

Friday's Festive Service of the Word

Our Lord Jesus Christ instituted the Sacrament of the Altar to be celebrated in a worthy manner, which includes examining oneself and discerning the body (1 Corinthians 11:27–29). As unworthy eating and drinking of the Lord's Supper leads to guilt and lack of discernment to judgement, it is the responsibility of pastors to practise spiritual oversight over the flock entrusted to them in order to guide the sheep of Christ to receive the Sacrament in a beneficial way in faith, love and forgiveness (Matt. 5:23; 1 John 2:9–11; 4:11; Gal. 5:6; Col. 3:13 etc.).

Breaking the sacramental bread together also presupposes unity in the apostles' teaching and fellowship (Acts 2:42). Communing together is an outward expression that such unity exists. It is the responsibility of pastors to ensure that all who ask to receive the Sacrament share the same confession of what the Word of God teaches. Communion fellowship exists between altars, not just between individuals. This is expressed in the Lutheran Confessions.

The larger the Corpus Christi Conference has become, the more difficult it has been to practise real pastoral oversight over communicants. The more international the Conference has become, the more challenging it has been to navigate wisely within the complex web of fellowship agreements between the church bodies that we come from. It is a fact that our churches have no uniform practice of admission to Holy Communion, and that we come from churches that are not always in full fellowship with each other. To some attendees, the Biblical Lutheran concept that admission to the Lord's Supper presupposes unity in doctrine is foreign. To others, the practice of communing together without a publicly declared fellowship between our church bodies goes against their consciences.

Although we pray that our Lord continues to use Corpus Christi to strengthen unity among Lutherans, it is not in our power to change these realities at the Conference. Together with our Lord Jesus, we continue to pray that we may all be one also in this most visible way (John 17:21). Furthermore it is our intention to foster such unity by inviting speakers and preachers who teach that doctrine, solely based on Holy Scripture, which unites the Lutheran Church with the one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church throughout the ages.

We also ask you to take note of the International Lutheran Council Bylaws printed in the Conference Handbook which reflect our Biblical Lutheran understanding (especially Bylaws II.1.D.2).

In the months leading up to this year's conference, the Board of Corpus Christi discussed the issue at hand and asked a Pastoral Committee to make a decision for the conference this year. The committee consisted of the Chairman of the Association, Rev. Dr. Samuli Siikavirta, the Chaplain of the conference, Rev. Tapani Simojoki, the two pastors from the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany (SELK) who originally had been asked to administer the Lord's Supper at the closing service, Rev. Prof. Dr. Armin Wenz and Rev. Felix Hammer, as well as Board Member and SELK pastor, Rev. Dr. Michael Wenz.

For the aforementioned biblically-grounded theological reasons, the Pastoral Committee decided that instead of celebrating a Divine Service with the Lord's Supper on Friday, we will celebrate a festive Service of the Word. Those staying behind in Germany for the Sunday are encouraged to attend a SELK service where the local pastor will be responsible for admission to the Lord's Table according to SELK statutes. And even when we go home and commune at our respective congregations faithful to Christ's institution, we already participate in the same body and blood of our Lord (1 Corinthians 10:16) – even if it takes place at different altars.

Should you have any concerns or questions about this decision, do not hesitate to contact the Board of the Association, the Chairman or the Chaplain during or after the Conference.