no communicants present who desired to receive it. Otherwise, it was offered.

## **7. If the Lutheran Reformers continued to make the Lord’s Supper available every Sunday, why did this change? And when?**

Historians usually note three main factors that led to its decline in frequency:

(1) Pietism: A movement within the Lutheran Church that emphasized personal devotion and de-emphasized the Sacraments in the life of a Christian.

(2) Rationalism (18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century): A movement that came on the heels of Pietism. It emphasized man’s reason over the Bible. Experience ruled over all. Churches in many places became mere lecture halls, devoid of religious instruction. The Lord’s Supper was offered even less frequently, in many places only four times per year.

(3) The upheaval from numerous wars in Europe following the Reformation did significant damage to Communion practice in Lutheran churches.

## **8. So, the decline in frequency of the Lord's Supper was largely due to negative factors?**

Yes. An over-emphasis on preparation as being essential for a worthy reception, an emphasis on personal piety over-against participation in the Sacraments of the Church, and a departure from the true Lutheran doctrine all contributed to a more infrequent availability of the Sacrament.

## **9. Are there any congregations in the Missouri Synod where the Lord's Supper is offered weekly?**

There are. In fact, in a survey conducted by a Lutheran pastor in 1995, it was noted that there were over 400 congregations that had a weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper, and even more where Communion was offered every Sunday at alternating services.

Over the past fifteen years, the Synod has seen a resurgence of this practice among its congregations. In some places, the Lord's Supper is available not only on Sundays, but on other days.

There have also been several resolutions adopted by the Synod at Convention urging and encouraging congregations to study the Biblical, Confessional, and Historical reasons for offering the Lord's Supper every Lord's Day.

## **10. How will Immanuel Lutheran Church benefit from such a practice?**

Any congregation that restores a weekly Communion practice, granted that it is done with a right understanding, will inevitably reap the following blessings:

- a.) No Sunday will go by without the opportunity for Christians to receive the Body and Blood of Christ for the forgiveness of their sins.
- b.) Those who travel frequently, or who work occasionally on Sundays, would not have to worry that when they did come to church the Lord's Supper would not be offered.
- c.) If someone is sick, and misses a Communion Sunday, he or she would not have wait weeks to partake of the Lord's Supper again.
- d.) The Lord's Supper would once again reclaim its central place in the life of the Church and the pastoral care of her Ministers.

### **11. Must one receive the Lord's Supper every time it is offered?**

The Lord's Supper is a gift that Jesus wants his believers to enjoy. It is given for the forgiveness of sins and for the strengthening of the believer's faith in Jesus. If one asks, "How often must I receive it?" then a good gift is turned into a Law, and the Lord's Supper is seen as a burden, rather than the gift that it is. However, if one asks, "How often may I receive it," the answer is very simple: as often as one desires it.

Like medicine for the soul, Christ wants us to make use of this gift as often as we have need of it. Of course, the Christian who is conscious of his sins will see that there is never a time when we do not have need of it.

Still, this is a valid question. We do not force anyone to come to the Sacrament. Ultimately, it is up to the individual Christian, whether or not he makes the decision to commune. We should not come to the Sacrament merely out of a sense of obligation, but because we hunger and thirst for the forgiveness that is given through it.

One also ought to think of his fellow Christians. Even if a person does not feel the need for the Lord's Supper on a particular Sunday, his fellow believers may.

## **12. Won't having the Lord's Supper every week make the Service too long?**

Length of the service, while not the most important issue for Christians to consider, is nevertheless a valid concern. Ways to remove unnecessarily time-consuming elements of the Service have been discussed by the pastor and the elders.

The reality is, however, it is difficult to avoid lengthening the service without doing damage to the Service itself. It is best to think not of how long the service is, but how blessed we are to be in church with our fellow believers.

## **13. The Lord's Supper is very special to me, and personal preparation is very important to me. Won't it be less special if it is there every week?**

Thankfully, what makes the Lord's Supper special is not us, but what it is in itself—Christ's body and blood, given and shed for us for the forgiveness of sins! The Sermon should be special to us as well, and it is often the case that what we hear goes in one ear and out the other. Yet, we would never say that we should only have sermons preached twice a month.

The point is, because we are sinful, there will certainly be times in which we take for granted the precious gift of the Lord's Supper. That can happen no matter how often the Supper is offered.

If we detect in ourselves a temptation to treat the Sacrament of Christ's body and blood as *not* special, we do well to remember that the problem is not with the Lord's Supper, or how often it is offered; the problem is with us and our sinful hearts. Therefore the solution is not to offer the Lord's Supper less frequently, but to examine ourselves, repent of our lack of faith, and trust the Word of Christ.