

SACRAMENTS IN A TIME OF EMERGENCY

The following pastoral letter and rubric come from our South Dakota Synod Bishop Constanze Hagmaeir. We forward to you the part that is instructional for receiving Holy Communion in our homes.

In this time of national emergency related to the COVID-19 virus we as the people of God are finding ourselves in situations we never imagined. One such situation is the question of how we can receive the sacraments when we are not holding or attending regular worship services.

As Lutherans, we understand that in a time of emergency all baptized Christians are authorized to administer the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. When we do that, we follow the Words of Institution as Christ gave them to us and the same Words of promise we hear in a regular service of Baptism. ... This means that during this time of emergency, you may in good conscience deliver these Words of promise in your home and know that it is a valid delivering of Christ's promise of forgiveness, life, and salvation - just as you would hear in a regular church service.

I want to reinforce that these measures are only in place for as long as we are in this state of emergency. Once we are holding regular worship services we will follow good church order and understand that while you are all called as baptized Christians to deliver Christ's promise in emergency situations, this is not a role you can assume in your congregation outside of such times. Regular congregational duties are rightly administered by those called to a public ministry office.

... This is not a time for fear, but rather for proclaiming and delivering Christ's promise of forgiveness and freedom into the ears of all who need to hear it; trusting in the power of that promise to deliver us all from doubt and death itself.

Instruction for administering the sacraments:

In times such as these, when you cannot gather as a congregation, you may in good conscience administer the sacrament in your home with your family. As Christ promised, where two or three are gathered in his name Christ is among us. (Matthew 18:20)

Brief Order for the Lord's Supper (in our homes)

Leader: The Lord be with you.

All: And also with you.

Leader: In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread and gave thanks; broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take and eat, this is my body, given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me. Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me.

Recite the Lord's Prayer together.

Distribute the bread and wine to one another with the words:

Leader: The Body of Christ given for you.
 The Blood of Christ shed for you.

Bless one another with these words:

All: May the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen you and keep you in faith. Amen.

The Sacrament of the Altar Martin Luther's Small Catechism

What is the Sacrament of the Altar?

It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ himself for us Christians to eat and drink.

What is the benefit of such eating and drinking?

The words "given for you" and "shed for you for the forgiveness of sin" show us that forgiveness of sin, life and salvation are given to us in the sacrament through these words, because where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.

How can bodily eating and drinking do such a great thing?

Eating and drinking certainly do not do it, but rather the words that are recorded: "given for you" and "shed for you for the forgiveness of sin." These words, when accompanied by the physical eating and drinking, are the essential thing in the sacrament, and whoever believes these very words has what they declare and state, namely, "forgiveness of sin."

Who, then, receives this sacrament worthily?

Fasting and bodily preparation are in fact a fine external discipline, but a person who has faith in these words, "given for you" and "shed for you for the forgiveness of sin," is really worthy and well prepared. However, a person who does not believe these words or doubts them is unworthy and unprepared, because the words "for you" require truly believing hearts.