
THE SACRAMENT OF

The Lord's Supper

A Practical Guide for Lay Teachers

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Introduction: A Gift, Not a Duty

The Lord's Supper is, alongside Holy Baptism, one of the two sacraments instituted by Christ Himself. It is not a human invention, not a church tradition, and not a religious formality. It is Christ's own gift to His church—a gift in which He gives His very body and blood for the forgiveness of sins, the strengthening of faith, and the sustaining of the Christian life.

And yet, for many Christians—including many who sit in Lutheran pews—the Lord's Supper has become either a routine observance drained of its meaning, a vaguely symbolic memorial, or an occasion of confusion and even anxiety. Much of this confusion stems from the influence of non-Lutheran traditions that have fundamentally redefined what the Supper is and what happens in it. Adults in your class may have spent years in churches where the Lord's Supper was treated as a quarterly memorial service, a moment of personal reflection, or an act of communal obedience. They may never have been taught that Christ's body and blood are *truly present* in the Sacrament or that the Supper actually *delivers* the forgiveness of sins.

This paper will equip you to teach what the Lord's Supper is, what it gives, how Christ is present in it, and how it differs from what other traditions teach—all in accordance with the Augsburg Confession, Luther's Small Catechism, and Holy Scripture.

1. What Is the Lord's Supper? The Catechism's Teaching

Luther's Small Catechism organizes its teaching on the Lord's Supper (which Luther calls the "Sacrament of the Altar") around a series of questions. These form the essential framework for our teaching.

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 to drink.

— Luther's Small Catechism, Part VI

Notice what Luther says and what he does not say. He does not say the bread *represents* Christ's body. He does not say the bread *becomes* Christ's body by

ceasing to be bread. He says the Lord's Supper is "the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ *under* the bread and wine." Both bread and body, both wine and blood, are truly present. Christ's body and blood are given *in, with, and under* the bread and wine. This is the Lutheran confession of the real presence, and it is grounded directly in Christ's own words of institution.

The Words of Institution

The foundation of the Lord's Supper is Christ's own words, spoken on the night He was betrayed:

"Take, eat; this is my body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of me." Likewise 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."

— Words of Institution (1 Corinthians 11:23–25; Matthew 26:26–28; Mark 14:22–24; Luke 22:19–20)

The Lutheran confession takes these words at face value. When Christ says "This is my body," He means what He says. He does not say "This *represents* my body" or "This *symbolizes* my body." The verb is *is*—a verb of identity, not metaphor. Luther insisted on this point against Zwingli at the Marburg Colloquy in 1529, famously writing *Hoc est corpus meum* ("This is my body") on the table and refusing to move from it. This was not stubbornness; it was fidelity to Christ's clear words.

What Benefits Does the Lord's Supper Give?

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 forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.

— Luther's Small Catechism, Part VI

The Lord's Supper is not merely an act of obedience, a moment of reflection, or a communal bonding experience. It is a means of grace—a specific, concrete way in which God delivers to you personally the forgiveness of sins that Christ won on the cross. When you receive the bread and wine, you receive Christ's body and blood, and with them the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

This is why the Lord's Supper is not optional or peripheral to the Christian life. It is not something we do because it is a nice tradition. It is something Christ gives us because we *need* it. We are sinners who need forgiveness—not once, but continually. The Lord's Supper meets us in that need, again and again, as often as it is celebrated. It is the ongoing sustenance of the baptismal life.

Who Receives the 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.

— Luther's Small Catechism, Part VI

Worthy reception of the Lord's Supper is not a matter of personal moral achievement. It is a matter of faith. The person who comes to the Table believing the promise—"given and shed *for you* for the forgiveness of sins"—is worthy, regardless of how sinful they feel. Indeed, it is precisely the person who knows they are a sinner and needs forgiveness who is the ideal recipient. The Supper is medicine for the sick, not a reward for the healthy. Luther said it plainly: the Lord's Supper is given precisely for those who feel the burden of their sin and hunger for the comfort of the Gospel.

This does not mean, however, that anyone and everyone should receive the Sacrament without distinction. Paul's warning in 1 Corinthians 11:27-29 about receiving the body and blood "in an unworthy manner" is serious and must be taken seriously. The question of who should be admitted to the Table is addressed below in the section on communion practice.

2. The Augsburg Confession on the Lord's Supper

The Augsburg Confession addresses the Lord's Supper directly in Article X:

Our churches teach that the body and blood of Christ are truly present and distributed to those who eat the Lord's Supper. They reject those who teach otherwise.

— Augsburg Confession, Article X

Article X is remarkably brief and remarkably clear. It affirms two things: first, that Christ's body and blood are *truly present* (not symbolically, not spiritually in some vague sense, but truly); and second, that they are *distributed to those who eat*—meaning that all who receive the bread and wine receive Christ's body and blood, whether they believe it or not. The presence of Christ's body and blood does not depend on the faith of the recipient. The *benefit* of that presence depends on faith, but the *presence itself* depends on Christ's Word and promise.

This last point is important and often misunderstood. When an unbeliever receives the Lord's Supper, they receive Christ's true body and blood—but to their judgment, not to their benefit (1 Corinthians 11:29). This is precisely why Paul's warning about "discerning the body" is so grave: if the bread were merely bread, there would be nothing to discern and nothing to receive unworthily. The very seriousness of Paul's warning confirms the reality of the presence.

3. Three Positions: Rome, the Reformed, and the Lutheran Confession

The doctrine of the Lord's Supper is one of the points where confessional Lutheranism is most distinct from both Roman Catholicism and the Reformed/evangelical tradition. Understanding these three positions is essential for any teacher, because adults in your class will almost certainly have encountered one or both of the other two—and may unknowingly hold one of them.

The Roman Catholic Position: Transubstantiation

Rome teaches that when the priest consecrates the bread and wine, their *substance* (their fundamental reality) changes into the body and blood of Christ, while their *accidents* (their outward appearance—taste, texture, color) remain those of bread and wine. This is called *transubstantiation*: a change of substance. After consecration, according to Rome, what appears to be bread is no longer bread at all—it is entirely and exclusively the body of Christ.

The Lutheran objection: Transubstantiation goes beyond what Scripture says. Jesus said, “This is my body.” He did not say, “This bread has ceased to be bread and has been transformed into my body.” The Scriptures continue to call the element “bread” even after the words of institution: “The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?” (1 Corinthians 10:16). Paul calls it *bread* and a participation in the *body*—both, simultaneously. Transubstantiation also relies on Aristotelian philosophical categories (substance and accidents) that Scripture neither uses nor requires. The Lutheran confession does not need a philosophical theory to explain *how* Christ is present; it simply confesses *that* He is present, because He said so.

The Reformed Position: Memorial or Spiritual Presence

The Reformed tradition encompasses a range of views, but they share a common denial of the bodily presence of Christ in the Supper. Zwingli (1484–1531) taught that the Lord's Supper is a *memorial meal*—a symbolic act of remembrance in which Christ is not present in any special way beyond His general omnipresence. The bread and wine are merely symbols that remind us of Christ's sacrifice. Calvin (1509–1564) held a somewhat higher view, teaching a *spiritual presence*: Christ is present by the power of the Holy Spirit, but His body remains in heaven and is not received orally in the bread and wine. The communicant is “lifted up” to heaven by the Spirit to receive Christ spiritually.

Most American evangelicals, Baptists, and non-denominational churches follow some version of the Zwinglian view, even if they have never heard Zwingli's name. When people say the Lord's Supper is “just a memorial” or “a way to remember what Jesus did,” they are expressing Zwingli's position. This is the view your adult students are most likely to have absorbed from the broader Christian culture.

The Lutheran objection: Both Zwingli and Calvin fail to take Christ's words at face value. “This is my body” does not mean “This represents my body” or “The Spirit will

lift you up to where my body is.” Moreover, the Reformed view separates the sign (bread and wine) from the thing signified (Christ’s body and blood), making the Supper a human act of remembrance rather than a divine act of giving. If Christ is not truly present in the bread and wine, then the Lord’s Supper does not deliver anything—it merely illustrates something. It ceases to be a means of grace and becomes a means of nostalgia.

The Lutheran Confession: The Real Presence

The Lutheran confession holds that Christ’s body and blood are truly, really, and substantially present *in, with, and under* the bread and wine. The bread remains bread. The wine remains wine. But in, with, and under those earthly elements, Christ’s true body and blood are given and received. This is sometimes called the “sacramental union”—a real, inseparable union of the earthly element and the heavenly gift in the sacramental act, without the one being transformed into the other.

How is this possible? Lutherans do not claim to know. We confess it because Christ said it, and we trust His Word even when our reason cannot fully comprehend it. Luther put it simply: “I would rather drink blood with the pope than mere wine with the enthusiasts.” The point is not that we understand the *mechanism* of Christ’s presence; the point is that we believe His *words*. The same Christ who created the universe from nothing, who became incarnate in a virgin’s womb, and who rose bodily from the dead is certainly capable of giving His body and blood in bread and wine if He says He does.

Summary Comparison

Position	Christ’s Presence	The Bread & Wine	Key Problem
Roman Catholic	Body & blood present after the bread & wine cease to exist	Substance changes; only the appearances of bread & wine remain	Goes beyond Scripture; relies on Aristotelian philosophy
Reformed / Evangelical	Absent bodily; present only spiritually (Calvin) or not at all (Zwingli)	Remain mere bread & wine; symbols only	Contradicts Christ’s plain words; empties the Supper of its gifts
Lutheran	Body & blood truly present in, with, and under bread & wine	Remain bread & wine; united with Christ’s body & blood	None — the faithful confession of Christ’s words

4. Communion Practice: Who Should Receive?

Because Christ is truly present in the Lord’s Supper—and because Paul warns that receiving the body and blood in an unworthy manner brings judgment (1 Corinthians

11:27-29)—the question of who should be admitted to the Table is a serious pastoral matter, not a mere administrative detail.

The Lutheran tradition has historically practiced some form of communion discipline, guided by the pastoral responsibility to protect communicants from receiving to their harm and to maintain the integrity of the church's confession. The specifics of communion practice may vary from congregation to congregation, and your pastor is the person to consult on the particular practice of your church. However, the theological principles underlying communion discipline are consistent:

- **The communicant should be baptized.** Baptism is the entry into the church and the sacramental life. The Lord's Table is for the baptized.
- **The communicant should be instructed.** Paul's admonition to "examine yourself" and to "discern the body" (1 Corinthians 11:28-29) presupposes that the communicant understands what the Lord's Supper is and what is being received. This is one of the reasons we practice confirmation instruction—so that those who come to the Table know what they are receiving and can examine their hearts.
- **The communicant should be able to examine themselves.** Self-examination includes recognizing one's sin, trusting in Christ's forgiveness, and intending to amend one's sinful life with God's help. This does not mean one must be sinless—if that were the standard, no one would ever commune—but it does mean one approaches the Table with repentance and faith.
- **The communicant should believe that Christ's body and blood are truly present.** Because what is received in the Supper is Christ's true body and blood, a communicant who denies the real presence is receiving something other than what they believe they are receiving—and this is precisely the failure to "discern the body" that Paul warns against.
- **The communicant should be in agreement with the confession of the congregation.** The Lord's Supper is, among other things, a confession of unity in doctrine (1 Corinthians 10:17). To commune together is to confess together. This is the principle behind the historic practice of communion fellowship: those who share the Table share the confession.

A note for teachers: Questions about who may receive communion can be sensitive, especially in adult classes where participants may have friends or family members from other traditions. It is important to teach these principles with both clarity and charity. The practice of communion discipline is not exclusionary for its own sake; it is a pastoral act of love—love for the communicant (protecting them from receiving to their judgment) and love for the truth (maintaining the integrity of what the Sacrament confesses). When questions about specific cases arise, direct them to your pastor.

5. Common Errors to Watch For

“The Lord's Supper Is Just a Memorial”

This is the most common error you will encounter, and it is deeply embedded in American Protestant culture. The word “remembrance” in the words of institution does not mean “merely looking back.” The Greek word (*anamnesis*) carries the sense of an active, participatory remembrance in which the past event is made present and its benefits are received anew. Israel's Passover was a “remembrance” in exactly this sense: not merely recalling the Exodus but participating in its reality. The Lord's Supper is remembrance in the same way—Christ's sacrifice is made present to us, and its benefits are delivered to us.

In your teaching: When someone says the Lord's Supper is “just a memorial,” ask: “A memorial of *what?*” Christ said, “This is my body, given for you.” If it is merely a memorial, then Christ was being needlessly misleading. But if Christ's words mean what they say, then the Supper is far more than memory—it is Christ's own gift of Himself to us.

“It Doesn't Matter What You Believe About the Supper”

This is the error of indifference—the idea that the Lord's Supper is a matter of personal interpretation and that different views are equally valid. But Paul's warning about discerning the body (1 Corinthians 11:29) makes clear that what you believe about the Supper matters. If Christ's body and blood are truly present, then failing to recognize that presence is not a neutral theological preference; it is a failure that Paul says brings judgment. Doctrine about the Sacrament is not optional.

In your teaching: Adults who have come from traditions with a memorial view may initially resist the Lutheran confession. Be patient, but be clear. The issue is not “What do I feel comfortable believing?” but “What did Christ say?” Direct them to the words of institution and let Christ's own words do the work.

“The Lord's Supper Is Primarily About Community”

While the Lord's Supper does express and strengthen the unity of believers (1 Corinthians 10:17), its primary purpose is not horizontal fellowship but vertical gift-giving. God is giving Christ's body and blood to sinners for the forgiveness of sins. The communal dimension is real and important, but it is secondary to and dependent on the sacramental reality. When the communal dimension is emphasized at the expense of the sacramental reality, the Supper becomes a potluck with liturgical trappings.

In your teaching: It is not wrong to speak of the Lord's Supper as a family meal of the church, but always anchor the family meal in what makes it unique: the presence of Christ's body and blood and the delivery of forgiveness. Without those realities, it is not the Lord's Supper at all.

“I’m Not Worthy to Receive”

This is an error born not of bad theology but of a tender conscience—and it must be handled with great pastoral care. The person who feels unworthy to come to the Table is often *exactly* the person for whom the Table is set. Remember: the Catechism says the person who is truly worthy is the one who has *faith in these words*: “Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.” Worthiness is not moral perfection; it is faith in the promise. The Lord’s Supper is for sinners who know they are sinners and trust that Christ’s body and blood are given for their forgiveness.

In your teaching: This is a particularly important issue in adult classes, where people may carry decades of guilt, shame, or spiritual anxiety. Luther’s counsel is liberating: “Those who feel their weakness, who are anxious to be rid of it, and who desire help—these are the worthy guests for whom the Table is prepared.” Point them to the promise, not to their performance.

“Frequent Communion Diminishes Its Specialness”

Some Christians resist frequent celebration of the Lord’s Supper on the grounds that it becomes “routine” or “loses its meaning.” But this logic is never applied to any other gift of God. No one says, “We should only pray once a month so prayer stays special.” No one argues that hearing the Gospel preached weekly makes it less meaningful. The Lord’s Supper is given for our ongoing nourishment, and we need that nourishment as often as it is offered. Luther lamented that Christians would neglect the Supper, calling it a sign of contempt for the gift.

In your teaching: Encourage your students to receive the Lord’s Supper whenever it is offered, with repentance and faith. The Supper does not become less meaningful with frequency—if anything, regular reception deepens appreciation for the gift and strengthens the faith that receives it.

6. Practical Guidance for Teaching

- **Teach the words of institution.** These words are the foundation of everything. Help those you teach memorize them and understand them. Every doctrine of the Lord’s Supper flows from what Christ said on the night He was betrayed.
- **Use precise language about the real presence.** Say “Christ’s body and blood are truly present in, with, and under the bread and wine.” Avoid imprecise language like “Christ is present in a special way” (too vague) or “the bread becomes Christ’s body” (that’s transubstantiation). Precision matters because it protects the truth.
- **Connect the Lord’s Supper to the Gospel.** The Supper is not a separate topic from justification; it is the means by which Christ personally delivers to each communicant the forgiveness He won on the cross. Every lesson on the Supper should make this connection explicit.
- **Teach the connection between Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.** Baptism is the beginning of the sacramental life; the Lord’s Supper is its

ongoing sustenance. Baptism initiates; the Supper nourishes. They are not isolated events but the twin pillars of the Christian's life in Christ.

- **Be prepared for hard questions about communion practice.** Questions like “Why can't my Baptist friend take communion here?” or “Doesn't restricting the Table go against Jesus' love?” will come up, especially in adult classes. These are not hostile questions; they are sincere struggles. Answer them with the theological principles outlined in Section 4, and when the specifics get difficult, direct people to your pastor.
- **Know the three positions.** You do not need to be a church historian, but you should be able to explain, in plain language, the difference between the Roman, Reformed, and Lutheran understandings of the Lord's Supper. The comparison table in this paper and on the summary sheet will help.
- **Consult your pastor.** The Lord's Supper involves some of the most sensitive pastoral questions in the life of the congregation. If difficult questions arise about communion practice, personal situations, or doctrinal disputes, your pastor is the right person to address them. This is not a failure on your part; it is a recognition that the Office of the Ministry exists precisely for these moments.

Conclusion

The Lord's Supper is one of the most intimate gifts God gives His church. In it, the Creator of the universe comes to you personally—not in thunder and lightning, but in bread and wine—and gives you His own body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins. It is not a symbol. It is not a metaphor. It is Christ Himself, given *for you*.

As a confessional Lutheran lay teacher, you have the privilege and responsibility of helping those you teach—adults and children alike—understand this gift and receive it with faith and gratitude. In a world full of empty promises, the Lord's Supper is a promise you can taste: “Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.” Teach this. Believe this. And receive this gift as often as it is offered.

“The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?”

— 1 Corinthians 10:16 (ESV)

For Further Reading

- *Luther's Small Catechism, Part VI: The Sacrament of the Altar* — The foundational text. Teach from it directly.
- *Luther's Large Catechism, Part V: The Sacrament of the Altar* — Luther's extended pastoral treatment, rich in application.
- *Augsburg Confession, Article X* — The confessional statement on the Lord's Supper.

- Sasse, Hermann, *This Is My Body: Luther's Contention for the Real Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar* (Concordia Publishing House, 2001). The definitive historical treatment.
- Kleinig, John W., *Grace Upon Grace: Spirituality for Today* (Concordia Publishing House, 2008). Excellent on the sacramental life.

QUICK-REFERENCE SUMMARY

The Lord's Supper

For Sunday School Teachers — Keep This at Your Desk

THE LORD'S SUPPER IN ONE SENTENCE

In the Lord's Supper, Christ gives us His true body and blood in, with, and under the bread and wine for the forgiveness of sins — not as a symbol, not as a memory, but as a real gift.

THREE POSITIONS AT A GLANCE

	Roman Catholic	Reformed	Lutheran
Christ's body present?	Yes (bread gone)	No (in heaven)	Yes (with bread)
Bread remains?	No	Yes	Yes
Delivers forgiveness?	Yes (as sacrifice)	No (memorial)	Yes (as gift)
Based on...	Aristotelian philosophy	Human reason	Christ's words

THE QUICK TEST

✓ TEACH THIS	✗ NOT THIS
Christ's body and blood are truly present in, with, and under the bread and wine.	The bread and wine merely represent Christ's body and blood.
The Lord's Supper delivers forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.	The Lord's Supper is just a way to remember what Jesus did.
"This IS my body" — Christ's words mean what they say.	"This is my body" is figurative language or a metaphor.
The bread remains bread AND Christ's body is present.	The bread either ceases to be bread (Rome) or is only bread (Reformed).
Worthy reception = faith in the promise "for you."	Worthy reception = moral achievement or personal sinlessness.
The Supper is God's gift to us — He is the giver.	The Supper is our act of devotion toward God — we are the actors.
Communion practice reflects pastoral care and doctrinal integrity.	Communion restrictions are unloving or judgmental.

KEY SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Matthew 26:26-28 • Mark 14:22-24 • Luke 22:19-20 • 1 Corinthians 10:16-17
• 1 Corinthians 11:23-29

“This IS my body.” Christ said what He meant. Teach what He said.

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If this guide was helpful, here's where to find more like it.

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- ***Judeo-Christian Values?: A Confessional Lutheran Reckoning with Dispensationalism, Christian Zionism, and the Gospel They Replaced*** — a timely volume on where modern evangelical eschatology actually came from.
- ***Ad Fontes: Textual Criticism for Lutheran Laity*** — why we can trust the text of Scripture in the first place.
- ***What Horse?: Common Misconceptions About What the Bible Actually Says*** — for the reader who has heard things “the Bible says” their whole life and started to wonder.

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About the Author

Larry Herzog Jr. is a confessional Lutheran layman in Valley City, North Dakota — but he got there the long way. He came to Christ as a college-age atheist through an online debate on the reliability of Scripture, then spent over two decades working through North American Baptist, Evangelical Free, Nazarene (where he served as an associate pastor), a Calvinist Baptist church, and Reformed Baptist seminary before finally landing in confessional Lutheranism (AFLC). He teaches adult Sunday school and leads Bible studies at Grace Free Lutheran Church. His weekday job is cybersecurity.