"Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."

-- 1 Corinthians 1:10

When people commune together they are making a joint statement of faith. In many churches, this statement is based on only a few general Christian doctrines. But in this congregation, the common faith that we express is based on agreement concerning *all* of the teachings in the Bible. Before a person can say that he shares such a witness of religious truth, he must have knowledge of these beliefs.

To many, this may sound proud and judgmental. "As if this church had some sort of monopoly on truth!" We do not feel that we are the only people in the world who will be saved. We do not claim to be more wise or more holy than anyone else. We do not feel that we are more "deserving" to receive communion than other people -- after all, no one is deserving! We are all sinners before God! We do, however, firmly believe that the Bible is what it claims to be: the very Word of God in all of its parts. We believe that the Bible is clear in what it teaches, and that all of its teachings are important. Finally, we believe that there must be a real unity with regard to God's Word before such "oneness of faith" is expressed at the communion table.

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." *- 2 Timothy 3:16*

Delay is Not Denial

By not inviting all of our visitors to commune with us, we are taking a serious risk. We risk leaving the impression that we are automatically marking them as being "not up to our standards." That is not the message we are trying to convey! We are eager to share the Sacrament of the Altar with those who share our faith. We are certain that, once our visitors understand the reason for our practice, they will want to get a detailed knowledge of what our beliefs are before communing with us. So, we offer information along with the encouragement to prepare for the celebration. There may be delay. This is not denial.

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Why Close Communion?

Introduction -- At this Lutheran congregation, our practice has always been to have Close Communion, that is, we do not serve the Lord's Supper on a "come one, come all" basis. Frequently, visitors to our services do not understand this. They sometimes feel excluded, or even insulted. Because we are concerned about your feelings and we want to be understood, please take a few moments to read about why our celebration of Communion is "close."

I. It is "close" because of Jesus' teaching and example.

Different people have different views on just what is happening when the Lord's supper is celebrated. Some feel that it is a commemorative meal and nothing more; they see in the bread and wine mere symbols of Christ's suffering and death. However, when our Lord first gave His supper to His disciples, He told them exactly what they were receiving:

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed it and broke it, and gave it to It to them and said, `Take, eat;

This is My body.' Then He took the cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. And He said to them, `This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many.' -- Mark 14:22-24

In our Communion service, we believe that we are receiving Christ's true body and blood in, with, and under the bread and wine. No, the bread and wine do not undergo a physical change; however, Christ's body and blood are truly present -- in a miraculous way that we can't understand. By partaking of Christ's body and blood, we receive added assurance of the forgiveness of our sins. It is a strengthening of faith that says "Christ gave His body and shed His blood for ME, personally." Since it is much more than mere bread and wine, of course we want to handle the sacrament according to God's command and Biblical example. It is the Lord's supper; it is not ours to do with as we please.

During His life here on earth, Jesus preached God's Word to everyone. When He commissioned His disciples, He urged them to *"Preach the gospel to every creature,"* (Mark 16:15) and to *"Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them..."* (Matthew 28:19). But when He instituted the Lord's supper, He included only His disciples, not the general public. In our

services, we would never presume to try to judge whether someone else is a true disciple of Jesus or not -- after all, we have no way of reading a person's heart! All we have to go on is what people *say* they believe. We feel that it is very important to be aware of what each participant says he or she believes about the Lord's Supper, about Jesus Christ, and about His Word. It is the only responsible thing to do when handling Christ's true body and blood, and it is not something that can be done "on the spot."

II. It is "close" because we don't want to harm anyone.

Could this wonderful source of blessing, Christ's true body and blood, be harmful for anyone? Sadly, yes. We learn this from the Bible:

"Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body." *-- 1 Corinthians 11:27-29*

Out of simple care and concern, we feel the burden of doing what we can to insure that all who participate in our Lord's Supper celebration are properly prepared. It would be the height of irresponsibility, we think, to say (in Jesus' name), *"Take, eat,"* when someone may not have had proper instruction in what is involved in this. We do not wish by our carelessness to cause anyone to bring a "judgment" upon himself. There is a real danger of this happening, if a person fails to make a distinction between the true body and blood of Christ and ordinary bread and wine. The Lord's supper is like a powerful, faith-sustaining medicine in that it can give tremendous benefits -- but it also has the potential for harm if misused. As such, the Lord would have us dispense it on a "prescription" basis, not in the fashion of an "over-the-counter" medication.

III. It is "close" because in Communion we express true unity of faith.

The question may now be asked: "Why don't we admit to Communion at least all those who profess to be Christians?" The answer: Scripture also shows us that those who approach the Lord's Table together are thereby giving expression to a common faith -- in all parts of God's Word -- that unites them.

"For we, being many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread." *-- 1 Corinthians 10:17*