

## RECEIVE THE SACRAMENT OFTEN

If you have been using the above Book of Concord Reading Plan, then you would know that we have been reading through *Luther's Large Catechism*, and are now reading through the section on the *Sacrament of the Altar*. In the *Large Catechism*, Luther comments on how necessary it is to receive Holy Communion regularly. But how often is often enough?

Perhaps you might remember growing up in a congregation where Holy Communion was offered once per month. Where communion is offered more frequently, questions then arise in the minds of the laity regarding why communion should be offered more often and how often a person should receive Holy Communion.

In parishes where communion might only be offered once per month, there is this practical and pastoral concern: If a person were to miss communion the first Sunday of the month, it can be nearly two months before the next time communion was offered during the service. There is also the concern for those whose job schedule requires them to sometimes work the first Sunday of the month.

When it comes to questions addressed by those who are in attendance each Sunday Holy Communion is offered, the blessings of communion are such that we should desire to receive them frequently and gladly.

The Bible does not set a minimum for how often communion should be offered and received, nor does it set a limit. In the Words of Institution, Jesus uses the word “often” twice: *In the same way also He took the cup, after the supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood. Do this, as **often** as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.”*<sup>26</sup> *For as **often** as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes,* (1 Corinthians 11:25-26).

“Often” in the early decades of the Christian Church meant every Sunday. The book of Acts describes: *“upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them”* (Acts 20:7). From this we see that in the New Testament, the Sacrament was a regular and major feature of congregational worship, not an occasional extra. Likewise, at the time of the Reformation, our Lutheran forefathers celebrated the Sacrament “every Sunday and on other festivals” (Apology of the Augsburg Confession XXIV, 1).

When the first Lutherans arrived from Germany to Australia, often a pastor had to serve numerous flocks scattered over a wide area. As a result, communion was celebrated as infrequently at each place as four times a year. With the invention of the car this increased to maybe once per month, as most pastors still had more than one congregation to serve. Recent decades have seen an increase in communion celebration throughout Lutheranism, some congregations returning to every Sunday communion.

An in-depth study of the Lord’s Supper increases an appreciation in our midst of the blessings of the Lord’s Supper. The chief blessing of the Sacrament is the forgiveness of sins, which Christ’s body and blood have won for us on the cross. The Lord’s Supper is a means of grace, a way in which the forgiveness, life, and salvation won at the cross are applied to us personally.

Returning to the catechism, this time to Luther’s Small catechism with Explanation, Question 295 goes like this: *Why are we to receive the Sacrament often?*

Answer: We are to receive the Sacrament often because

- A. Christ commands, or urgently invites, us, saying, “This do in remembrance of Me”;

B. His words, “Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins” promise and offer us great blessings;

Matt. 11:28 Come to Me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.

C. We need the forgiveness of our sins and the strength for a new and holy life.

John 15:5 I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing.