

Virtual Communion Statement

An analysis of virtual communion begins with the following question: Is the church a virtual church and can Holy Communion be practiced virtually, that is, without physicality? For some, this is an open question. For us it is not. Correctly defined, open questions are such questions as inevitably arise in our study of the Scriptural doctrines but are not answered by Scripture at all or at least not clearly. One should approach this with caution. Our focus must be what the Scriptures say regarding what constitutes a Christian assembly and her altar fellowship. And if some want to expand the Scriptural and Confessional definitions, then they must provide a clear Word from God to ratify their positions, instead of leaving us with nothing but opinions, inventions, and noble intentions.

In controversies of the past, Lutherans have always understood that the message of Holy Scripture retains its power even when not in use. This was maintained so that the message of sacred Scripture, which is eternal (1 Peter 1:25), might not ever be reduced to the level of human words. What is recorded in Scripture is the eternal Word of God.¹

As far as the Sacrament of the Altar is concerned, we confess that the words alone do not determine the validity or benefit of the Lord's Supper. God's Word is to be attached to bread and wine to be used in a specific way. Thus, the Formula of Concord Solid Declaration (hereafter referred to as FCSD) Article VII 85 states: "In order to preserve this true Christian teaching on the Holy Supper and to avoid and eliminate many kinds of idolatrous abuses and perversions of this testament, this useful rule and guide is taken from the Words of Institution: nothing has the character of a sacrament apart from the use [usus] instituted by Christ or the divinely instituted action [actio]."² We cannot consider the validity or benefit of the Sacrament of the Altar only on the argument of the efficacy of the Scripture, but must also include its use or divinely instituted action. In light of this, The ULMA position on Virtual Communion can be summarized thus: the church has, throughout history, observed the Sacrament of the Altar as a physical reality in the locally gathered congregation. This is the way Jesus and the apostles did it. Additionally, it is the last will and testament of Christ, and no one should add to or nullify what is ratified by the testator unless He gives us permission. And when we search for the approval of the testator to do things differently, as in the case with virtual communion, we do not find such permission. Consequently, we maintain that the Sacrament of the Altar is for the local church as we have always understood what constitutes the local congregation. It is a public proclamation and thus is done in public in the presence of the people gathered together. We will do it this way because Christ and the apostles did it this way. To do otherwise, is playing with the body of Christ, which is a truth that is way beyond us, and should remain undisturbed."

See also: ULMA Virtual Communion Expanded Explanation

¹ Preus, R. D. (1970). The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism. In *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism* (Vol. I, pp. 367-371). Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia.

² The Book of Concord the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. (2001). In R. Kolb & T. J. Wengert (Eds.), *The Book of Concord The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (pp. 607-608). Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press.