

House communion during exceptional times for Families and Singles

Northeastern Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Africa (NELCSA)

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Holy Communion has been a part of the Church, even from before its start. Jesus, on the night before his death on the cross, celebrated it for the first time with his disciples.

They did not understand what was happening, but Jesus knew that they would need the food for the road. He knew that they would all betray him and would go through their deepest crisis ever.

And so he gave himself: Take and eat- this is my body! Take and drink, this is the New Covenant in my blood!

This most intense communion (fellowship) with their Lord carried the disciples through the days and the darkness that followed.

On the day of Easter, as the news broke that Jesus had risen, confused disciples were on their way home to Emmaus. Jesus walked with them, but they did not know it.

It was only when he broke the bread (the term used for Communion in the New Testament) they realised: It is him! He has been with us, and we did not realise it! (Luke 24, 13-35)

Communion carried the disciples through the darkness of despair. Communion opened their eyes to the risen Lord and gave them the strength and the joy to run and proclaim: He has risen!

In this time of “Corona Crisis” we experience a crisis different from what the world has ever experienced before. We, and other nations too, are now under lockdown. All Church services have been suspended.

But in this time, more than ever, we need to receive communion, receive strength for those who are not well, receive the assurance that Christ is with us, and be strengthened and filled with peace and joy, to share that He has risen, Christ has conquered death!

How can we then still celebrate Communion? The very first Christians gathered in the homes where they shared the Word, prayed and received Communion. (Acts 2, 47)

Our Lutheran understanding is that Holy Communion has three elements that are made out of Communion. I quote from Luther’s small catechism “On Holy Communion”, section 3:

“How can eating and drinking do all this?”

It is not eating and drinking that does this, but the words, given and shed for you for the remission of sins. These words, along with eating and drinking, are the main thing in the sacrament. And whoever believes these words has exactly what they say, forgiveness of sins.”

It is general practise that communion is administered by an ordained pastor. This, however, is not a New Testament prescription, but a practise that over time became the norm. In some churches the doctrines state that Holy Communion is not Holy Communion if it is not administered by an ordained Priest.

This is not our Lutheran teaching or belief.

That is why in NELCSA we offer courses for lay people to administer Communion in their congregations. For the sake of good order they have to be nominated by the pastor and the congregational council.

Also, for the sake of good order, the local pastor is “in charge” of altar and pulpit - that is, the local pastor has to agree to “others” preaching and administering communion in the congregation. But nothing speaks against those “others” being lay persons.

Now we are in extraordinary times.

Church Council of NELCSA has agreed that during this time we should find ways of making it possible for our members to celebrate communion in their homes. There is no way that the pastors can visit all the homes - apart from the fact that it now would be in contravention of the lockdown.

We therefore encourage families living together in their homes, as well as singles, to not only hold devotions, but also to celebrate communion.

For the sake of order we channel this through the local pastor who will communicate it to the congregation.

Also, for the sake of order, we request that feedback be given to the pastor/congregational council, when such home communion has been celebrated, and who administered it.

This is for the duration of this crisis. As soon as the restrictions are lifted and we can again come together to worship and celebrate, celebrating communion together in the congregation will again be the norm.

To assist the families, I have compiled the following guideline for celebrating communion in the family:

1. Practical issues

- Communion can best be celebrated at the dining room table, where you normally eat.
- With families, the family appoints someone to administer the communion. (Liturgy is on page 5)
- The special hygiene rules apply also for communion: Wash your hands properly and ensure that plates and cups are clean.
- Bread: Any bread can be used. Cut it in bite size and place on a plate. It is shared with the words: The body of Christ, given for you!
- Wine: You can use wine or grape juice - depending on the family situation. The New Testament speaks about the Fruit of the Vine without specifying exactly what it was.
- In stead of using a chalice, pour the wine into a dispenser (a Milk Jug will do).
- Each participant has their own cup, and after the words of institution the jug is used to pour into each cup with the words: The blood of Christ, shed for you!
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- **Singles**(Liturgy page 7): Prepare the table as stated above. You can use a small bread or a slice of bread, of which you then, during communion, break off a peace.
- Pour the wine/juice into a cup as you prepare the table.
- Don't only read the liturgy - say it aloud.
- You can let friends and family know when you plan to celebrate communion, so that the sense of fellowship is strengthened.
- **Families with children** are reminded of the booklet: "Am I invited too?", published by our church some years ago. It is a help for parents to tell their children what communion is about. You can also read a story from that booklet to them at the beginning of the service. The booklet can be downloaded from nelcsa.net
- **In cases of serious illness:** a shortened liturgy can be followed (liturgy

Page 9). If the sick person cannot eat or drink, a drop of wine can be placed on the lips, with the words: "The body and blood of Christ, given for you for the forgiveness of sins."

- Inform your pastor about the celebration and also who administered it.

2. Theological issues

- We believe that Jesus Christ is present in Communion. Jesus himself did not explain how it works - he just says: It is my body, it is my blood. Eat and drink, and you have part in me! (John 6, 28-58)
- The communion table is the table of the Lord - Jesus Christ is the host, we are the guests, even at our own diningroom table!
- The sign of the cross (†) during the words of institution indicate that it is Christ, giving himself for us.
- Communion links us with all Christians across the globe. There is only one Table of the Lord, and in celebrating we are part of this one big Table Communion, even when on our own!
- In the time of isolation and lockdown, through Communion we experience this global fellowship in a way that "goes beyond understanding!"
- In receiving Communion we proclaim that Christ died for us, and that we belong to him.
- In receiving communion we re-commit ourselves to Christ, and he commits himself to us.
- We taste and see that the Lord is good!
- Luther encouraged that communion should be celebrated often!

May we, in this time of crisis, experience the comfort and strength that comes from celebrating Communion. May we experience this global fellowship even in our isolation. May our eyes be opened, like those of the Emmaus disciples, so that we know: Jesus is present! He has not abandoned us!

May this then fill us with strength and joy, that we share with whatever means possible with others as well.

Yours in Christ
Horst Müller

3. A Liturgy for House Communion in the family

Preparation:

Prepare the elements as stated above (ensuring that hands have been thoroughly washed beforehand)

The family is seated at the dining room table.

If the Communion is part of a devotion or Bible study, this precedes the Communion.

Administrator (A): The peace of the Lord be with you

Family (F): And also with you!

A: Let us pray

Lord Jesus Christ, you celebrated the first communion with your disciples at the evening of the darkest hour of humankind. You gave yourself to the disciples in bread and wine to carry them through this darkest hour.

The whole world is facing a crisis that we have not seen before. Therefore we come to you, because we need you to carry us through! You know the road that lies ahead. We don't.

We gather here at your table to receive comfort, courage, strength and joy.

Here, in your presence we hear your voice: Fear not!

We give thanks to you, God our Father, through Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord. He took upon himself all our sin, all our wrongdoings, so that we being dead to sin, should live to righteousness.

Therefore with angels, archangels and with all the company of heaven and all the church on earth we adore and magnify your glorious name, evermore praising you and singing:

(If you can, sing together): Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts; heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

THE LORD'S PRAYER (spoken by all)

Our Father in heaven, Hallowed by your name,

Your kingdom come, Your will be done, On earth, as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread,

Forgive us our sins As we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are Yours,

Now and forever. Amen.

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

A: *Takes the plate with bread and says:*

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 his disciples and said: Take and eat, this is † my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

The plate with bread is passed to each other with the words: The body of Christ, given for you! The last person then also gives it to the Administrator with the same words, who then takes and eats.

A: *Takes the jug with wine/grape juice and says:*

In the same way he took the cup, after the super, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them and said: Drink of it, all of you; this is † my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

The administrator pours into each cup with the words: The blood of Christ, shed for you, upon which the recipient drinks. At the end someone then pours into the administrator's cup with the same words, who then also drinks.

After all have received, the administrator says:

A: The body and blood of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ strengthen and preserve us in body and soul to eternal life!

Prayer of Thanksgiving and intercession *(or prayer fellowship)*

We give thanks to you, almighty God, that you have refreshed us through this healing gift, and we pray that through it you would graciously strengthen us in faith towards you and in love toward one another.

We also pray for ... *(specific prayers for people that you know, for the leadership of the country, etc)*

All this we pray through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever! Amen.

Family says together: The Lord bless us and keep us. The Lord make his face shine upon us and be gracious to us. The Lord look upon us with favour and give us peace! Amen

4. A Liturgy for House Communion as a single person

Preparation:

Prepare the elements as stated above.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, on the very first Easter Morning Mary was at your grave alone. She was crying. She did not realise that you were there. But then you called her Name: Mary! And her eyes were opened and everything changed. Therefore I pray, Lord, speak to me, by my Name (*Say your Name*) ...
I thank you, that you are here, and that you give me your peace!

Lord Jesus Christ, you celebrated the first communion with your disciples at the evening of the darkest hour of humankind. You gave yourself to the disciples in bread and wine to carry them through this darkest hour.

The whole world is facing a crisis that we have not seen before. With thousands of other Christians I come to you, because we need you to carry us through! You know the road that lies ahead. We don't.

I am at your table to receive comfort, courage, strength and joy.

Here, in your presence I hear your voice: Fear not!

Together with all believers I give thanks to you, God our Father, through Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord. He took upon himself all our sin, all our wrongdoings, so that we being dead to sin, should live to righteousness.

Therefore with angels, archangels and with all the company of heaven and all the church on earth we adore and magnify your glorious name, evermore praising you and singing:

(You can sing or speak:) Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts; heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, Hallowed by your name,
Your kingdom come, Your will be done, On earth, as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread,
Forgive us our sins As we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are Yours,
Now and forever. Amen.

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

Take the plate with bread and say:

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 his disciples and said: Take and eat, this is † my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

Break off a piece of bread, say: The body of Christ, given for me!

Take the cup with wine/grape juice and say:

In the same way he took the cup, after the supper, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them and said: Drink of it, all of you; this is † my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

Say: The blood of Christ, shed for me, *upon which you then drink.*

After having received, say:

Through the body and blood of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ I am part of his global communion. They strengthen and preserve me in body and soul to eternal life!

Prayer of Thanksgiving and intercession:

Together with countless multitudes I give thanks to you, almighty God, that you have refreshed us through this healing gift, and I pray that through it you would graciously strengthen me and all Christians in faith towards you and in love toward one another.

I also pray for ... (*specific prayers for people that you know, for the leadership of the country, etc*)

All this I pray through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever! Amen.

Blessing:

Lord, bless me and keep me.

Lord, make your face shine upon me and be gracious to me.

Lord, look upon me with favour and give me † peace! Amen

5. Shortened Liturgy in cases of serious illness:

Preparation: *Prepare the elements as stated above (ensuring that hands have been thoroughly washed beforehand)*

If permitted, the family forms a circle around the bed.

Administrator (A): The peace of the Lord be with you! Let us pray
Lord Jesus Christ, you celebrated the first communion with your disciples at the evening of the darkest hour of humankind. You gave yourself to the disciples in bread and wine to carry them through this darkest hour.

We come to you, because we need you to carry us through this difficult time!

Here at your table we receive comfort, courage, strength and joy.

Here, in your presence we hear your voice: Fear not!

We give thanks to you, God our Father, through Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord. He took upon himself all our sin, all our wrongdoings, so that we being dead to sin, should live to righteousness.

Therefore with angels, archangels and with all the company of heaven and all the church on earth we adore and magnify your glorious name, evermore praising you and saying:

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts; heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

THE LORD'S PRAYER (*spoken by all - this is important for the ill person to hear, even if in a coma*)

Our Father in heaven, Hallowed by your name,
Your kingdom come, Your will be done, On earth, as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread,
Forgive us our sins As we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are Yours,
Now and forever. Amen.

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

A: *Takes the plate with bread and says:*

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 his disciples and said: Take and eat, this is † my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

The bread is given with the words: The body of Christ, given for you! The last person then also gives it to the Administrator with the same words, who then takes and eats.*

A: Takes the jug with wine/grape juice and says:

In the same way he took the cup, after the supper, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them and said: Drink of it, all of you; this is † my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

The administrator pours into each cup with the words: The blood of Christ, shed for you, upon which the recipient drinks. At the end someone then pours into the Administrator's cup with the same words, who then also drinks.*

*** If the sick person cannot eat or drink, a drop of wine can be placed on the lips, with the words: "The body and blood of Christ, given for you for the forgiveness of sins."**

A: The body and blood of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ strengthen and preserve us in body and soul to eternal life!

Prayer of Thanksgiving

We give thanks to you, almighty God, that you have refreshed us through this healing gift, and we pray that through it you would graciously strengthen us in faith towards you and in love toward one another.

This we pray through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever! Amen.

A: The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you.
The Lord look upon you with favour and give you † peace! Amen
