

March 2026

To: Ordained Ministers of the Gospel  
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

Martin Luther once referred to the Lord’s Supper as the “sum and substance” of the Gospel (AE 36:56). What a treasure we have in the sacrament of Christ’s body and blood, through which He grants us forgiveness, life, and salvation. At the Sacrament of the Altar, we are united with one another in our confession of the truth faith, as St. Paul says, “we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor. 10:17).

Along with such blessings come many challenges in our day. They include internal tensions within the church, new technologies and health concerns that complicate our practice, and practical questions that can cloud Christ’s clear words and cause confusion and uncertainty. It was in light of these challenges that the 2023 convention asked the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) to address several practices related to the proper elements and reverential administration of the Lord’s Supper (2023 Res. 5–15).

In this report, *Proper Administration of the Lord’s Supper: Applying Scripture and the Confessions to Contemporary Issues*, the CTCR offers the Synod guidance on three practical issues in our Synod presently: the use of grape juice, pre-packaged elements, and non-wheat hosts. By way of introduction, the report also provides a brief summary of what Lutherans believe, teach, and confess about the Lord’s Supper. It is the hope of the Commission that this may help church workers and congregations deepen their knowledge of this Sacrament, remove potential obstacles to receiving it rightly, and exercise sensitivity to those who commune with them at their tables.

The Commission has chosen to publish this document through Concordia Publishing House and have copies sent to all active LCMS pastors. We encourage pastors to study this document and share its findings with their flocks, as we together seek to heed Christ’s words, express the unity we share at that table, and proclaim the atoning death of Christ for the sins of the world. “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor. 11:26).

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Dr. Joel Lehenbauer, Executive Director

# Proper Administration of the Lord's Supper:

*Applying Scripture and the Confessions  
to Contemporary Issues*



*a report of*

THE COMMISSION ON THEOLOGY  
AND CHURCH RELATIONS

DECEMBER 2025

PROPER ADMINISTRATION  
OF THE LORD'S SUPPER: APPLYING  
SCRIPTURE AND THE CONFESSIONS  
TO CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

A Report of the Commission on Theology  
and Church Relations

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

December 2025

## Abbreviations

<b>AC</b>	Augsburg Confession
<b>AE</b>	Luther’s Works
<b>Ap</b>	Apology of the Augsburg Confession
<b>CW</b>	Convention Workbook
<b>FC SD</b>	Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration
<b>FC Ep</b>	Formula of Concord, Epitome
<b>LC</b>	The Large Catechism
<b>SA</b>	Smalcald Articles
<b>SC</b>	The Small Catechism



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# Contents

Preface	4
Theological Considerations	7
Substitution of Grape Juice for Ordinary Wine	11
The Use of Pre-Packaged Elements in the Lord's Supper	14
Substitution of Non-Wheat Bread for Wheat Bread	22
Conclusion	36
Appendix A	37
Appendix B	40
Appendix C	45

## PREFACE

At its 2023 convention The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) adopted Resolution 5-15, “To Uphold Proper Elements and Reverential Administration of the Lord’s Supper,” addressing concerns about the practice of the Lord’s Supper.<sup>1</sup> The resolution includes reminders that the Supper is “a communal meal . . . through which His body and blood are distributed in, with, and under bread and wine for the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.” The resolution goes on to reaffirm the confessional teaching “that the proper use of the Sacrament includes unified consecration, distribution, and reception” and the consequent fact that the Supper “should be kept according to His [Christ’s] institution.” It adds: “It is incumbent on all faithful ministers of the Gospel to remove all obstacles that create doubt regarding what Christ offers in this Sacrament or detracts from it.” Lastly, the final two “Whereas” statements speak about the use of “prefilled communion cup and wafer sets” and “the use of non-wheat hosts and/or grape juice” in LCMS congregations.

Three resolves follow:

*Resolved*, That our pastors and congregations give careful consideration to the reverential treatment of the elements in the administration of the Lord’s Supper; and be it further

*Resolved*, That this convention reaffirms 2001 Resolution 3-16, “To Encourage Use of Only Wine in Administration of Lord’s Supper”; and be it finally

*Resolved*, That the Commission on Theology and Church Relations [CTCR] be instructed to take up these concerns.

The following consideration is offered in compliance with the third and final

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1 The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2003 *Convention Proceedings*, 157.

direction of 2023 Res. 5-15 and seeks to address the three specific “concerns” about the practice of the Lord’s Supper identified therein: first, the substitution of grape juice for wine; second, the use of prefilled communion cup and wafer sets; and third, the substitution of non-wheat for wheat hosts.

Each one of the three practices mentioned in 2023 Res. 5-15 has its rationale in pastoral concern for the well-being of communicants. Specifically, each addresses a matter of bodily health and well-being. Pre-packaged elements were introduced in some LCMS congregations during the COVID-19 pandemic as an attempt to protect communicants from transmission of the coronavirus. Churches that make grape juice available rather than wine do so to aid members who suffer from alcoholism or others who are on medications that should not be taken together with alcohol. And churches that offer gluten-free bread in the Supper do so to prevent adverse physical reactions to the gluten in wheat. It is important to acknowledge and commend the compassion and pastoral concern that these practices represent.

At the same time, appreciation of the compassion, motivations, and actions at work does not mean that we should ignore the theological appropriateness of these practices. Therefore, the CTCR seeks to address herein each of these practices from a confessional Lutheran theological and pastoral perspective. Our goal is that our practice would fully align with our confession of the Lord’s Supper as instituted by our Lord Jesus.



# THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Gospel “is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16). As people hear and believe the Gospel’s promises they are sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13). We are saved by grace through faith in Christ. Holding to Christ in faith, we also hold to His promises. His promises are spoken that we may believe them and so receive what they promise: forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. Faith is thus confident hope. It is assurance that what God promises is ours, even when we do not see it (Heb. 11:1).

Among the precious expressions of the Gospel is the Sacrament of the Altar, where Christ explicitly promises that the bread of the Sacrament is His body and the cup of wine is His blood—and that this body was given for us and this blood was shed for the forgiveness of our sins. This is not “interpretation” but a simple acknowledgment of God’s Word:

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.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See “The Words of Our Lord,” or Words of Institution, as they appear in the Divine Service of *Lutheran Service Book* (Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 162, 179, 197, 209, 217.

This wonderful promise of the sacramental union and forgiveness in the Lord's Supper also has a sobering corollary: "We hold that the bread and wine in the Supper are Christ's true body and blood. These are given and received not only by the godly but also by wicked Christians" (SA III VI 1).<sup>3</sup>

Given these words, the Small Catechism simply and boldly restates them, confessing that the Sacrament of the Altar "is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, for us Christians to eat and to drink, instituted by Christ Himself" (SC VI 2). The Formula adds the assurance that the words of Jesus are "simple, plain, clear, firm, and beyond doubt" (FC SD VII 48). Thus Lutherans make a confident confession, grounded in Christ's trustworthy promises. There is no doubt or quibbling or any attempt to rationalize how such a gift could be given. Faith does not demand an explanation; it receives and rejoices as it trusts in Christ's promises. Rather, Lutheran Christians firmly confess that the "true" body and blood—that is, the real, actual body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ—are what Christ gives Christians to eat and to drink. Any talk of Jesus' words as symbolic or mere figures of speech is ruled out. Thus the Formula of Concord echoes the Apology (X 54) to say, "We believe that in the Lord's Supper Christ's body and blood are *truly and substantially present* and are truly administered with those things that are seen (bread and wine) to those who receive the Sacrament" (FC SD VII 11; emphasis added).

All this is true, of course, not only of the Last Supper, but every Lord's Supper that follows Christ's intent. Paul's repetition of Christ's words in 1 Corinthians proves that they are rightly understood to apply not only to the bread and wine Christ distributed on the night of His betrayal, but are also true for the communion administration of the church in every age (see 1 Corinthians 10 and 11, especially 1 Cor. 10:16 and 1 Cor. 11:23–24; see also FC SD VII 54–55).

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3 Therefore Lutherans do not administer the Sacrament without restriction to any and everyone. "Everyone who desires to be a Christian and go to this Sacrament should know them [the words of Christ]. For it is not our intention to let people come to the Sacrament and administer it to them if they do not know what they seek or why they come" (LC V 2). That the "unworthy" receive Christ's body and blood is taught in 1 Cor. 11:27–32.

The “word, institution, and ordination” of Christ creates the sacramental union (FC SD VII 73–75).<sup>4</sup> And His “Do this” means the validity of the Sacrament also includes more than a mere recitation of Christ’s word over bread and wine. “This embraces the entire action or administration in this Sacrament. In an assembly of Christians bread and wine are taken, consecrated, distributed, received, eaten, drunk, and the Lord’s death is shown forth at the same time. St. Paul also places before our eyes this entire action of the breaking of bread or of distribution and reception (1 Corinthians 10:16)” (FC SD VII 84). This is summarized in the ancient rule that “nothing has the nature of a Sacrament apart from the use [*usus*] instituted by Christ or apart from the action [*actio*] divinely instituted” (FC SD VII 85). “The use or action here does not mean chiefly faith. Nor does it mean the oral participation alone. It means the entire external, visible action of the Lord’s Supper instituted by Christ: the consecration, or words of institution, the distribution and reception, or oral partaking of the consecrated bread and wine, of Christ’s body and blood” (FC SD VII 86).

Given the emphatic certainty of the Gospel in the words of Jesus when He instituted His Holy Supper, we should be concerned if any church practice fails to follow His institution or if it introduces doubt or uncertainty about the Supper. Instead, the church rightly seeks to follow our Lord’s own institution in Holy Communion. Just as our Lord took bread and wine, declaring it His body and blood and promising that “in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us through these words” (SC VI 6), so we also echo His very words over bread and wine, distributing them in confident faith because He has declared that He wants to distribute His very body and blood in this way.

The clear words of Christ answer essential questions: “For Christ gives this command at the table and at supper. There is certainly no doubt that He speaks of real, natural bread and of natural wine. Also, He speaks of oral eating and drinking” (FC SD VII 48). Everything important is there in the Words of Institution. Because they are simple and clear and make unambiguous promises, our practice should avoid anything that takes the plain, powerful words of Jesus and produces questions or uncertainty, or leads to unhelpful, confusing, or illegitimate practices.

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4 The Latin text reads, “*verbo, institutioni atque ordinationi;*” and the German, “*Wort, Einsetzung und Ordnung.*” See *Concordia Triglotta*, 999.

## Proper Administration of the Lord's Supper

That we seek to avoid ambiguity about the Sacrament, however, does not mean that every specific thing described in the Last Supper or in Paul's advice to Corinth must be followed in some kind of rigid mimicry. When Jesus said, "Do this," He focused on eating the bread that He promises is His very body and drinking the cup that He assures us is His very blood. Our Lord's emphasis is not on such things as the Passover setting or the physical action of breaking a loaf or other such matters. He tells us simply to eat and drink the bread and cup that are His body and blood—and thereby assures us that our sins are forgiven.

# SUBSTITUTION OF GRAPE JUICE FOR ORDINARY WINE

This is not the place to trace the history of how and why grape juice came to be substituted for wine in the practice of Holy Communion.<sup>5</sup> We should simply note that the practice came out of Methodist revivalism's condemnation of all alcohol use and was spurred by Thomas Welch's (a Methodist minister) development of a way to prevent the fermentation of grape juice through pasteurization.<sup>6</sup>

Over time the substitution of grape juice for wine was adopted by many Protestant churches and even by some LCMS congregations. Within the LCMS, however, this practice has not involved a total substitution of grape juice for wine. In such cases wine is used by most members and grape juice is available for alcoholics and others who avoid alcohol for medical reasons.

Although some LCMS congregations may in some situations substitute grape juice for wine in the Lord's Supper, the LCMS has taken a long-standing, consistent position against the practice. For this reason, although 2023 Res. 5-15 asked the CTCR to take up the three concerns we are addressing herein, the use of grape juice in place of wine can be considered most briefly. The resolution itself reaffirms a 2001 resolution that strongly encourages our congregations to use only wine and not grape juice (see Appendix A for the full text of 2001 Res. 3-16).

The Synod's position on this matter predates 2001 and is based firmly on Scripture. It is also consistent with the traditions of the church before the Reformation, of

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5 A relatively brief history of the temperance movement in the US is available on the National Institutes of Health's National Library of Medicine. See Paul Aaron and David Musto, "Temperance and Prohibition in America: A Historical Overview," <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK216414/>.

6 See Joe Iovino, "Methodist History: Communion and Welch's Grape Juice," United Methodist Church, June 28, 2016, <https://www.umc.org/en/content/communion-and-welchs-grape-juice#:~:text=To%20combat%20the%20epidemic%20of,it%20is%20such%20common%20practice.>

## Proper Administration of the Lord's Supper

Luther and the Confessions, and of confessional Lutheran teachers who followed. Throughout this history the term “fruit of the vine” has been understood as a technical term and not a general description. The LCMS and its theologians have with great consistency affirmed that only bread and wine are to be used in the Lord's Supper. This position can be traced from C. F. W. Walther to Franz Pieper to the faculties of our seminaries to the CTCR.<sup>7</sup>

In 1998, the Synod convention affirmed this understanding in Res. 3-16B, “To Affirm Use of Bread and Wine in the Sacrament of the Altar.” In keeping with its title, the resolution included reminders that the Scriptures are unanimous in stating that our Lord used bread and a cup of wine in the Last Supper and that the same were present in the Sacrament at Corinth. Pastors were urged to “remain faithful in their practice of Christ's institution” so as “not to introduce an element of uncertainty into the Sacrament.”<sup>8</sup>

As noted in 2023 Res. 5-15, the Synod again addressed this topic in 2001, in Res. 3-16, “To Encourage Use of Only Wine in Administration of the Lord's Supper.” The convention then addressed congregations that were using grape juice: “That the congregations be encouraged to use only wine for the Sacrament.”<sup>9</sup> Once more, in 2023 Res. 5-15, the Synod again reaffirmed its 2001 Res. 3-16 stance, “To Encourage Use of Only Wine in Administration of Lord's Supper.”<sup>10</sup>

We must add that this consistent position also indicates concern for the communicant who for various reasons cannot tolerate alcohol. The discussions of both seminaries and the CTCR all note the availability of low or non-alcoholic *wines* that may be used without objection.

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7 See Walther's *Pastoral Theology* (Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 199; Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 3 (Concordia Publishing House, 1953), fns 94, 354; also “Opinion of the Department of Systematic Theology,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 45, nos. 1-2 (1981): 77-80; “Is ‘Non-Alcoholic Wine’ Really Wine?” *Concordia Journal* 17, no. 1 (1991): 4-6; Commission on Theology and Church Relations, *Theology and Practice of the Lord's Supper* (The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1983), under 2. The Elements, b. The Wine, 16-17.

8 See The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *1998 Convention Proceedings*.

9 See The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *2001 Convention Proceedings*.

10 *2023 Convention Proceedings*, 157.

There is no reason to question the Synod’s time-honored position on this matter. The elements referred to in Scripture are without question bread and wine. The Synod therefore rightly opposes the substitution of pasteurized grape juice for wine in the Sacrament. Rather, the Commission echoes Concordia Theological Seminary’s “Opinion of the Department of Systematic Theology”:

We strongly urge, therefore, lest confusion be multiplied, offense be given, consciences and peace within the church be disturbed, that Lutheran pastors and people continue a consistent practice in support of the Scripturally designated elements in Holy Communion, especially as regards the use of wine, “the fruit of the vine,” which Christ instituted when He gave to His church this new testament in His blood.<sup>11</sup>

In conclusion, we commend once more the Synod’s long-standing teaching that only bread and wine should be used in the Lord’s Supper, since “the use of an element other than wine is an alien practice in the churches of the Augsburg Confession and brings about doubt whether the Sacrament is offered or not” (2001 Res. 3-16).

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11 “Opinion of the Department of Systematic Theology,” 80. Earlier in its opinion, the Systematic department offers this strong caution: “Those who simply ‘prefer’ to receive grape juice instead of wine should be led to see that their ‘preference’ is in violation of Scripture’s own clear teaching and that they are thereby making the Sacrament an uncertain matter, if in fact not invalid. Moreover, it is to be feared that such tampering with the Sacrament may in the final analysis involve a deeper error, the relegating of the Lord’s Supper to a mere memorial meal instead of the blessed means of grace that Christ has constituted it to be for our spiritual well-being, for the forgiveness of sins” (80). See Appendix B for the full text of this opinion.

# THE USE OF PRE-PACKAGED ELEMENTS IN THE LORD'S SUPPER

## Historical Background

Of the three practices that are named in 2023 Res. 5-15, the most recent—at least in the LCMS—is the introduction of pre-packaged bread and wine (or grape juice). COVID-19 led to skyrocketing use of the packets in many Protestant and Evangelical churches,<sup>12</sup> and also to some use in the LCMS. The recent rise of pre-packaged elements resulted from the mystery of how COVID-19 was spreading. The use of packets was linked to other changes in church life, from widespread temporary suspension of worship in many churches, to parking lot services, to physical separation of individuals and families in sanctuaries, and so forth. For one vendor of the pre-packaged elements, sales rose by 1,000 percent in the year after COVID-19 hit the US.<sup>13</sup>

Over the centuries, various ways of providing the communion elements have been employed in the church catholic. With regard to the bread, practice has varied through church history. The earliest evidence indicates that ordinary table bread was used. The Roman Catholic tradition now is to use only unleavened wheat bread; churches of the East generally use leavened bread. For many years a larger

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12 Lutheranism can arguably be placed under the Protestant and the Evangelical umbrella as a church body that stems from the sixteenth-century Reformation. However, within this document our general practice will be to distinguish confessional Lutheranism from other Protestants and Evangelicalism.

13 Parija Kavalanz, “Easter Is Here, and So Are Disposable, Pre-filled Communion Cups,” CNN Business, April 7, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/07/business/prefilled-communion-cups/index.html>.

loaf was employed—sometimes leavened and sometimes not. Both unleavened and leavened bread have been used, usually made from wheat flour, although there is evidence that in some places other grains were acceptable to make the flour for the bread. Usually the unleavened bread for the Sacrament is made with only flour and water, but in some places oil is added, and in others wine or salt may also be in the dough.<sup>14</sup> The creation of the individual host dates to the seventh or eighth century, and by the ninth century the practice of individually made unleavened hosts was nearly uniform in the West (almost always baked in monasteries with prayer and fasting). However, a few, even in the West, preferred a single loaf of leavened bread for the Eucharist.<sup>15</sup>

With the Reformation came more change. The Reformed eventually insisted on the use of ordinary loaves in the Supper, because of the symbolism inherent therein, while Lutherans generally retained the Roman practice of individual hosts.<sup>16</sup>

The wine of the Supper through history also exhibits significant variety. Only grape wine appears to have been used throughout the church, although some heretical groups used only water rather than wine. While water alone was condemned, wine was typically diluted with water in the ancient world, in Jewish practice, and so also in the church. Augustine mentions the practice, and Cyprian of Carthage comments on this theologically, although the practice was more likely the result of practicality and custom than theology.<sup>17</sup> The grape varieties used for wine varied.

The practice of communing in one kind, or withholding the cup, is of course one of the most significant variations that occurred in the practice of the Lord's Supper. The practice of the New Testament church, as we know from Corinth, or of the Western Church in general into the twelfth century was clearly Communion in both kinds, although there were exceptions in isolated circumstances, for example,

14 See Henri Leclercq, "Host," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 7 (Robert Appleton Company, 1910), <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07489d.htm> (accessed August 19, 2024).

15 Lucia Graziano, "Communion Wafers Instead of Loaves: A History," *Aleteia*, February 7, 2023, <https://aleteia.org/2023/02/07/communion-wafers-instead-of-loaves-a-history> (accessed August 19, 2024).

16 "Host," *Catholic Encyclopedia*.

17 Augustine, "On Christian Doctrine," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2, ed. Philip Schaff (Hendrickson reprint, 1995), 590; Cyprian, "Epistle 62: Caecilius, on the Sacrament of the Cup of the Lord," in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5, ed. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (Hendrickson reprint, 1995), 358–64.

when the Sacrament was taken to the sick and in the practice mentioned by certain church fathers of laity taking home the host for communing privately and in the communion of young children.<sup>18</sup> In the East the Sacrament “is always given in both forms—bread and wine.”<sup>19</sup> Thus, the Roman practice of communing in only one kind is a novelty in the catholic tradition that, unfortunately, became the standard in the medieval Roman Catholic Church. Protests against the practice of withholding the cup preceded the Reformation, but with the Reformers the chalice was returned to the laity in virtually every strand of the Reformation.

As noted above, however, some Protestants began the variation of using something other than wine in the cup. Then, beginning in the twentieth century and due to advances in knowledge about disease transmission, the common chalice gradually gave way to the use of individual metal cups or glasses and then individual plastic cups. The cups were almost always filled in advance of the service. The rationale for the practice is the assumption that communicants are thereby protected from colds, flu, or other diseases. (It should be noted, however, that this assumption cannot be firmly substantiated and that there is no verifiable evidence of any transmission of infections via the common cup.)<sup>20</sup> Over time the use of individual portions of wine became common also in the LCMS, and the Synod formally approved the use of individual glasses in 1944.<sup>21</sup>

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18 See Patrick Toner, “Communion under Both Kinds,” II. History of Disciplinary Variations, 2, in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 4 (Robert Appleton Company, 1908), <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04175a.htm> (accessed February 22, 2026).

19 “Holy Eucharist,” Orthodox Church in America, <https://www.oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/worship/the-sacraments/holy-eucharist> (accessed August 22, 2024).

20 In 1998 the US Center for Disease Control “reported that there had never been an outbreak of infection related to the communion cup and that a theoretical risk of transmitting infectious diseases by using a common communion cup exists, but that the risk is so small that it is undetectable.” See “COVID-19 and Holy Communion” *Public Health* 187 (2020): 134–35, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhe.2020.08.012>. A later study published in light of COVID-19 came to this same conclusion that “the common communion cup *may* serve as a potential vehicle for transmission. However, the risk is considerably lower compared to other conditions of social gathering. *Furthermore, the transmission of any infectious disease has never been documented*” (emphasis added); see Dimitrios Anyfantakis, “Holy Communion and Infection Transmission: A Literature Review,” *Cureus Journal of Medical Science*, June 21, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.8741>.

21 The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *1944 Convention Proceedings*, 254–55.

Prior use of individual pre-packaged elements for the Lord's Supper is even more recent, dating only to the closing years of the twentieth century.<sup>22</sup> The initial “market” was among Evangelical churches and other Protestants whose practice of the Lord's Supper involved having filled individual glasses (usually with grape juice) in a cup holder attached to the pew in front of the worshipers. Convenience was the initial rationale for the pre-packaged elements since the laborious process of filling each individual glass could be avoided.<sup>23</sup>

During the pandemic, many congregations, including some in the LCMS, adopted the use of pre-packaged elements as a way to have the Lord's Supper without any perceived danger of virus transmission from either bread or cup. Plus, the packets simplified distribution for churches that met in parking lots and enabled it also for churches that held online or “virtual worship” by having members use pre-packaged elements that had been delivered to their homes.<sup>24</sup>

Polarization of opinions was an unfortunate result of the various responses to COVID-19. Some condemned those who refused government restrictions and counsel. Others condemned those who followed the guidelines. The use of communion packets was yet another source of disagreement. The debates and, too often, rancor affected churches and circuits. Hence, the LCMS convention request to consider the practice of using pre-packaged elements in 2023 Res. 5-15. But we note that the same convention also urged “charity and latitude” among Synod pastors regarding the various approaches taken in response to the pandemic.

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22 According to the *Chicago Tribune*, prepackaged elements were first marketed in 1996. See “Communion in a Cup Has Its Converts, Naysayers,” April 19, 1996, updated August 18, 2021, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/1996/04/19/communion-in-a-cup-has-its-converts-naysayers/>.

23 Although popular, the communion package also had detractors even within Evangelicalism. “Communion in a Cup” notes that critics argued that the practice undermined the symbolism of the Lord's Supper.

24 The LCMS has, of course, strongly opposed virtual or online Communion. See 2023 *Convention Proceedings*, Res. 5-o8A, 152–53. The third “Resolved” reads: “That the Synod in convention clearly and unequivocally reject and condemn the practice of virtual (online) Communion.” See Appendix C for the full text of the resolution. See also the various CTCR opinions on this issue, available online at <http://resources.lcms.org/reading-study/ctcr-library-means-of-grace-sacraments-lutheran-doctrine-and-practice/>.

## Response

We noted above that the accounts of the Last Supper in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, as well as Paul's comments about the Sacrament in 1 Corinthians 10 and 11, certainly indicate something of how the Lord's Supper was administered first by Jesus and then in the New Testament church. In both the Passover meal when Jesus first instituted His Supper and in Paul's description of the Sacrament as he had received it, we hear of bread (*artos*) that is taken, blessed with thanksgiving,<sup>25</sup> broken, and then distributed for eating with the assurance that it is Christ's body. In like manner, a cup of wine is taken up to be blessed and declared to be His blood, and participants are invited to drink.

With regard to right practice, then, the Synod holds firmly to the confessional understanding that the validity of the Lord's Supper involves certain necessities: (1) right consecration—the use of the words of Jesus (Words of Institution) spoken over (2) the appropriate earthly elements of bread and wine, followed by (3) the distribution to the congregation for them to eat and drink (see, e.g., FC SD VII 79–82; FC SD VII 121; FC Ep VII 8–9; FC SD VII 75).

Given the various ways that bread and cup have been given and received by Christians, as described above, one must proceed with caution before passing judgment on practice. For example, there has been widespread acceptance in most of Christianity of the use of bread that is provided in individual portions rather than from a single loaf. Similarly, even churches that do not utilize individual glasses for the Sacrament often employ several chalices when communing a very large assembly. Synod congregations have used both a single loaf and, more commonly, individual hosts, leavened and unleavened bread—all without condemnation or question. And many if not most congregations offer individual cups with explicit Synod approval.

The LCMS has no resolutions or statements on the use of pre-packaged elements, and there is no incontrovertible scriptural basis for asserting that the use of individual packets of bread and wine would inherently invalidate the Sacrament of

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25 Matthew and Mark speak of Jesus "blessing" the bread (Matt. 26:26; Mark 14:22), while Luke and Paul describe Him giving "thanks" (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24).

the Altar. This does not mean that any and every practice is acceptable regarding pre-packaged elements, especially since the Synod has addressed the manner of distributing the cup in the Lord's Supper. We offer the following comments giving our considered opinion about their use:

**Consecration:** As is always the case in the Lord's Supper, the words of Christ must be spoken over the elements.

To be sure, the words can be spoken over pre-packaged elements.

However, the packets prevent a more explicit declaration. In a typical setting, the pastor can clearly indicate the bread and the cup (or cups) separately during the Words of Institution. He indicates the bread by touching or lifting it as he repeats our Lord's words: "Take, eat; this is My body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me." Then, he repeats Christ's words as he indicates the cup: "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."

In our judgment, the consecration of packets lends itself to a confusion that is not evident in typical consecration.

Also, the use of disposable plastic cups raises concerns about the proper and reverent treatment of the consecrated wine that remains after Communion.<sup>26</sup>

**Elements:** The LCMS affirms the biblical and confessional understanding that only bread and wine should be used in the Lord's Supper.

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26 In *Theology and Practice of the Lord's Supper*, page 17, the CTCR states: "The consecrated elements which remain after all have communed should be treated with reverence. This reverence has been expressed by Lutherans in various ways. Some have followed the ancient practice of burning the bread and pouring the wine upon the earth. Others have established a basin and drain—*piscina*—specifically for the disposal of the wine. The elders or altar guild may also return the consecrated bread and wine to specific containers for future sacramental use, or the elders and pastor can consume the remaining elements. All of these practices should be understood properly. The church is not, thereby, conferring upon the elements some abiding status apart from their use in the Lord's Supper itself." See also the reference to FC SD VII 14–15 on page 17.

## Proper Administration of the Lord's Supper

Communion packets are available for purchase from a number of sources. Some provide only a portion of unleavened bread with grape juice. A few offer both packets with grape juice and with wine and some also offer gluten-free bread in their packets.

Only packets that are filled with bread and wine are acceptable under any circumstances in LCMS congregations.

**Distribution:** The manner of distribution varies. As is the case in general, some congregations have communicants come to the altar, kneel, and then receive Communion. Others have individuals walk forward and receive the Sacrament while standing, and then return to their seats (continuous Communion). In exceptional cases members are communed in their seat. Regarding prefilled packets, variety also existed. Three approaches were observed in LCMS congregations during the pandemic. In some churches, packets were handed to each individual communicant by the pastor or an elder assisting him. In others, individuals helped themselves, taking the packet from a tray or basket as they approached the altar to commune. A third form of distribution was having individuals take a communion packet together with a service folder (bulletin) as they entered the church and then, during the service of the Sacrament, communing in their seat.

In general, the manner of reception is an adiaphoron.

However, we strongly discourage the practice of having individuals take communion elements for themselves into the service and then communing in their seats. This practice is problematic in two ways. First, it largely prevents any pastoral care regarding who is prepared for the Sacrament. Second, it raises confusion and doubt about the point of reference in the consecration when the pastor speaks of “this bread” and “drink this cup.” Should he say “That is My body” or “That cup is the new testament in My blood”?

Further, since “self-communing” in the pew is common in many Reformed churches and congregations, this may lead to confusion regarding crucial differences between Lutheran and Reformed theology and practice.

Given these concerns, while the Commission does not consider the use of pre-packaged elements to be inherently illegitimate, we find it troubling. The use

of pre-packaged elements invites confusion and can encourage bad practices. As noted above, such usage seems to invite some churches to adopt specific practices that undermine or prevent the practice of closed Communion and may also create questions about what has or has not been consecrated. Consequently, such a practice may under some circumstances create doubts that may cause communicants to be unsure that they are receiving Christ's body and blood and therefore to refrain from reception. For these reasons, we believe the Synod should discourage their future use.

This judgment does not in any way seek to condemn those pastors and congregations that, according to their best judgment during the confusion of the COVID-19 pandemic, made use of the packets. Nevertheless, we believe that the potential for confusion and bad practice outweighs any potential benefit. The great treasure that is Christ's Holy Supper should not be discounted in place of uncertain attempts to avoid disease. Moreover, if we emphasize worries about the potential for disease transmission, public worship itself would be viewed as a possible threat to physical well-being because of the constant presence of influenza, continuing outbreaks of COVID-19, and other contagions. Our deepest concern as Christians is not threats to the body, but threats to our soul. Jesus rightly admonishes us about the danger of living in fear of this world's threats and ignoring God (Matt. 10:28). A risk to the spiritual well-being of those who would be uncertain of the Sacrament should rank above the unlikelihood that Communion will endanger us physically.

# SUBSTITUTION OF NON-WHEAT BREAD FOR WHEAT BREAD

## **Biblical and Historical Background**

The question of the propriety of using bread made from grains other than wheat is largely a result of requests by individuals who suffer from celiac disease or another form of gluten intolerance. Although celiac disease was diagnosed as early as the second century AD, it was given little study or medical treatment until the 1800s.<sup>27</sup> Both celiac disease (CD) and non-celiac gluten intolerance (NCGS) have garnered increasing attention in recent years. The *World Journal of Gastroenterology* (WJG) says that “currently, 1% of the United States population holds a diagnosis for celiac disease (CD), however, a more recently recognized and possibly related condition, ‘non-celiac gluten sensitivity’ (NCGS) has been suggested to affect up to 6% of the United States public.”<sup>28</sup> In addition to those with such diagnoses, a significantly higher number of Americans—about 20% of the population—have chosen to adopt a gluten-free diet without either a CD or NCGS diagnosis.<sup>29</sup> This has led to concerns about the Sacrament, since wheat hosts or bread have been used almost exclusively for generations. By the late twentieth century non-gluten hosts were offered to churches as an alternative to wheat hosts for use in cases of CD or other gluten intolerance. Significant numbers of LCMS churches offer non-gluten hosts

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27 See “History of Celiac Disease,” Beyond Celiac, <https://www.beyondceliac.org/celiac-disease/celiac-history/> (accessed September 17, 2024). The death rate for untreated celiac children is about 30 percent. Because of high rates of child mortality, the fact that celiac victims tended to be children may have prevented scientific attention until more recent times.

28 Samuel O. Igbinedion et al., “Non-Celiac Gluten Sensitivity: All Wheat Attack Is Not Celiac,” *WJG* 23, no. 40 (2017): 7201–10, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29142467/>.

29 Igbinedion, et al.

to those who request them. Hence the question of their propriety has been raised in 2023 Res. 5-15.

Regarding the bread of the Lord's Supper, this is what we have been given in Scripture:

**Matthew 26:26** – “Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body.’”

**Mark 14:22** – “And as they were eating, He took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, ‘Take; this is My body.’”

**Luke 22:19** – “And He took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is My body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.’”

**1 Corinthians 11:23–24** – “For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when He was betrayed took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, ‘This is My body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.’”

In each of the passages, the text shows that Jesus took “bread” with a blessing or thanksgiving, and distributed it to the disciples with the words “This is My body.”

The concern the CTCR has here been asked to address is whether it is consistent with our Lord's “Do this” for congregations to use “non-wheat hosts” in the Lord's Supper. That is, since the Lord took “bread” as one of the elements of the Lord's Supper, is bread made from something other than wheat a valid earthly element? The Confessions simply describe Christ's instruction: “For Christ gives this command at the table and at supper. There is certainly no doubt that He speaks of real, natural bread and of natural wine. Also, He speaks of oral eating and drinking” (FC SD VII 48). Therefore, consistent with our response in the matter of substituting grape juice for wine, we should state at the outset that using something other than “natural bread” would not be in keeping with our Lord's words.

The Greek word translated as “bread” in the four passages cited is *artos*. For biblical studies, Greek lexicons (dictionaries) provide definitions by summarizing the

usage of a word in the ancient world during both the period of Classical Greek literature and later, more common (Koine) biblical and early church literature. The definitions for *artos* vary somewhat in the dictionaries but can be summarized: In Classical Greek when *artos* appears without a modifier it seems to have referred to wheat bread almost exclusively; however, the definition broadened to become the general term for all bread in the Koine period.<sup>30</sup>

The Bible knows different grains and breads. Wheat and wheat bread are most frequently mentioned (over fifty times), but barley and bread made from barley are also mentioned frequently (more than thirty times). As for other types of grain, the only certain reference of bread made from them is the passage in Ezekiel 4:9, where the Lord commands the prophet to make bread from a mixed flour containing wheat, barley, beans, lentil, millet, and emmer. The term “bread” (*lehem* in Hebrew, *artos* in Greek) is far more common than specific terms such as “wheat bread” or “barley bread.” It is used over two hundred times in the Old Testament and nearly one hundred times in the New Testament. “Bread” can mean a loaf, a cake, or a wafer—although when the wafer is unleavened bread in the Old Testament the term *matzah* rather than *lehem* is typical.

Bread is further used in ways that go beyond the literal. Since bread was the staple in the diet of the biblical world, the Bible also can use “bread” as shorthand for food or nourishment (e.g., Prov. 6:8; Lam. 1:11; Ezek. 18:16; Matt. 6:11; Luke 14:15; 15:17; 2 Thess. 3:12). Reference to bread being broken is connected with the blessing of the meal by the head of the household and the subsequent distribution of food. This is also, of course, the sense in the four Lord's Supper narratives. The combination of breaking and bread in Luke and Acts seems to indicate partaking of a meal in some cases (Luke 24:35; Acts 2:46; 20:11), but it may refer to the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7). Certainly “the bread that we break” in 1 Corinthians 10:16 refers to the Supper.

There is further usage of the term “bread” beyond any reference to normal grain bread. Note the connection with manna, “bread from heaven” (Ex. 16:4, 8; Psalm

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30 Several dictionaries can be consulted: Henry George Liddell et al., eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th rev. ed. (Oxford University Press, 1996); James Diggle et al., eds., *The Cambridge Greek Lexicon*, vol. 1 (Cambridge University Press, 2021); Johannes Behm, “*artos*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Eerdmans, 1964); Walter Bauer et al., eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (University of Chicago Press, 2000).

105:40; Neh. 9:15; John 6:31). And, of course, Christ refers to Himself as the true bread or bread of life (John 6:31–59).

The Bible knows more than one kind of bread, although wheat bread is mentioned more than other grains or bread. Jesus uses wheat in parables such as the Parable of the Weeds (Matt. 13:24–30) and of the Dishonest Manager (Luke 16:1–30). Bread made from the “finest wheat” seems to have been the preferred bread for the Old Testament. For example, “fine wheat flour” is used for the unleavened bread offered during the consecration of priests (Ex. 29:2; see also Deut. 32:14). Barley is also frequently mentioned in the Bible, but it evidently was a humbler grain or, at any rate, less costly than wheat (e.g., Rev. 6:6). Of note are the twenty barley loaves that Elisha used miraculously to feed one hundred men (2 Kings 4:42–44) and the five barley loaves from which our Lord fed five thousand men and their families (John 6:9–13).

The passages from Matthew, Mark, and Luke all describe the Last Supper in the upper room with Jesus and His disciples as the Passover. Thus the bread that Jesus used at that meal would almost certainly have been unleavened bread since Passover directly preceded the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Lev. 23:4–6). Given their proximity, Luke refers to Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread as one event (Luke 22:1). Houses were cleansed of leaven in preparation for Passover and the following Feast of Unleavened Bread (Ex. 12:15–20; Deut. 16:16).<sup>31</sup> The leavening to be cleansed would have included any leavened grain bread, such as barley as well as wheat.<sup>32</sup>

Given the direct connection between Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, it is of note that the word for bread in the first three Gospels is *artos*, the general term for bread, and not the specific Greek term for unleavened bread (*azymos*). Then, in Paul’s teaching about the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians 10 and 11, there is no mention of a Passover setting or of unleavened bread. In those chapters Paul, too, speaks only of bread generally (*artos*, not *azymos*) without further qualifica-

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31 See Francis X. E. Albert, “Azymes,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 2 (Robert Appleton Company, 1907), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02171a.htm>.

32 There is specific mention of barley in Rabbinic Judaism (Tosefta, *Pisha*, 3:8f.). Later Talmudic Judaism holds that *matzah* (unleavened bread) is to be made from one of the grains mentioned in the Torah (wheat, barley, spelt, rye, oats). See “Passover: Matzah,” Jewish Virtual Library, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/matzah>. Karaite Jews used only barley, believing it to be most suited to serve as the “bread of affliction” (Deut. 16:3) since it was the bread commonly eaten by the poor.

tion (1 Cor. 10:14–22; 11:20–34).<sup>33</sup> Although grain was certainly used for the bread of the Last Supper and in Corinth, no text explicitly describes the kind of grain used in either case.

The early church practice of the Lord's Supper was distinguished from the Jewish Passover, as was the case in Corinth. In the earliest Christian centuries, there is no evidence of controversy over the kind of bread—whether leavened or unleavened—that should be used in the Supper. It appears that ordinary leavened bread was used most widely throughout the early church. Over time, however, a division regarding leavening developed between the Eastern and Western branches of Christianity. Eventually unleavened bread was used almost exclusively among the Roman—or Western—Church and leavened bread was used in the East.<sup>34</sup> This became one of the factors leading to the Great Schism.<sup>35</sup>

In the thirteenth century Thomas Aquinas concluded that only unleavened wheat bread should be used in the Sacrament. Although he argues that only wheat bread should be used, he concedes that there are other practices in some places where cereal grains that resemble wheat were used in the Sacrament. He allows that some mixture of other grains with wheat may be acceptable for use in the Sacrament, as long as wheat predominates. He also mentions that some have thought wheat starch could be used in place of wheat flour. As for leavening, Thomas is more circumspect. Wheat is “necessary,” while unleavened bread is only “suitable” because it is in accord with the Roman rite, while leavened bread is suitable in the East according to their rite. Nevertheless, overall, unleavened bread is “more reasonable.”<sup>36</sup>

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33 Paul's only mention of Passover in 1 Corinthians is in chapter 5, where the subject is the incestuous sexual relationship of a man in Corinth. In arguing for the necessity that the man be disciplined by the church, Paul says: “Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (vv. 6–8).

34 Augustin Joseph Schulte, “Altar Breads,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 1 (Robert Appleton Company, 1907), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01349d.htm>.

35 For a brief discussion, see “East-West Schism,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/event/East-West-Schism-1054> (accessed September 19, 2024).

36 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 58, trans. William Barden (Blackfriars, 1965), 35–39 (Part 3, ques. 74, arts. 3, 4).

Thomas’s conclusion that unleavened wheat should be used in the Sacrament was endorsed by the Council of Florence in 1439 for use in the West, stating that “the body of Christ is truly confectioned in both unleavened and leavened wheat bread, and priests should confection the body of Christ in either, that is, each priest according to the custom of his western or eastern church.”<sup>37</sup> For Rome, this teaching remains unchanged. Trent reaffirmed it as did John Paul’s Instruction *Redemptionis Sacramentum* in 2004. Paragraph 49 is explicit:

The bread used in the celebration of the Most Holy Eucharistic Sacrifice must be unleavened, purely of wheat, and recently made so that there is no danger of decomposition. It follows therefore that bread made from another substance, even if it is grain, or if it is mixed with another substance different from wheat to such an extent that it would not commonly be considered wheat bread, does not constitute valid matter for confectioning the Sacrifice and the Eucharistic Sacrament. It is a grave abuse to introduce other substances, such as fruit or sugar or honey, into the bread for confectioning the Eucharist. Hosts should obviously be made by those who are not only distinguished by their integrity, but also skilled in making them and furnished with suitable tools.<sup>38</sup>

The same ruling was reiterated in 2017 by Cardinal Robert Sarah in a letter on behalf of Pope Francis. “Hosts that are completely gluten-free are invalid matter for the celebration of the Eucharist. Low-gluten hosts (partially gluten-free) are valid matter, provided they contain a sufficient amount of gluten to obtain the confection of bread without the addition of foreign materials and without the use of

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37 “Council of Basel-Ferrara-Florence, 1431–49 AD,” Session 6, July 6, 1439, Papal Encyclicals Online, <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils/ecum17.htm> (accessed February 19, 2026).

38 The Holy See, “Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacrament,” III 1, paragraph 48, [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccdds\\_doc\\_20040423\\_redemptionis-sacramentum\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20040423_redemptionis-sacramentum_en.html).

procedures that would alter the nature of bread.”<sup>39</sup> Here the judgment is not what may be more “suitable” or “reasonable.” An “invalid” sacrament is no sacrament. The use of low-gluten hosts made by authorized providers is suggested as the only acceptable alternative to gluten-free hosts.<sup>40</sup>

With the Reformation came a significant reconsideration of the nature of the Sacrament and also its elements. While the doctrine of the sacrifice of the mass was the central point of contention, Luther also addressed other matters, including the bread used in the Lord's Supper. In Luther's *Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of Images and Sacraments* he discusses sacramental bread in the context of his rejection of the view that has the validity of the Lord's Supper hanging on duplication of doing everything that Christ does. “But we are of the opinion that it is not necessary to do or refrain from doing all that Christ has done or refrained from doing.”<sup>41</sup> It is what Christ teaches—the Word alone—that matters.

Attempts to mimic Christ's actions exactly would lead to “utter foolishness,” says Luther, even to avoiding the Sacrament completely due to uncertainty about exactly what Christ did or did not do (or say) at the Last Supper. Sarcastically he writes: “Since we do not know and the text does not state whether red or white wine was used, whether wheat rolls or barley bread were used, we must by reason of doubt at this point refrain from observing the Last Supper, until we become certain about it, so that we do not make any external detail differ a hairsbreadth from what Christ's example sets forth.”<sup>42</sup> To the contrary, Luther concludes: “No one is to command or prohibit anything which he has neither commanded nor forbidden.”<sup>43</sup> The kind of bread and the color of wine are adiaphora.

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39 “Letter to Bishops on the Bread and Wine for the Eucharist,” Vatican Radio, July 8, 2017, [https://www.archivioradiovaticana.va/storico/2017/07/08/letter\\_to\\_bishops\\_on\\_the\\_bread\\_and\\_wine\\_for\\_the\\_eucharist/en-1323886](https://www.archivioradiovaticana.va/storico/2017/07/08/letter_to_bishops_on_the_bread_and_wine_for_the_eucharist/en-1323886).

40 Four providers of hosts are named by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), Committee on Divine Worship, “Celiac Disease, Alcohol Intolerance, and the Church's Pastoral Response,” updated April 20, 2016, <https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/the-mass/order-of-mass/liturgy-of-the-eucharist/celiac-disease-and-alcohol-intolerance>.

41 Martin Luther, *Against the Heavenly Prophets*, AE 40:131.

42 AE 40:132–33.

43 AE 40:133.

This general perspective with regard to the altar bread has been passed down in Lutheran theology. Martin Chemnitz notes former debates about the bread—“Whether it should be of wheat, whether leavened or unleavened”—but adds that “the church judged correctly that these things are free and not of necessity for the sacrament.”<sup>44</sup> In naming only wheat—“whether it should be of wheat”—before saying that “these things are free and not of necessity,” Chemnitz apparently holds simply that the kind of grain may not be restricted only to wheat at risk of binding something that has been kept free.

Generations later, C. F. W. Walther also addresses the matter of sacramental bread in his *Pastoral Theology*. In his discussion of “Valid administration of the Lord’s Supper” (emphasis original), Walther states:

Whether the *bread* is made with yeast or not; whether it is rye, wheat, corn, barley, or oat bread; and whether it has this or that shape is an adiaphoron, so long as it is a baked good [made] with grain flour and water.<sup>45</sup>

Interestingly, Walther puts rye before wheat in his list of grains. One can only speculate that this may be the case because of the strong preference for rye in German breads and baked goods.<sup>46</sup>

Walther’s perspective, that the kind of grain used to make the bread of the Supper is an indifferent thing, has continued to be endorsed by later LCMS theologians. Franz Pieper quotes directly from Walther’s theological opinion in his *Christian Dogmatics*.<sup>47</sup> John H. C. Fritz paraphrases Walther’s statement, listing the same grains in the same order.<sup>48</sup>

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44 Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, Part II, *Chemnitz’s Works*, trans. Fred Kramer (Concordia Publishing House, 1978), 540.

45 Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther, *American-Lutheran Pastoral Theology*, *Walther’s Works*, ed. David W. Loy, trans. Christian C. Tiews (Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 168.

46 “The History of German Bread: A Crusty Chronicle,” *German Culture*, <https://germanculture.com.ua/baking-recipes/history-of-german-bread/> (accessed June 20, 2023).

47 Franz Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 3 (Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 354.

48 John H. C. Fritz, *Pastoral Theology: A Handbook of Scriptural Principles Written Especially for Pastors of the Lutheran Church* (Concordia Publishing House, 1945).

In 1983 the CTCR continued in the same vein, but with one variation. In considering "The Elements" to be used in the Lord's Supper, the CTCR states:

The Greek word for bread in the New Testament texts, *artos*, is generic. It applies to bread in general. While Greek has a more restricted term, *azumos* [*azymos*], for unleavened bread, it is not found in any of the New Testament accounts of the Lord's Supper.

The fact that unleavened bread was used in the Passover and that the three evangelists set the time for the Lord's Supper "on the first day of [the Feast of] Unleavened Bread" would strongly suggest the use of unleavened bread in our Lord's original action (Matt. 26:17; cf. Mark 14:12 and Luke 22:7). Therefore we have reason to conclude that unleavened bread should also be used today. Since the Scriptures are silent on the source of the bread, it may be baked from the flour of wheat, rye, barley, or other grains. While the form of distribution should reflect reverence for the elements, there is no specific guidance on the size or shape of the wafer or portion.<sup>49</sup>

Note that the CTCR here also views the type of flour to be an indifferent thing, but concludes that "unleavened bread *should* also be used today" (emphasis added).<sup>50</sup>

The most recent statement from within LCMS circles on the bread to be used in Holy Communion comes from *Pastoral Theology* (1990), edited by Norbert Mueller and George Kraus. They also continue the position set forth in Walther, but provide a somewhat more substantial discussion of the type of bread that may be used in the Sacrament of the Altar. In so doing, they distinguish between what is "essential" for the Lord's Supper and what is "custom":

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49 CTCR, *The Theology and Practice of the Lord's Supper*, 15–16.

50 CTCR, *The Theology and Practice of the Lord's Supper*, 16.

In the Koine Greek, *artos* is the generic name given to bread of whatever kind—white, whole wheat, rye, barley, etc. It would seem, however, that the context of the institution of the Lord’s Supper indicates the use of unleavened wheat bread. It is not essential that the bread used in the celebration of the sacrament be unleavened, but it is a custom of long-standing in the Lutheran Church.<sup>51</sup>

To summarize, *artos* may refer to any kind of grain bread.

## Response

With regard to the substitution of non-wheat for wheat bread in the Sacrament, the Commission believes it is helpful to uphold some important distinctions. First, we would distinguish between practices that are required for a valid Communion and those that are condemned because they prevent a right and salutary sacramental service. Paul condemned the twisted practice of Corinth with its self-absorbed feasting and drunkenness, saying, “It is not the Lord’s supper that you eat” (1 Cor. 11:20). To correct this he delivered again what the Lord requires: that bread and wine be blessed and received according to the declaratory words of Christ: “This is My body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.” And, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me” (vv. 24–25). The Lord’s Supper is exactly what Christ promises—His true body and blood for the forgiveness of sins—so long as “bread and wine are taken, consecrated, distributed, received, eaten, drunk, and the Lord’s death is shown forth” (FC SD VII 84).

But what of the *kind* of bread that is employed? Does non-wheat bread invalidate the Sacrament? No. To make such a judgment is to go beyond what the Word of God makes necessary and to forbid what God does not forbid. Even if it could be proven that only unleavened wheat bread was used in the Sacrament by Jesus and

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<sup>51</sup> Norbert H. Mueller, George Kraus, eds., *Pastoral Theology* (Concordia Publishing House, 1990), 96. They go on to contrast “the generic bread” with “a specific ‘fruit of the vine’: wine,” 96–97.

the apostles, that would not be grounds to declare all other practice, such as the use of leavened bread or bread from other grains, to invalidate the Lord's Supper. Wheat bread has not been commanded. Unleavened bread has not been commanded. Breads from barley, rye, or other grains have not been forbidden. "No one is to command or prohibit anything which he [our Lord] has neither commanded nor forbidden."<sup>52</sup> The position of Luther and other fathers is correct. To hold otherwise introduces dissension and division into the church and risks a return to the kind of ritualistic understanding of the Sacrament as continues in the Roman Church today.

Validity is not the only question, however. We also hold that it is helpful to distinguish between what is customary and what is innovative. And while our culture tends to value innovation over custom, that is not the case throughout the church's history or, for that matter, in the Lutheran Church. In the midst of necessary changes, the Lutheran Reformation steadfastly held to countless traditions. Tradition is not ironclad, of course. For example, the church at some point went from the use of a loaf that required breaking to individual broken morsels to individually made hosts—at least in the Western Church. Yet these changes all came to be affirmed both explicitly and implicitly and were then handed on to further generations.

Emerging from within this kind of tradition, Lutherans were insistent that they would not forsake the doctrine of the church catholic and so were favorably disposed toward church traditions. So Lutherans retained the liturgy as it was handed down, making changes only where a practice contradicted the Word of God (AC XXIV 1–9; XXVI 40; see also Ap XXIV). Custom was valued highly for the sake of good order, but also critically so that none should suppose it merits forgiveness (Ap XV 1–7). In keeping with this the Commission strongly encourages churches to continue the custom of using unleavened wheat hosts in the Lord's Supper, although our pastors and churches should be reminded that this custom is for the sake of good order and does not mean that other practices—such as the use of leavened bread or bread made from other grains—make the Sacrament invalid. Since the use of unleavened wheat hosts has been the nearly uniform practice

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52 AE 40:133.

of LCMS congregations throughout recent history, to change this would result in needless confusion.

There remains the pastoral question of how the spiritual needs of Christians with celiac disease or gluten intolerance are to be addressed: What is the most appropriate pastoral care for individuals with a diagnosed medical consideration like CD that makes the reception of the bread in the Lord's Supper cause physical harm?<sup>53</sup>

There is something of a parallel here with the question of the potential danger to an alcoholic in receiving the wine of the Lord's Supper. We recall the counsel offered by the CTCR earlier in this document, together with the Synod's 1998 Res. 3-16B, which both acknowledge the need for pastoral discretion. Acceptable suggestions for pastoral care in the case of alcoholism included diluting the wine and intinction, but the Commission also acknowledged that in some cases there may be "no fully satisfactory answer" to the question of how best to respond to alcoholism.

While both alcoholism and CD are conditions plaguing individual Christians, they must be distinguished. Alcoholism is understood as "a disease characterized by compulsive decision-making, impulsive behavior and relapse" and thus a mental health disorder.<sup>54</sup> CD is a physical disorder, that is, an autoimmune disease in which gluten triggers an attack on the small intestines, potentially leading to many other serious physical conditions.

The danger of gluten is real for individuals with CD, although it was unknown prior to World War II, when wheat shortages resulted in vastly improved health outcomes for celiac patients. Over time the practice of following a gluten-free diet expanded beyond celiacs and also for those with non-celiac gluten sensitivity (NCGS), about 1 percent of all people, to include many people without CD or

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53 It is important to distinguish the challenge of CD from missiological questions—such as whether in Asian countries a rice host would be preferred over a wheat host.

54 "Is Alcoholism a Mental Illness?" Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation, October 9, 2019, <https://www.hazeldenbettyford.org/articles/why-is-alcoholism-classified-as-a-mental-illness#:~:text=Since%201956%2C%20the%20American%20Medical,making%2C%20impulsive%20behavior%20and%20relapse.>

NCGS.<sup>55</sup> The only known treatment is dietary—“a lifelong adherence to a strict gluten-free diet.”<sup>56</sup> Most gastroenterologists recommend that a CD patient consume less than 50 milligrams of gluten each day for adults and less for children to remain symptom free. However, as little as 10 milligrams of gluten causes intestinal abnormalities in some patients.<sup>57</sup>

The average communion wafer contains about 22 milligrams of gluten. As such, it may be consumed without triggering symptoms by most who suffer from CD or NCGS. The operative word is “may,” however, and many individuals do suffer problems from even such a small amount. What options can be considered for such individuals in light of no specific direction from Scripture?

Decisions regarding these alternatives should remain a matter of pastoral discretion in consultation with those who suffer. However, several options may be suggested for consideration by pastors and members with CD/NCGS. We list them in order of preference after due consideration by the Commission.

Perhaps the single best option is to use low-gluten wheat hosts. The North American Society for the Study of Celiac Disease found these hosts to be “safe for consumption by celiac disease patients.”<sup>58</sup>

A second option is to receive only a fragment of the normal host, which thereby reduces the amount of gluten consumed. This may present practical problems in distribution and reception, however.

A third option is to use non-wheat, gluten-free hosts made from rice flour or another grain. (Even though we are here recommending low-gluten hosts, an al-

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55 Jacqueline Howard, “Gluten-Free Diets: Where Do We Stand?” CNN Health, updated March 10, 2017, <https://www.cnn.com/2017/03/01/health/gluten-free-diet-history-explainer/index.html>.

56 “What Is Celiac Disease?” Celiac Disease Foundation, <https://celiac.org/about-celiac-disease/what-is-celiac-disease/> (accessed September 23, 2024).

57 Inna Spector Cohen et al., “Gluten in Celiac Disease—More or Less?” NIH National Library of Medicine, January 28, 2019, [https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6363368/#:~:text=studied%20the%20long%2Dterm%20effect,communion%20wafer\)%20prevented%20histological%20recovery.](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6363368/#:~:text=studied%20the%20long%2Dterm%20effect,communion%20wafer)%20prevented%20histological%20recovery.)

58 “NASSCD Confirms Use of Low-Gluten Host for Catholic Mass,” Celiac Disease Foundation, September 1, 2017, <https://celiac.org/2017/09/01/nasscd-statement-use-low-gluten-host-catholic-mass/#:~:text=Accordingly%2C%20considering%20the%20total%20weight,safe%20in%20various%20clinical%20studies.> This option has another potential benefit, namely, that such low-gluten wheat hosts could be used for the entire congregation and not only for people with CD/NCGS.

ternative recommended by the Roman Catholic Church, it is important to state forthrightly that we disagree with the Roman view that the use of bread made by another grain invalidates the Sacrament.) However, we emphasize that caution is necessary if the third option is employed. Gluten-free “bread” for Communion is offered now by many vendors, but in many cases it is made without grain flour. Other starches are used instead (e.g., potatoes, garbanzos, tapioca, palm fruit oil, cellulose, sunflower). The CTCR urges congregations that decide to use non-gluten bread to ensure that the alternative hosts are made from actual grain crops.

## CONCLUSION

2023 Res. 5-15 instructed the Commission “to take up these concerns.” To summarize the results of our study herein we

Strongly reaffirm the long-standing LCMS understanding that only wine, of whatever alcohol content, should be used in the consecration of the Lord's Supper;

Recommend against the use of prefilled wine and wafer sets in the Lord's Supper because of potential confusion and the potential encouragement of bad Communion practices; and

Suggest that the medical needs of celiac patients and others with gluten intolerance may best be met through the use of low-gluten wheat hosts, or if that is not possible, the use of hosts made from another grain crop.

# APPENDIX A

## RESOLUTION 3-16<sup>59</sup>

### Overture 3-52 (CW, p. 172)

WHEREAS, A number of congregations in the Synod have introduced grape juice for use in the Sacrament of the Altar; and

WHEREAS, The clear statements of our Confessions instruct us that “As the Words of Institution of Christ expressly state: while at the table during the Supper, he distributed natural bread and wine to his disciples” (FC SD VII 64); and

WHEREAS, The use of an element other than wine is an alien practice in the churches of the Augsburg Confession and brings about doubt whether the Sacrament is offered or not; and

WHEREAS, “Since Christ used and sanctified no other element for this Sacrament; since no place in Scripture which treats of the Lord’s Supper mentions even a single other element; since it befits the true disciples of Christ to abide by His ordinance and institution, John 8:31; since the promise of Christ concerning the sacramental reception of His body and blood is expressly dependent upon the bread and wine; and finally, since bread and wine are the essential elements of the holy Lord’s Supper, it follows that under no circumstances can or should one substitute elements, which might be comparable, in place of bread and wine” (Johann Gerhard, *A Comprehensive Explanation of Holy Baptism and the Lord’s Supper* [trans. Elmer M. Hohle; Repristination Press, 2000], 228–29); and

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59 2001 Convention Proceedings, 141–42.

## Proper Administration of the Lord's Supper

WHEREAS, Both theological faculties of the LCMS have offered opinions (*Gutachten*) (cf. *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 45:1/2 [Jan./Apr., 1981], 77–80; *Theological Observer* 17:1 [Jan. 1991], 4–6) supporting the use of wine, or reduced-alcohol wine, offering the clear teaching of the Evangelical Lutheran Church with regard to this matter from the Scriptures, the Confessions, and the teaching of the church; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has spoken in 1998 Res. 3-16B “To Affirm Use of Bread and Wine in the Sacrament of the Altar”; therefore be it

*Resolved*, That the congregations be encouraged to use only wine for the Sacrament; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the theological faculties of our seminaries be commissioned to offer guidelines to pastors and congregations in meeting the needs of those who feel they cannot drink wine; and be it finally

*Resolved*, That all action taken in this resolution shall be used to help carry out “The Great Commission” and shall not in any way detract or distract from the primary mission of God’s kingdom here on earth. We will remember 1-02!

**Action:** Adopted as amended (11)

(This resolution was first discussed during session 10. The fifth whereas as presented by the committee, *WHEREAS, Both theological faculties of the LCMS have offered opinions (Gutachten) to the contrary* (cf. “*Opinion of the Department of Systematic Theology: The Fruit of the Vine in the Sacrament of the Altar,*” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 45:1/2 [Jan./April., 1981], 77–80; *Department of Systematic Theology, Concordia Seminary, “Is ‘Non-Alcoholic Wine’ Really Wine?”* (*Theological Observer, Concordia Journal* 17:1 [Jan. 1991], 4–6), *offering the clear teaching of the Evangelical Lutheran Church with regard to this matter from the Scriptures, the Confessions, and the teachers of the church; and*, was amended by replacing it with the paragraph included in the adopted resolution. A substitute resolution, *To Encourage Use of Fruit of Vine in Lord’s Supper*, was considered by the delegates when this resolution was brought back by the committee in session 11: *WHEREAS, Any guidelines for celebrating the Lord’s Supper must originate in God’s Word; and WHEREAS, The Constitution of the Synod, Article II, refers to “The Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament as the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and of practice”; and WHEREAS, God’s Word says in Luke 22:17–18, “And taking the cup and giving thanks He said, “Take this and distribute it among yourselves. For I say to*

*you that I will certainly not drink from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes”*; and WHEREAS, God’s Word says in Mark 14:24–25, “*And He said to them, this is My blood of the covenant which is being poured out on behalf of many. Truly I say to you that I will certainly not any longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God*”; and WHEREAS, God’s Word says in Matthew 26:27–29, “*And taking a cup and giving thanks He gave to them saying, drink of it all of you, for this is My blood of the covenant being poured out for the many for forgiveness of sins. And I say to you that I will certainly not drink of the fruit of the vine until that day whenever I drink with you anew in the kingdom of My Father*”; and WHEREAS, the word wine (*oinos*) is used in the New Testament 33 times, but never in relation to the Lord’s Supper; and WHEREAS, God’s Word only uses “*the fruit of the vine*” in regards to the content of the cup; therefore be it Resolved, *That the congregations be encouraged to use only the fruit of the vine as one of the elements for the Sacrament.* The substitute motion was defeated and the original motion was adopted as amended in session 10 [yes: 814; no: 184]. The final resolve is added as required by Res. 1-02, adopted by the convention at an earlier session.)

## APPENDIX B

### Opinion of the Department of Systematic Theology<sup>60</sup>

#### The Fruit of the Vine in the Sacrament of the Altar

The classic definition of the Lord's Supper was given by Luther: "It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, for us Christians to eat and to drink, instituted by Christ Himself." Luther cites Matthew (26:26–29), Mark (14:22–25), Luke (22:15–20), and the Apostle Paul (1 Cor. 10:16; 11:23–29) as Scriptural proof for the institution, nature, and meaning of the Sacrament of the Altar.

In recent years some have raised the question whether grape juice might be substituted for wine in the Sacrament in view of the fact that the texts do not expressly state "wine," but "fruit of the vine" or "cup." The reasoning is that grape juice should be an allowable substitute for wine in sacramental use, since grape juice can rightly be termed "fruit of the vine."

The Scriptural texts leave no doubt that Christ was celebrating the Passover meal with His disciples. Among the foodstuffs on the table would have been unleavened bread and wine. As regards the latter, it was without question the fermented product of the grape vine, in view of the fact that this was the spring of the year, probably April. Moreover, wine was the customary drink of the Jews at solemn festival meals, the *peri haggaphen* (liturgical Hebrew for "fruit of the vine"). There can be no doubt then, as Lenski points out, that "*this* fruit of the vine"—with emphasis on the *this*—which the Passover cup contained "shuts out any and all other products of the vine save actual wine and thwarts all modern efforts that speak

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60 *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 45, nos. 1–2 (1981): 77–80.

of unfermented grape juice, raisin tea, or diluted grape syrup” (*Commentary on Matthew*, [p. 1007]). The point is that “fruit of the vine” is a technical term which in the stated contexts can have no other meaning than *wine*. The church has never, from that day forward, felt at liberty to alter the solemn testament given by Christ in conjunction with the bread and the wine of the Sacrament (cf. Matt. 28:20; Gal. 3:15). Whenever such altering or substitution was introduced, it was promptly repudiated, lest any doubt be cast upon the validity of the sacrament as Christ instituted it.

In an article dealing with the “Archaeology of the Sacraments” (CTM, X [1939], p. 328), P. E. Kretzmann avers: “There never was any doubt in the minds of the teachers of the Church as to the meaning of the expression [fruit of the vine]. For this reason they resented the use of any substitute for wine.” The consensus is virtually unbroken. The chief quibble seems to have been whether water was to be added to the wine. This Jewish custom was followed later in the Roman Church, on the grounds that this action symbolized the uniting of the people with Christ in the priest’s celebration of the Mass and on the fact that blood and water flowed from the side of the crucified Christ.

The Lutheran Confessions stand as a phalanx behind Luther’s simple and beautifully clear definition in the Small Catechism, “under . . . the wine.” There is not a single concession, nor any implication, that anything else was ever to be substituted or understood for “wine.” The Small and Large Catechisms enjoy the support on this point of the Augsburg Confession (Article X), the Apology of the Augsburg Confession (Article X), the Smalcald Articles (III, vi), and the brilliant exposition and defense of the Lord’s Supper in the Formula of Concord and its Epitome (Article VII). There is total concurrence that in the Lord’s Supper Christ “offers His disciples natural bread and natural wine” (FC VII 64). Countless other references in the Confessions attest the same fact.

Luther’s many writings on the Sacrament of the Altar also bespeak the same consistency of usage. There was no substitute for wine in the Sacrament. For Luther, of course, Christ’s precious gift of His true body and blood in the Sacrament was the pre-eminent thing, but never apart from the stated bread and wine. He advised those who had doubts or misgivings about receiving both kinds in the Sacrament to forego reception for the time being. That they could do without sinning (St. L.

22, 1862; 21a, 608). He noted, too, that the Sacramentarians, for all their wild notions concerning the meaning of the Sacrament, were at least agreed on one point, viz., that the bread was bread, and the wine, wine (St. L. 20, 1773). While he considered it an adiaphoron whether water was mixed with the wine, Luther's personal emphasis was on natural wine, without additional diluting or mixing with water (St. L. 19, 258). Luther noted that the Scriptures did not specify whether the wine should be red or white (though it was to be of or from the grape vine), nor whether the bread was to be of wheat or barley flour or another grain (St. L. 20, 188). These matters were adiaphora, as were also the quantity and shape of the host or bread, manner of distribution, and other externals or usages connected therewith.

Sometime during the winter of 1542–43 Luther was asked whether a sick person, wishing to have the Sacrament but unable because of nausea to use wine, could be given something else in place of the wine. According to Kaspar Heydenreich, who recorded the conversation, Luther replied (WA 74, TR 5, 5509; emphasis added):

The question has often been put to me; but I have always responded as follows: *Nothing else but wine should be used*. If wine cannot be taken, then let the matter rest that way, in order that nothing new is done or introduced. *Must* a person who is dying receive the sacrament yet? In times past it was said that he who received the one kind might consider himself to have partaken of both kinds. Why do we not rather say: If you receive nothing, consider yourself to have received both?

Clearly Luther rejected *any* idea of substitution for the *materia terrestris*. Hence the barbed *reductio ad absurdum* above, suggesting that then a person take or receive nothing and just simply believe that he has received something.

Luther's stance, as also that of the Confessions, is upheld by *all* Lutheran theologians. (Cf. Baier-Walther, *Compendium*, p. 498; N. Hunnius, *Epitome*, p. 208; F. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* 3, p. 354; T. Engelder, *Popular Symbolics*, p. 93; J. T. Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics*, p. 525; Ad. Hoenecke, *Dogmatik* 4, p. 115; E. Hove, *Christian Doctrine*, pp. 34of; et al.) Martin Chemnitz, the Lutheran Church's greatest theologian in the generation after Luther, wrote definitively of the Sacrament of the Altar

in his *Enchiridion*, in his famous *Examen Concilii Tridentini*, and in his beautiful *De Coena Sacra*. As with Luther there is no question in Chemnitz's mind as to the prescribed elements, bread and wine; Holy Scripture clearly teaches them.

Nor ought the question be raised for dispute in our day. Those who do so, that is, argue that "fruit of the vine" should also allow for the use of grape juice, processed or unprocessed, are clearly making this suggestion for other reasons than on Scriptural grounds. The idea of insinuating or substituting grape juice (or something else) for wine is of sectarian background, stemming specifically from religious bodies which pledge total abstinence from all liquids that have alcoholic content.

There is no ground for the notion that the use of wine in the Lord's Supper contributes to alcoholism or even threatens the so-called alcoholic. The sin of drunkenness, like adultery, homosexuality, etc., is clearly exposed in Scripture as serious (1 Cor. 6:10); but the source of the evil in each such case of sin is man's own depraved, evil heart. Even though some may argue on scientific grounds that certain individuals are naturally and constitutionally more inclined to alcoholism, for example, than others, this still would not remove the onus of sin. By virtue of his sinful nature man is prone to all manner of sin, but Scripture nowhere allows us to teach that man is, as it were, biologically programmed by God to *be* so and so. This would virtually remove from man the responsibility for his sin and place it on God, something totally repugnant to Scriptural teaching. We may be sure that Christ, who knew perfectly what was in man (John 2:25), would not have instituted anything, including the Lord's Supper and the use of wine, if it in *any* way would contribute to man's delinquency. The Apostle Paul's pastoral practice also underscores this fact (1 Cor. 11). The wine in the Lord's Supper threatens no sinner who comes in repentance and faith, but consoles and lifts him up with the precious gift of the blood of Christ for the forgiveness of sins and gives him strength for godly living. This is the only teaching Scripture supports.

Those who simply "prefer" to receive grape juice instead of wine should be led to see that their "preference" is in violation of Scripture's own clear teaching and that they are thereby making the Sacrament an uncertain matter, if in fact not invalid. Moreover, it is to be feared that such tampering with the Sacrament may in the final analysis involve a deeper error, the relegating of the Lord's Supper to a mere memorial meal instead of the blessed means of grace that Christ has constituted it

## Proper Administration of the Lord's Supper

to be for our spiritual well-being, for the forgiveness of sins.

Any substitution for the Scripturally stated elements is especially offensive because it yields to the intrusion of Reformed theology and practice into the Lutheran Church. It is to be expected that those who hold the Lord's Supper to be a symbolical eating and drinking will have little difficulty substituting other elements for the bread and wine. This has been true in some Reformed circles. Needless to say, the *strength*, or alcoholic *content* of the wine, is not the issue, as long as natural grape wine is used. This, therefore, rules out some bizarre concoctions, or mixtures, which are sometimes sold as wine, such as grape juice mixed with alcoholic spirits distilled from grain.

We strongly urge, therefore, lest confusion be multiplied, offense be given, consciences and peace within the church be disturbed, that Lutheran pastors and people continue a consistent practice in support of the Scripturally designated elements in Holy Communion, especially as regards the use of wine, "the fruit of the vine," which Christ instituted when He gave to His church this new testament in His blood.

# APPENDIX C

## To Affirm In-Person Communion

### RESOLUTION 5-08A<sup>61</sup>

#### **Overtures 5-11-20 (CW, 293–300)**

WHEREAS, In the wake of the pandemic, congregations throughout the Synod sought to provide spiritual care to their congregations when public health measures prohibited gathering for corporate worship services; and

WHEREAS, The Lord Jesus, with words and actions spoken and carried out by Him in the direct and physical presence of His disciples, instituted Holy Communion as a communal meal through which His body and blood are distributed under the bread and wine for the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation (Matt. 26:26–28); and

WHEREAS, In speaking of the Lord’s Supper, Holy Scripture does not endorse a spiritual or virtual fellowship, but rather a physical, communal gathering as the apostle Paul describes when he writes to the church in Corinth, “So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another—if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that when you come together it will not be for your judgment” (1 Cor. 11:33–34a); and

WHEREAS, The Epistle to the Hebrews states, “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Heb. 10:24–25); and

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61 2023 Convention Proceedings, 152–53.

WHEREAS, The Augsburg Confession describes the administration of the Lord's Supper in the context of a physically gathered assembly (Augsburg Confession [AC] VII 1; XXIV 36–39); and

WHEREAS, The Commission on Theology and Church Relations and the systematic theology departments of both seminaries issued opinions that unequivocally and unanimously argued against the practice of online or virtual Communion and affirmed the administration of Holy Communion in person by the pastor; and

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Confessions (Formula of Concord [FC] Solid Declaration [SD] VII) indicate that the proper use of the Sacrament includes a unified consecration, distribution, and reception, none of which are to be severed from the other:

However, this blessing, or the recitation of the words of Christ's institution alone, does not make a Sacrament if the entire action of the Lord's Supper, as it was instituted by Christ, is not kept. (For example, it is not kept when the consecrated bread is not distributed, received, and partaken of, but is enclosed, sacrificed, or carried about.) Christ's command "This do" must be observed unseparated and inviolate. (This embraces the entire action or administration in this Sacrament. In an assembly of Christians, bread and wine are taken, consecrated, distributed, received, eaten, drunk, and the Lord's death is shown forth at the same time.) St. Paul also places before our eyes this entire action of the breaking of bread or of distribution and reception (1 Cor. 10:16).

yet the practice of online or virtual Communion would interject a spatial, temporal, and technological gap between the consecration and the distribution and reception; and

WHEREAS, The pastoral office is responsible for oversight of the administration of the Sacrament in accordance with the keys conferred upon the pastor by virtue of his call (AC XIV; *Walther's Theses on the Ministry V and VII*); and

WHEREAS, The Sacrament of the Altar has been established by our Lord according to His Words of Institution, commanding literally “This keep on doing” (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24–25), which indicates that this use of the Sacrament should be kept according to His institution, and that “nothing is a sacrament without the appointed use” as set forth by those same Words of Institution (FC SD VII 73) and these texts (and all related) require serious study by the church; and

WHEREAS, No theological justification for the novel practice of online or virtual Communion has existed within the Synod or in the Lutheran tradition nor has been advanced in the circles advocating for it on the basis of the principally relevant texts (*sedes doctrinae*) of Holy Scripture or of the Lutheran Confessions; and

WHEREAS, The Synod has historically recognized the need for collegial debate, collaborative decision-making, and consensus-building, enshrining “[t]he example of the apostolic church (Acts 15:1–31)” in the Preamble of its Constitution and by adopting a process whereby those principles may be observed with respect to the adoption of doctrinal statements in Bylaw 1.6.2 (b); and

WHEREAS, The practice of online Communion has created confusion and concern whether such observance of Holy Communion is pleasing to God and in accordance with His Word; and

WHEREAS, The uniformity in practice from the foundation of the Synod has long been considered desirable (1847 Constitution Articles I 3, II 4, IV 5, V 14) and remains an endeavor toward which congregations are encouraged to strive (Const. Art. II 7); therefore be it

*Resolved*, That we commend the desires of faithful pastors to care for their flocks in a time of pandemic, granting charity and latitude to our brothers in the office due to the emergency nature of the situation confronting us all; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the Synod’s district presidents and those who assist them be counseled and urged to instruct our pastors and congregations on the basis of Holy Scripture’s exhortation to gather in person to celebrate the Lord’s Supper and on the basis of the examples of the Augsburg Confession Articles VII and XXIV, to refrain from the practice of online Communion, ensuring that those pastors and

## Proper Administration of the Lord's Supper

congregations who continue to practice online Communion after due fraternal admonition be subject to appropriate ecclesiastical supervision; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the Synod in convention clearly and unequivocally reject and condemn the practice of virtual (online) Communion; and be it finally

*Resolved*, That those who are hindered for a time from bodily participation in Holy Communion be encouraged to content themselves with the power of the Word, remembrance of their Baptism, and the exercise of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Action:** Adopted (8)

It was moved but failed to strike the final resolve. Upon closure of debate, as suggested by the chair, the resolution was adopted [Yes: 842; No: 140]. Pacific Southwest District President Michael Gibson addressed the convention, requesting patience for district presidents as they continue to work with perhaps a dozen churches remaining in the practice of online communion.

At its 2023 convention, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod adopted Resolution 5-15, “To Uphold Proper Elements and Reverential Administration of the Lord’s Supper,” addressing concerns about the practice of the Lord’s Supper. This report by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations seeks to address the three specific “concerns” about the practice of the Lord’s Supper identified therein: first, the substitution of grape juice for wine; second, the use of prefilled communion cup and wafer sets; and third, the substitution of non-wheat for wheat hosts.

In this report, the CTCR addresses each of these practices from a confessional Lutheran theological and pastoral perspective so that our practice would fully align with our confession of the Lord’s Supper as instituted by our Lord Jesus. It searches the Scriptures and traces the practices of the church through the ages, taking heed of Martin Luther’s words: “No one is to command or prohibit anything which [Christ] has neither commanded nor forbidden” (AE 40:133).



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