

# The *Early Communion* Handbook



St. Paul's

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LUTHERAN CHURCH

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

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# The Rite of Early Communion Prior to Confirmation

## General Notes

1. This rite is intended to be used to admit to the Lord's Supper baptized children who have not yet been confirmed. Candidates for admission to the Lord's Supper have learned the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer. They have received careful instruction in the Gospel and Sacraments. Confessing their sin and trusting in their savior, they desire to receive the Lord's Supper for the forgiveness of sins and the strengthening of their faith in Christ and their love toward others.
2. Concerning the worthy reception of the Lord's Supper, the Small Catechism teaches: "That person is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words: 'Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.' But anyone who does not believe these words or doubts them is unworthy and unprepared, for the words 'for you' require all hearts to believe."
3. Baptized Christians are admitted to the Sacrament when they have been examined and absolved by their pastor in accordance with the practice outlined in the Augsburg Confession (Article XXV).

—from *Lutheran Service Book: Agenda*

## Address to the Congregation

- P** Beloved in the Lord, in Holy Baptism these young people were born again as God's children and received into His Church. As a further gift of His love for us, our Lord Jesus Christ has given His Church the Sacrament of the Altar and invites His children to receive this Sacrament in faith for the forgiveness of their sins. The apostle Paul reminds us, "Let a person examine himself and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup," [1 Cor 11:28] and "as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes." [1 Cor 11:26] These candidates have received instruction and have been examined by the pastor regarding their sin and their understanding of the Sacrament of the Altar.

## Address to the Candidates

- P** You are about to be admitted to the Lord's Table. Holy Scripture describes the life of the Church and every baptized Christian with these words: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." [Acts 2:42] You are invited by our Lord to come regularly to hear His Word and receive His Sacrament. You will continue to be instructed and nurtured in the Christian faith and life. You are invited to confess your sins and receive the comfort of Holy Absolution. All this will help you live as the child of God you have been made through Holy Baptism.

In testimony of this faith and confession, I now ask you:

### **Profession of Faith**

- P** Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty, in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord, and in the Holy Spirit?
- R** *Yes, I believe.*
- P** Do you believe that Jesus Christ, true God and true man, is your Lord?
- R** *Yes, I believe.*
- P** Do you believe that you are a sinner?
- R** *Yes, I believe.*
- P** Do you believe that Jesus Christ died for you and shed His blood for you on the cross for the forgiveness of all your sins?
- R** *Yes, I believe.*
- P** Do you believe that in the Lord's Supper He gives you His true body and blood for the forgiveness of all your sins and to strengthen your faith in Him and your love toward others?
- R** *Yes, I believe.*
- P** Do you intend to continue to hear and receive the instruction of your Lord, confess your sins, and receive the Lord's Supper faithfully throughout your life?
- R** *Yes, with the help of God.*
- P** I therefore invite you to the Lord's Supper to receive Christ's precious body and blood for the forgiveness of all your sins, in the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.
- C** **Amen.**

—from the liturgy for First Communion in *Lutheran Service Book*

## **The Early Communion Process at St. Paul's**

The “formal” process for early communion at St. Paul's begins, typically, in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, though any child in grades 5-7 may participate in early communion once the requirements are met. One of the pastors teaches a class in the fall with both parents and children in attendance. The process is explained, some basic instruction takes place toward foundational knowledge, and the continuing process is placed in the parents' hands. (See “Early Communion Requirements” for more details.)

### **“Catechumen” and “Catechesis”**

In this document and other communications you will see and hear the word “catechumen” and “catechesis.” *Catechesis* is a New Testament word for a way of teaching. We typically understand a student to be someone who is learning required material. A *catechumen* is certainly a student, but he is more. A *catechumen* is one who is in the process of *having The Faith embedded in one's soul*. The “goal of catechesis is the creation and sustaining of faith in Christ, and how that faith expresses itself in the Christian life,” writes Rev. Peter Bender, and “Christians are disciples of Jesus—catechumens—for life, not just for a few years of confirmation instruction.” (*Lutheran Catechesis*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. xi)

## Early Communion and the Road to Confirmation

Early Communion leads to Confirmation, and Confirmation is a process of discipleship. It is studying and applying the Word of Christ by which and into which the catechumen is baptized. "Confirmation Day" is the very special day when you publicly announce that the faith into which you were baptized is the same faith to which you are committing your life. (At St. Paul's this is typically done in the spring of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade year.) On your confirmation day you commit yourself to a life of Christian discipleship. The purpose of Confirmation is to prepare you for this commitment and life, that you may take up adult membership in the church.

## Learning and Living the Sacramental Life

Early Communion (a.k.a., "First Communion") admits to the Lord's Supper, baptized children who have not yet been confirmed. Those who participate in Early Communion before Confirmation will have much of the assigned memory work for Confirmation already done. More importantly, Early Communion permits the catechumen to internalize the rhythms of the sacramental life at an earlier age. For most of the church's history people received their first communion as children. Indeed, most early Lutherans memorized their catechisms and were confirmed before age 10. Certainly, *early communion is not required*. Those who wish to delay the reception of Holy Communion until Confirmation are welcome to do so. That is a prayerful decision between the parents, the child, and the pastoral staff. That said, it is *never* too early to begin preparing to receive The Lord's Supper!

## Faith is taught in the Home

The Faith is taught at home, in communion with the Church. During the course of the year students are asked to complete various assignments that require conversation at home. Also, **parents/guardians are expected to assist their child(ren) with memory work**. Along the way, parents/guardians are be asked to confirm that their child has memorized the assigned texts.

### Early Communion Requirements

1. Worship
  - a. At least 75% weekend service attendance
  - b. Turn in sermon notes to pastor
  - c. Use *Congregation at Prayer* in the home.
2. First Communion Class
  - Attend & Prepare for Class
    - May 13, 20, 2018 @ 9:15a.m.
3. Foundational Knowledge (Memory)
  - Memorize the *Early Communion Learn-by-Heart Texts* (pg. 5-8)
4. Applied Knowledge
  - a. Once parents have helped the catechumen memorize the Foundational Knowledge components they should call the office to set up an appointment with Pastor O'Donnell in order to:
    - i. Verify foundational knowledge component;
    - ii. Discuss in greater depth our understanding of The Lord's Supper
    - iii. Schedule a date for First Communion

**First communion will be scheduled once Foundational and Applied Knowledge components are met and verified by the Pastor. This can**

**happen as soon as, or as late as, the parents and catechumen desire. It is *not* simply a matter of attending the class.**

- b. An appointment or phone call with the Pastor may be scheduled any time if either the parents or catechumen have questions.
5. Service in Church (***optional, but highly encouraged***)
  - a. Catechumens (once they are trained) are encouraged to serve as acolytes for worship according to a regular schedule.
  - b. An acolyte training class will be scheduled for fall 2018 and published on the website, *Epistle*, and weekly bulletin.
  - c. The church secretary will publish a master schedule online. Each family will also receive contact information for other families. ***If you are unable to serve you are responsible for communicating with the office and finding a replacement.***

#### **Early Communion *Learn-by-Heart* Texts**

### **Books of the Bible in order (Old & New Testaments)**

#### **OLD TESTAMENT**

##### ***Books of Moses***

Genesis  
Exodus  
Leviticus  
Numbers  
Deuteronomy

##### ***Books of History***

Joshua  
Judges  
Ruth  
1-2 Samuel  
1-2 Kings  
1-2 Chronicles  
Ezra  
Nehemiah  
Esther

##### ***Books of Wisdom and Poetry***

Job  
Psalms  
Proverbs  
Ecclesiastes

Song of Solomon

##### ***Major Prophets***

Isaiah  
Jeremiah  
Lamentations  
Ezekiel  
Daniel

##### ***Minor Prophets***

Hosea  
Joel  
Amos  
Obadiah  
Jonah  
Micah  
Nahum  
Habakkuk  
Zephaniah  
Haggai  
Zechariah  
Malachi

#### **NEW TESTAMENT**

##### ***Gospels***

Matthew  
Mark  
Luke

John

##### ***History***

Acts

##### ***Pauline Epistles***

Romans  
1-2 Corinthians  
Galatians  
Ephesians  
Philippians  
Colossians  
1-2 Thessalonians  
1-2 Timothy  
Titus  
Philemon

##### ***General Epistles***

Hebrews  
James  
1-2 Peter  
1-3 John  
Jude

##### ***Prophecy/ Apocalypse***

Revelation

## **10 Commandments (by number)**

1. You shall have no other gods.
2. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.
3. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.
4. Honor your father and your mother.
5. You shall not murder.
6. You shall not commit adultery.
7. You shall not steal.
8. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.
9. You shall not covet your neighbor's house.
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

Conclusion: He says: "I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love Me and keep My commandments."(Ex. 20:3,7,8,12-17)

## **Apostles' Creed (by article)**

### *The First Article*

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,  
Maker of heaven and earth.

### *The Second Article*

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died and was buried.  
He descended into hell.  
The third day He rose again from the dead.  
He ascended into heaven  
and sits at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty.  
From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

### *The Third Article*

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy Christian church, the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen

## **The Lord's Prayer (by petition)**

Introduction: Our Father who art in heaven.

1. Hallowed be Thy Name.
2. Thy kingdom come.
3. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
4. Give us this day our daily bread.
5. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.
6. And lead us not into temptation.
7. But deliver us from evil

Conclusion: For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

## **Key Texts for Baptism**

Matthew 28:19

*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

Mark 16:16

*Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.*

## **Key Text for Holy Absolution**

John 20:22-23

*The Lord Jesus breathed on His disciples and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."*

## **The Sacrament of the Altar**

### ***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.

### ***Where is this written?***

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."(Mt 26; Mk 14; Lk  
22; 1 Cor 11)

***What is the benefit of this eating and drinking?***

These words,  
*Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins,*  
show us that in the Sacrament  
forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation  
are given us through these words.  
For where there is the forgiveness of sins,  
there is also life and salvation.

***How can bodily eating and drinking do such great things?***

Certainly not just the eating and drinking do these things,  
but the words written here:  
*Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.*  
These words, along with the bodily eating and drinking,  
are the main thing in the Sacrament.  
Whoever believes these words has exactly what they say:  
*forgiveness of sins.*

***Who receives this sacrament worthily?***

Fasting and bodily preparation are certainly fine outward training.  
But that person is truly worthy and well prepared  
who has faith in these words:  
*Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.*  
But anyone who does not believe these words or doubts them  
is unworthy and unprepared,  
for the words "for you" require all hearts to believe.