

# The Cloud

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News and Articles from the St. Cloud Circuit of the LCMS

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## **The (Convention) Communion Issue**

*By Rev Joshua Reber (Trinity, Clear Lake; Faith St. Cloud; SCSU Campus Pastor; Editor of the Cloud)*

You'll notice this issue is shorter than usual! We've been busy. We just had our Minnesota North District Convention (review below!). Lent starts on March 5, and we teamed up with the Little Falls Circuit to write Lent devotions (access 'em at [lcmscloud.org](http://lcmscloud.org)!). But, we managed to get a few articles together on communion, and since we're short on time, why not just go straight for the jugular and talk about closed communion? Sounds great to me! If you think we're wimps, please let us know, and we'll work on it. We pray that God would bless us as we figure out what it means to have communion with God and one another as a circuit.

## 2025 MNN District Convention in Review

*By Rev Joshua Reber (Trinity, Clear Lake; Faith St. Cloud)*

Clock has started. You got 2 minutes. Defend the Christian faith. Go!

That's what district conventions feel like. Everybody appreciates a compact schedule. How do I know? You complain when the service goes over the designated hour for the Protestant service.

Speaking of which, the opening communion service for the convention lasted about 90 minutes. Time spent in God's Word is never wasted, though. The Convention's best part was the designated time we had together in the Bible. Rev Heath Curtis (recently elected Southern Illinois District President) led Bible studies throughout the Convention on 1 Peter.

We didn't spend much time on these particular verses, but 1 Peter 3:15-16 says, **"In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect."**

One reason we meet every 3 years is to make a public defense of the faith. We did that this year, although let's not pat ourselves on the back too much. There's always more work to be done, and the devil is crouching at our door, ready to overpower us.

Here are the numbers – 100 voting lay delegates. 98 voting pastoral delegates. 20 advisory delegates (one would think there was more based on how many times they spoke at the microphone). 53 guests, including our good friend from the Church Ambassador Network, Pastor Rory Martin. That makes the total attendance 271.

We passed 15 resolutions. Some were mundane no-brainers, like revisiting our District Constitution to line up with how we're operating and with what our needs are. Some were multi-million dollar decisions, like transferring the ownership of Lutheran Island Camp from the District to the camp itself (this was a business decision – insurance has been hard for the District to obtain for the camp. Don't worry, it's still a camp of the LCMS!) We re-affirmed our doctrine of closed communion (see Pastor Timm's article below).

I'm more interested in the 4 resolutions we didn't get to because time ran out. All 4 were written by the St. Cloud Circuit, 3 being written by yours truly. I don't think there was a conspiracy to suppress me at the Convention, but I'll gladly publish any fan fiction that floats that theory. We didn't get to vote on sending a letter to Concordia Publishing House, encouraging them to offer free shipping. Don't worry, my devoted readership – we'll send the letter as a circuit.

Now that you've had time to think about it, what's your 2 minute defense of the Christian faith? Here's mine in 2 sentences: I've got 3 life rules; the first one is to avoid eating chili before getting in the pulpit. Rule 2 is that if anyone is ever crucified and comes back from the dead 3 days later, that guy is the King; (semi-colon to preserve 2 sentences!) the last rule is never trust Baby Boomer pastors.

## Closed Communion – Not Again!

By Rev Bruce Timm (Redeemer, St. Cloud and 2<sup>nd</sup> (he got promoted!) VP of MNN District)

A woman goes to her doctor. She is convinced she has cancer. She demands her doctor give her chemotherapy. Her doctor refuses. "I cannot prescribe chemotherapy without a proper diagnosis." She insists. She argues in tears, "How can you say that? Don't you care about me? I know what's best for me. You are a very unloving doctor. I'm going to file a complaint with your superiors." She phones up the CEO of CentraCare and lodges her complaint against the doctor. After a lengthy conversation the CEO agrees that the doctor has been uncaring and unloving with the patient. The doctor is removed from the clinic and tries to find a job in another state. The woman searches out a doctor who is loving and caring and there receives the chemotherapy she desires and within a few months the chemotherapy kills her.

You could never imagine this happening. A doctor who gave out medicine without a diagnosis would lose his license. CentraCare would be sued. Unfortunately, the woman would be dead. Now substitute the Lord's Supper for chemotherapy, pastor for doctor, and an unknown guest visiting your local LCMS congregation as the woman. It is a common temptation for both congregations and pastors to commune such a guest out of "love" and "care." Most people would be aghast at a doctor who prescribes powerful medicine to an undiagnosed patient, but many would argue for communing guests at the communion rail without diagnosis.

The teaching of closed communion is a settled issue in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. It is the practice of our Lutheran confessions based on the clear Word of God. There is no debate about these two beliefs. 1) People who do not know the bread is the body of Christ and the wine is the blood of Christ should not commune. 2) People who do not agree with the confession of the Lutheran church should not commune with us. If the first happens that person receives the Sacrament to his judgment. If the second happens we deny God's Word and our confession of the truth.

At our recent District Convention (Feb. 23-25) in Grand Rapids, we once again voted for a resolution on Closed Communion. We exhorted pastors to

***teach, exhort, practice and defend Closed Communion, communing only those who have been "examined and absolved;" who are neither living in open, unrepentant sin, nor under the ban, who have been taught and confess, not only the true doctrine of the Lord's Supper, but all doctrines as taught in the Small Catechism; who eat and drink at the Lord's Table as those who gladly hear and believe whatsoever their Lord teaches, professing no doctrine contrary to that taught where they commune, and whose church membership reflects said confession, except in are, temporary, and extraordinary cases of pastoral discretion; (Resolution 1-02)***

The resolution also called on District Presidents to ***"teach, exhort, defend, and further the practice of Closed Communion among ... pastors and congregations committed to their care."***

Why do we regularly address this accepted Biblical teaching of our faith? Because we have a variety of practices. Some congregations do not print or speak publicly about their communion practice. Some open the railing to all who believe Christ's body and blood is present under the bread and wine. Some commune those who no longer attend an LCMS congregation and therefore are not in public agreement with us.

Sadly, a young laymen told me that his pastor put a man and woman under the ban (banning them from communion because they were living in open and willful sin) and a neighboring LCMS pastor privately communed the couple.

171 delegates voted on the resolution for Closed Communion. 55 delegates voted against the resolution, meaning it passed, but 1/3 of the votes went against it. I did address the assembly after the vote to tell those 55 that they voted against the doctrine of the Synod. I also asked them to email me their reasons for doing so. As a Vice President of the District and a pastor who strives (and struggles) to practice closed communion, it is important to address this apparent dissent to our shared confession. District President Finnern and the other Vice Presidents of the District also desire to address this.

Please continue to pray for all the pastors and congregations of our District. As Christians we live as exiles in the world (1 Peter 1) and as Jesus promised we are hated. Yet in love for Him and for our neighbor we hold to His Word, confess the truth, and practice what that Word of truth teaches us.

## Communion and Discipline

*By Rev David Buchs (Concordia, Fairhaven)*

Let's think first about how discipline works. We can learn it straight out of the Scriptures, although it is also a matter of common sense: **"For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it"** (Heb 12:11). There are two observations to make here. First, discipline is painful. Second, it is fruitful.

It's not that pain is the goal of discipline. Rather, growth is the goal of discipline. Think of it like pruning a plant. In order to bring about better growth, the fruitless, diseased, or extraneous branches need to be lopped off. That is what discipline accomplishes. Discipline is the application of something painful, but the end result is fruitfulness.

In the life of a Christian, that fruit is righteousness. Knowing the righteousness of God through faith, a Christian can endure the pain of discipline. He recognizes that it comes from a loving heavenly Father who treats us as sons.

Sometimes God's discipline is immediate. You feel his hand weighing on you, drying up your strength as in the heat of summer. He goes to work through your conscience, through his giving and taking away of the things of this life, and through the afflictions and crosses he imposes for the sake of Jesus.

More ordinarily, however, God's discipline is mediated. That is, he has appointed people in our lives to discipline us on his behalf. Most obvious is the parents that God gives to children. Children keep the

Fourth Commandment by receiving the correction of their parents as discipline from their heavenly Father.

We are also disciplined by our pastors. **“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account”** (Heb 13:17). We are disciplined by our pastors not, in the first instance, through the extreme measures of excommunication or the use of the binding key. More on that in a moment. Instead, we are disciplined by our pastors when they preach God’s Word purely. When they proclaim God’s Law, they are crucifying our sinful flesh. Here it is worth noting that if it is not painful, then it hasn’t happened. We should expect God’s Word, purely proclaimed, to make our flesh shrivel up and die. We should expect God’s Word to lop off our fruitless, diseased, and extraneous branches so that through repentance and faith, we can bear abundant fruit.

At times the unruly branches may be particularly stubborn. At times the sins which cling to us may get the better of us. At times, the Christian may even begin to imagine that he wants to keep his sins and would rather not repent.

Praise God that when that happens, God does not just write us off. Rather, he instructs our pastors to make a deeper cut. Pastors are to withhold Communion from any Christian who is living in open, unrepentant sin. The goal of this discipline is that the Christian would bear the fruits of repentance. But first must come the pain. Note what kind of pain it is, though. Surely there is some pain from shameful exposure. But more importantly, there ought to be the pain of separation from the life-giving body and blood of our Savior. Where that pain is felt, the Christian is drawn to realize how dreadful his sin is. By his sin, he is pushing away the Lord who would forgive and restore him.

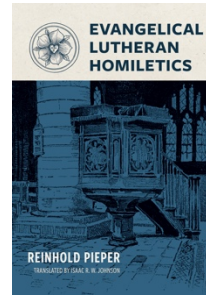
At times the heart of a Christian may become so hardened that he does not feel that pain or he is able to set it aside. It’s then that he no longer resembles a Christian, and a still deeper cut is required. **“Deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord”** (1 Cor 5:5).

Notice how optimistically Paul describes excommunication. To be sure, it is a funereal endeavor. But Christ has been raised from the dead, and so he can certainly restore a sinner who has wandered so far off.

The goal of excommunication is the same as the goal of preaching. It is discipline that is aimed at the peaceful fruit of righteousness. Pain is required, but pain here is not for torture – it is a teacher.

Praise God that he has not left us without discipline. Praise God that he has appointed pastors and instructed them to think of nothing but the fate of our souls. Pray that God would equip them by his Spirit to be bold and courageous and love us enough to discipline us as sons of God.

## Book Review by Rev Joshua Reber



***Evangelical Lutheran Homiletics*** by Reinhold Pieper (trans. by Isaac RW Johnson) (CPH, 2025, original German published in 1895), 512 pages

Before we get to the review, one quick note: Pastor Timm bought this book on my advice back in January and then won a copy at the District Convention. lol, couldn't have happened to a better guy.

This is a textbook, and sitting down and reading it was a little bit of a slog at points. Exhaustive can mean exhausting, but if there's any topic worth exhausting, it's preaching. People are saved by the Word of God. It's worth doing a deep dive, then, in how that Word is preached.

Readers in 2025 might laugh at some of Pieper's dated suggestions. He implores Lutheran preachers to never use a translation other than the *Lutherbibel*. (One wonders what he thinks of the ESV.) To prepare for preaching, he advises men to drink some raw eggs. His quotation of Walther includes the admonition to frequently remind people that they're not allowed to marry their siblings or cousins.

It's okay to chuckle at the dated advice, but read it charitably. If people find my sermons or writings in a century, I wonder what they'll think of my references to things happening in 2025.

Here's the big takeaway I got: it is essential for the preacher to be aware of what he's doing. If you don't know what you're doing, you can't evaluate your preaching, and you certainly can't improve. Pieper spends so much time on the theme (I read it as thesis) and its subsections because that's where a preacher has to succinctly explain what he's preaching and why. If you can't give me a thesis, don't get in the pulpit. Sometimes, homilies are appropriate, where you would say, "I'm preaching briefly verse by verse on this portion of Scripture." But most sermons need a thesis statement, which is usually either analytic or synthetic. Read the book to find out what those terms mean! (It's touched on in Johnson's introduction, so you don't need to look very far.)

The overall theme of the work can be taken from the last chapter. In order to be a good preacher, one must be competent and faithful. They belong together. The preacher's heart and mouth belong together. Most of this book focuses on competency - how can one's rhetoric, organization, speaking, and presence in the pulpit improve? But it always flows out of one's faithfulness to Jesus Christ.

This book, the first Lutheran homiletics written in America now finally translated into English, belongs on every Lutheran pastor's shelf. Buy a copy or harass Pastor Timm's for his one of his.