

Summary of “One little *word* can fell him”

Ten reasons to question whether “online Communion” is “truly good, right and salutary”

THE CTCR DOCUMENT, “Communion and Covid-19” (CC19), offers an opinion on Holy Communion practices during the coronavirus pandemic. Reactions have been both positive and negative. An anonymous reaction, “Communion in Homes During Times of Crisis: Scriptural and Confessional Principles” (CIH), has circulated within the Synod. CIH offers three reasons supporting the practice of online family Communion: (1) The validity of the Lord’s Supper is not based on our location, but wherever Christ promises to be present; (2) It is appropriate for both pastor and people to speak the Words of Institution Holy Communion since the gifts of Christ are given to the whole Church; (3) The certainty of the Lord’s Supper is not found in mere recitation of Christ’s words or in the location where the words are spoken, but *in Christ and Christ’s Word alone*. The authors of CIH wish to engage in “fraternal discussion.” In that same spirit, we are offering 10 reasons in the accompanying opinion to support the conclusion of CC19, that LCMS churches should refrain from online home Communion. This summary identifies points of agreement and apparent disagreement on the practice of online home Communion. The full document gives the rationale for the CTCR’s concerns.

1. God’s *Word* alone gives us everything we need for faith, life and salvation.

- We are agreed that the Lord’s Supper is Christ’s body and blood and conveys forgiveness of sins together with life and salvation, and that the Word of Christ alone ensures the Sacrament’s validity, not the particular time or place where it is offered.
- We disagree with certain conclusions drawn from this valid assertion by the author(s) of CIH (see 2–10 below).

2. It is the *Lord’s* Supper, not our supper.

- We are agreed that the Lord’s Supper is given by our Lord Jesus Christ and that we “do this” according to His command and promise.

- The question that divides us is whether online family Communion is a right *use* of the Sacrament according to Christ’s institution, and (therefore) whether it can be done with certainty and full assurance of our Lord’s own approval and blessing.

3. Holy *Communion* is to be celebrated in *community* with God’s gathered people.

- We agree that the gifts offered in and through Christ’s body and blood are intended for all members of His church and that Holy Communion is not bound to any set time or place.
- The matter that divides us is the significance of the New Testament’s portrayal of the Sacrament as a gathering of the church community, not a family group, and (therefore) whether it is a proper and acceptable practice for individuals and/or families to observe Holy Communion by means of a streaming video (as CIH advocates and encourages) rather than in a congregational (communal and churchly) setting.

4. Emergency Baptism? Yes. Emergency Communion? No.

- We are agreed that Baptism is to be administered even in an emergency, whether or not a pastor is present to baptize the person in need.
- We are divided over the question of whether the kind of situation we are facing in this epidemic means that the Lord’s Supper can and should be offered as an “emergency sacrament” by means of the unprecedented practice of online family Communion.

5. Responsible pastoral care is *essential* for the proper scriptural and confessional administration of the *Lord’s* Supper.

- We agree that responsible pastoral care is necessary for right use of the Lord’s Supper.
- We disagree whether such oversight is actually and/or fully possible in the varied circumstances that inevitably exist in online family Communion, many of which would almost certainly be unknown to the pastor. We ask: How can one oversee what one cannot see?

6. “I Want It All and I Want It Now”: Discerning the influence of culture on our theology and practice

- We think that all would agree that American culture can influence theology and practice both positively and negatively, and that Americans often assume that — if at all possible — their desires and perceived needs should be met according to their own timing.
- The CTCR is concerned with the possibility that our God-pleasing *desire* for the Sacrament can become a less-than-God-pleasing *demand* for it, which may stem from or result in an unwillingness to bear a temporary cross of deprivation and self-denial (as Israel suffered during its exile from the temple and previous generations suffered when they could not receive the Sacrament — in some cases, for an extended period of time).

7. “Online Communion” has questionable roots.

- We are agreed that creative and innovative methods of delivering God’s Gospel gifts (when in conformity with God’s Word and will) can be and often are good, right and salutary.
- We disagree on the question of whether this particular practice is an appropriate and beneficial innovation and are concerned that it is more informed by the theology and practice of evangelicalism (where the practice first originated) than by Lutheran theology and practice.

8. Novel practices often establish dangerous precedents.

- We agree that exceptional practices should not become the rule, as evidenced by the fact that many practitioners of online family Communion have indicated that this is an “emergency” measure and should be discontinued after the Covid crisis is over.
- The CTCR is concerned that since “online family Communion” has been endorsed as an appropriate Communion practice now, it may be accepted and employed in the future (even in non-emergency situations) as an alternate method of Communion — especially since many of the reasons given to justify it pertain to more than just “emergency” situations.

9. Walking Together: Does it even matter anymore?

- We acknowledge that the Synod has not addressed this matter in a doctrinal resolution in convention and that the CTCR opinion on online communion (CC19) is not binding in any formal or official sense.
- We disagree on the necessity or importance of seeking consensus as a Synod before introducing and engaging in a novel and potentially divisive practice such as this.

10. A final word: The *purpose* of this precious Sacrament is to create *faith*, not raise *doubts*.

- We are agreed that the Lord’s Supper is given to strengthen faith.
- We disagree whether the unprecedented and extraordinary practice of online family Communion can be done with certainty and (therefore) whether it serves the primary purpose for which Christ instituted His Supper: to strengthen faith, not create doubt.