

A LETTER FROM NALC BISHOP JOHN BRADOSKY

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To Pastors and Congregations of The North American Lutheran Church

Dear partners in ministry;

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

There is confusion and misunderstanding within the Body of Christ today, and especially within Lutheran churches, regarding the relationship between Holy Baptism and admission to the Lord's Supper. This confusion weakens the public witness of the Church with regard to our Biblical and confessional understanding of the Holy Sacraments entrusted to the Church of Jesus Christ. For this reason, it is my desire to provide clear, concise, easily understood pastoral guidance to our congregations. I have consulted with members of our Joint Commission on Theology and Doctrine for this purpose.

We in the North American Lutheran Church affirm the doctrine and practice of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church and the churches of the Lutheran Confessions which assert that only baptized Christians may be admitted to the Lord's Supper, trusting that Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, is truly present in, with and under the forms of bread and wine, for the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation.

The Sacrament of the Altar is the "food of souls," to strengthen and nourish the baptized "new man or woman." The baptized receives the real presence of Christ as a great treasure, His own body and blood for the forgiveness of sins, received through faith (Large Catechism V, 20-22; Matthew 26:28).

The concern for the unbaptized is pastoral, in light of what St. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 11:24. Martin Luther also addresses this in the Large Catechism, where he states that those who do not believe the words of Christ and do not believe the benefits offered in the Lord's Supper may eat and drink judgment upon themselves by eating and drinking unworthily (Large Catechism V, 33-37; Tappert, 450-451).

The Lord's Supper is the sacrament of unity, to create and maintain unity with Jesus Christ, the Head of the Body, and the Body of Christ as baptized community (1 Corinthians 10:16-17). While reception of the Lord's Supper is personal, it is never private. As the community of believers communes at the altar, they are making a public declaration of the faith of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. "And they devoted themselves to the apostolic teaching, the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42).

Within the life of each congregation, unusual circumstances may arise. We acknowledge that it is the responsibility of the local congregation and pastor to provide appropriate pastoral care with regard to admission to the Lord's Supper, as well as determining the appropriate age for first reception of Holy Communion, how instruction will be offered and how the faithful will be taught the value and meaning of the Lord's Supper. At the same time, each congregation needs to respect the historic practice of the Church: Baptism is the entrance into the Church; the Lord's Supper is the nurturing meal for those who are in the Church, baptized members of the Body of Christ.

Each congregation of the NALC is asked to publicize this understanding of the Holy Supper, either verbally or in print in worship bulletins:

All are welcome to receive the Lord's Body and Blood who are baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and believe that Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, is truly present in, with and under the forms of bread and wine for the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation.

With you in Christ's service,

Bishop John F. Bradosky