

“No poison can be in the Cup  
that my Physician sends me.”

*THE CHALICE RECONSIDERED*



*What God ordains is always good.  
His loving tho't attends me;  
No poison can be in the cup  
That my Physician sends me.*  
(TLH 521:3 / LW 422:3)

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**INTRODUCTION**

The topic of the use of the chalice and/or individual cups is often a thorny one. When someone dares to bring it up they are often accused of majoring in minors. However, it was not apparently a “minor” issue not worth discussing when over the past century many, if not most, of our congregations gave up, or moved away from, the scriptural, historic and catholic (i.e. universal) use of the chalice towards widespread acceptance of the use of either glass or plastic individual cups. While there are more important (and certainly much more pressing) issues in the Church today, it doesn't diminish the importance and relevance of how we administer Christ's Sacrament in Christ's Church to Christ's people in accordance with Christ's institution.

We spend much time today talking about (and perhaps lamenting) the influence of the surrounding culture on the life of the church, not to mention the infiltration of Reformed theology and practice in many of our LCMS congregations. Yet, I believe, we as Lutherans over the past century have listened too quickly to society with one ear and Reformed theology with the other in regards to this, if not most communion practices.

Indeed, we live in a hygiene-crazed society. So it is quite ironic that most of us trust minimum wage workers (who we have never met) in the preparing of fast food at McDonald's (which is arguably good for our health) but yet at the same time question those who prepare the table for the Lord's Supper (who we do know), not to mention the Lord Himself who instituted the Meal and serves yet as its host (which we confess is absolutely good for our spiritual well-being). How we have gotten to the point where we feel cavalier about eating a piece of meat wrapped in a plastic wrapper prepared by a total stranger who perhaps views their job as simply a way to make a few bucks for a time, while we are scared our Savior through His ministers will give us something that can potentially harm us I will never know. It seems like an absurd example, but is it not basically true?

Several things have shaped my desire to address this topic at this time:

1. A year ago here at St. Andrew's we moved from offering the chalice after the individual glasses, to offering the chalice first (the idea being that if both are offered the chalice should be offered first while the innovation is offered second). Since that time we have seen a marked increase in the percentage of those who commune from the chalice. Why?
2. At the Dying To Live Lutheran Youth Conference we did not have an alternative of individual glasses (we couldn't have found enough if we had wanted to) and though most of the youth had probably never communed from a chalice before, we received no negative evaluations or complaints, and as of last report, no one has died yet! :-) Why and why not?
3. Since our congregation hosted the Divine Service at the end of that conference, it naturally raises a question in terms of our practice here on a typical Sunday (i.e. Why use the Chalice alone when hosting the conference, but not on a normal Sunday?)
4. When I administer the Sacrament I make two rounds. I distribute the bread, and then I offer the chalice before he a deacon who follows with the tray of individual cups. While I wait for him to offer the chalice I often reflect on how sad it is that 1) We call something "Communion" when we are drinking from separate glasses because we are scared to get germs, and 2) Unity, while perhaps not lost, is at least not enhanced. I also wonder what this display of disunity visually represents about our confession of faith to visitors (i.e. might they not justly think: "Why can't I commune because they say their church and my church aren't united in the faith, when they apparently can't even agree on how they should receive the Lord's Supper?")
5. At the same time I am saddened to have to see people politely shake their heads or slightly wave their hands to nonverbally signal, "No, I don't want Christ's blood in this container, but in the next one." What does it say when we find ourselves bowing before God's presence but yet "passing up" receiving what He seeks to give us, even if only for a few seconds.
6. Individual cups were not introduced here at St. Andrew's until at the earliest, 1987-1988 (and maybe as late as 1992), even though for over two decades it at least was not reported as being a problem? Why? Did germs increase in 1987? It certainly hasn't made distribution easier now that we offer both.
7. I have always had a great concern that the use of individual glasses has had an indirect (though perhaps profound) impact on other communion practices (i.e. closed communion & every Sunday communion)
8. I see a marked interest and inquisitiveness on behalf of young people in learning about why we do what we do, especially in terms of communion practices, including this issue.
9. Nearly every catechumen I have ever confirmed here at St. Andrew's, having been even minimally instructed about many of the things to follow in this paper, has chosen to take the chalice rather than the individual glasses. Why?
10. I am concerned that overall we have perhaps stopped catechizing on this issue, especially among our young people. Even though a given church may only have individual cups, its young

members may still grow up and belong to many churches that either offer both, or perhaps only the chalice.

I have grown convinced that people will tend to take whatever is offered them. If given a choice, they will take the individual cups, especially if they are offered them first. However, most LCMS Lutherans have grown up only having one or the other offered to them. Thus, for the 18 year old college freshman whose home church has always and only (at least in the span of her lifetime) had individual cups, he/she of course would feel strange taking the chalice as it would be a new experience for him/her. If he/she attends the Divine Service somewhere where both are offered, he/she will most likely decline the chalice not as a matter of theology or even preference, but rather, experience (I imagine the same would generally be true in the reverse).

My goal here is not to make a case that the chalice is an essential element of the Sacrament as if the Sacrament doesn't exist apart from it. But the proper question is not: "Do we have to have the chalice in order to still have the Sacrament?" but rather, "How can we be most faithful to our Lord who instituted it and be 'most' assured that we have it? Is the chalice essential to the validity of the sacrament? Perhaps not. But the question I pose is rather, "Are we better off for having gotten rid of it!?" And if we are not, why should we not seek to restore it? And, moreover, if nearly every reason ever offered for why individual cups should have been brought into use in the first place can be demonstrated to be totally without merit, then should we not earnestly catechize our people towards restoring the salutary scriptural, historic, and catholic practice that was therefore unreasonably abandoned. In short, what are we waiting for!?!



## **THE HISTORICAL GENESIS OF INDIVIDUAL CUPS**

Ever since the fall of sin disease and germs have existed. Some of the worse plagues and outbreaks of disease occurred before this past century, yet, for 19 centuries the Church catholic (i.e. universal) had always employed the use of the chalice, with very little reflection or thought on using anything else. Of course, you had the Roman innovation of only offering one kind to the laity, an abuse Luther sought to restore (but without any obsession with hygiene). Ultimately, until the last century or so, never such a concern had ever seriously risen in the church catholic, regardless of one's theology about the Supper.

If hygiene was ever a serious concern it would have been during periods such as the bubonic plague in late 16<sup>th</sup> century Europe. Pastor Philip Nicolai wrote the text and tune of "Wake, Awake, For Night is Flying," to comfort his parishioners as they witnessed death on a daily basis due to that plague. The story is told about how he wrote it as he daily watched the unending funeral processions out of the window in his study. Here were a people who desperately needed comfort as well as protection from the spread of disease. So where to turn in such a time of need? I dare say that the place to turn is the Holy Communion to find strength, peace and comfort in Christ and His precious promises as to what it gives and does. Yet, we don't hear accounts of faithful Christians in such situations turning from the Sacrament out of fear, and this when the Holy Supper was most likely offered at least weekly everywhere. You would have expected them to have the same fear we have now and especially declare a moratorium on receiving the Sacrament from the chalice, if they dared receive at all. But they did not. Some might argue that "Well, people back then just didn't understand all that we now know from science today about germs." Well, perhaps, but you can't argue such naivety with dead bodies log jammed waiting for burial.

Individual cups first arose among the Reformed church bodies in the U.S in this last century. They are a 20<sup>th</sup> century “American” and “Protestant” innovation among the very people of whom Luther at the end of his days solemnly branded as “heretics...estranged from the Church of God” (and this before they came to the new world and got even farther from their original heretical roots). Since the Reformed believe the Sacrament itself is non-essential and nothing is actually received, they began using grape juice (which in fact was invented by the infamous Mr. Welch for this very purpose). Of course, if what you are receiving is not deemed that important, neither will be what you receive it in! Further, and as I will document later, there actually should be reasonable concern about hygiene if grape juice replaces alcohol. But again, if not for such Reformed innovation we might well not be discussing this at all. If we had been historically suspicious of such North American Protestant novelty (and the church should always have a healthy suspicion of any and all innovation lest it make an unwise and irreversible mistake), we also might not be discussing this either.

Luther faced false Reformed theology on the Supper (though they yet used the Chalice in his day in spite of their denials of what it contained); we still face their false theology as well as their new practice informed by it. But this should at least raise the following questions: Is the use/disuse of the Chalice a confession of faith? If we borrow from the prevailing culture around us, are we not at least at risk, of becoming like that culture? (Remember our LCMS forefathers were concerned about moving from the German language to English!) Similarly, if we borrow from churches of different confessions in terms of their practice of the Lord’s Supper, are we not in danger of coalescing to their doctrine of the Lord’s Supper too? What happens when we borrow “stylistically” from those of a different confession? If *lex orandi, lex credendi* still holds and we therefore believe in the rule that doctrine informs practice, and as a result, practice informs doctrine, then have we not placed ourselves at great risk in bringing in a Reformed innovation in theology as well as practice?! Moreover, the witness of historic Lutheran practice has been to choose *not* to follow Reformed practice where a matter is nonetheless considered unessential (i.e. the breaking of the host).



## THE HISTORICAL WITNESS OF THE CHURCH CATHOLIC – *With Special Reference to the LCMS*

There is little written throughout Christian history as a whole on this topic, since this point was not an issue for nearly the first 19 centuries of Christendom. Was the Chalice universally employed throughout this time? For the most part – yes! Are matters involving individual cups discussed over this time? Never! This silence from the church catholic is a powerful witness to the unity of the church through the ages. Either they were not as smart as us, or...!?!

However, the universal use of the Chalice does not necessarily mean that only one Chalice was employed at a given time in a given place. As Dr. William Weinrich, noted Early Church historian at CTS – Fort Wayne, has pointed out, in some instances in the early church a Chalice with a lip for pouring was centrally used so that the wine following consecration could be poured into secondary chalices for ease of distribution. This was mostly a practical concern of distribution that numbers necessitated and had nothing to do with fear (chalices were still used after all!). It is important to note though that “ease of distribution” was never the rallying cry for using individual cups (more on that later).

As Rev. Aubrey N. Bougher, an ordained minister of the International Lutheran Fellowship in Queens, NY mentions in an article in *The Bride of Christ*, innovations have been tried before in the church catholic:

Over the years, alternative methods to communing from the chalice were tried. Intinction in the East began as early as the sixth century, and was institutionalized by the time of the break with Rome. In some places a common straw was seen in the 8<sup>th</sup> century liturgies; and the Eastern form of breaking unleavened bread into a chalice to be distributed by a spoon developed further, still used by many of the Eastern churches today. (*The Bride of Christ*, Sept. 1997, "The Chalice: Article XXII", p.4)

However, the bottom line is that one could stockpile references throughout early church, Reformation, and LCMS history which clearly assume that the Cup or Chalice is the only method in use in Christian congregations for distributing the wine. Moreover, very early in the history of the Church, the congregation and pastors discarded the one loaf for individual wafers or host in order to accommodate a larger number of communicants in larger congregations. They kept the one Chalice, however, throughout this time as a symbol of the Church referred to by St. Paul (I Cor. 10:16ff)

Our forefathers, regardless of how long they have been dead, simply did not envision individual cups, nor the desire there could ever be for having them (though they surely faced death and disease as do we). But even logistical distribution concerns did not cause them to get rid of the Chalice, but to enlist other chalices for service as needed (and not little tiny individual baby chalice look-a-likes commonly seen in catalogs).

C.F.W. Walther, writes concerning the posture of the reception of the Lord's Supper in 1872:

Since some communicants take an awkward position, especially when receiving the cup, the preacher should be very careful that each of them really receives some wine. (*Pastoral Theology*, p.142)

One finds such statements throughout Walther's *Pastorale* (i.e. *Pastoral Theology*) and specifically his chapter on "The Administration of Holy Communion." His assumption is that the only thing in use is/will be the Chalice (though he commonly referred to it as "the cup"). This is no surprise, especially since among the prized possessions deemed most important to bring to the new country among Lutheran immigrants were the very "Cups" (i.e. Chalices) of which he spoke.

By 1945, we see that the issue had at least been sufficiently raised. John H.C. Fritz in his *Pastoral Theology* (the standard pastoral practice manual for a half a century of LCMS pastors) speaks of it this way:

There is no dogmatical reason why the individual Communion cup should not be used. In many churches two cups are used, why not more? But there is also no good reason why the old practice of using the common Communion cup should be discontinued. Sanitary reasons do not absolutely forbid it; the danger of infection is very remote. The pastor should see to it that all the vessels used at the Communion table are kept scrupulously clean. (*Pastoral Theology*, p.130)

Fritz states that in many churches more than one cup is used. Surely this was being done because of the size of congregations and to speed up the distribution (as was probably the case in the early Church). But to basically make the case "If two why not two hundred" misses the point.

In Paul H.D. Lang's What an Altar Guild Should Know (CPH, 1964), the most common altar care manual employed up until quite recently (and still used religiously by many yet) it is quite clear that: 1) Individual cups had gained some greater acceptance, and 2) There is an attempt made to yet hold up the Chalice for use in our congregations. Below Lang speaks of the communion of the homebound as an extension of the oneness in the Divine Service:

“Communion of the sick is an extension of the Holy Communion service from the church to those who are unable to attend. Holy Communion is true to its name, for it truly is a “communion” in which the many are one body as they partake of the one bread and one cup (1 Cor. 10:16-17). It is for the sake of symbolizing this communion that the Lutheran Church retains the common cup, the chalice. The chalice is the preferred choice of the Lutheran Church, for without exception the Word of God speaks of the cup in the singular in Holy Communion contexts. In the Words of Institution, Christ says that all should drink of the one cup, and we are told that they all drank of the one cup. This cup is called the cup of the Lord.”

It is quite fitting that Lang speaks of the Chalice in light of the communion of the sick because it is important for those who are homebound, hospitalized to yet sense the “oneness” of the Holy Communion, though they can not see it visually when they commune.

### **The Response of the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations**

By the 1980's the practice had continued to increase in the LCMS, though the question had yet remained (and always will as long as you have two divergent practices or some mixture of them). While there is no “official position” today of the LCMS per se, the CTCR in it's May 1983 report on the “Theology and Practice of The Lord's Supper” states in a closing Q/A section (pp.30-31).

*Does it matter whether a congregation uses individual glasses or the common cup to distribute the consecrated wine?*

In the absence of a specific Scriptural mandate, either method of distribution when performed in a reverent manner, is acceptable. Many Christians prefer the use of the common cup because of its symbolism as representative of the oneness of the body of Christ - the church – and because there is reason to believe that Christ used this method of distribution. Any decision in this area is to be marked by Christian liberty and charity.

I have not a few concerns with this answer. First of all, I obviously don't think its brevity does the topic justice! :-) Secondly, I don't think it is entirely accurate to say that there is no specific Scriptural mandate (surely Christ does say, as recorded by Matthew, “Drink of *it* all of you.” Moreover, the question itself slouches towards minimalism (i.e. “What's the least we can do and still have the essence of a thing?”). We as Lutherans are not minimalists; but maximalists!

The impression is given that individual cups are met on theological and historical neutral ground. This is hardly the case and the weight of the witness of the church catholic is simply left out in the statement “Many Christians prefer....” Why not say “The vast majority of Christians throughout the ages have exclusively used the chalice....” And again, “Individual cups are a 20<sup>th</sup> Century North American Reformed innovation and therefore we should be careful...”

Even more, the idea is given that some prefer the common cup because “there is reason to believe that Christ used this method of distribution.” (People use phrases like “there is reason to believe” when something is yet in doubt but they think it is “almost” but not convincingly yet clear). But there is clear and compelling reason to be quite confident that Jesus used the chalice in instituting the Holy Supper and

offering it to the disciples, even though they already had individual glasses in front of them at the table. (more on that later)

Instead of saying that the chalice is preferable it says that either is “acceptable” if done in a reverent manner. But should we not be more desirous of revering Christ by following His actual institution rather than departing from it, though we still have the Sacrament in doing so. And should we be using the Chalice as a matter of mere preference when the clear indication of Scripture is that Jesus clearly “preferred” to use one when individual cups were also at the table in the context of the Passover Meal? And if it is a matter of simple preference, why are we so “closed” to offering preferences on other matters surrounding the Divine Service, if after all they can be claimed to be non-essential too, and in fact were definitely not employed by Christ. After all, some would simply say, “You prefer dead orthodox Lutheran music, I prefer uplifting contemporary praise songs. So why can’t we at least offer both?” Grant it, that is an entirely different issue, but that is the road one must be prepared to walk down when they allow preferences in some areas but not others. Precedents have a nasty habit of coming from strange places.

In the long run, should not our theology inform and determine our practice? If not, do we not run the risk of letting our practices dictate our theology, even without us realizing it!



### BY WAY OF ANALOGY

I believe the manner in which we, over the years, have given into the unfounded fears of our people in regards to potential hygiene concerns is actually contrary to our normal mode of operation as regards similar things deemed non-essential.

For instance, (and at the acknowledged risk of drawing comparisons between Sacraments) we believe in the validity of a baptism by immersion, but yet we as Lutherans do not baptize by immersion, in part because some Reformed bodies do. Even though baptism by immersion wouldn’t effect our theology; it *is* essential to theirs. To alleviate the confusion and keep from giving any false impressions (and since it is not essential anyway ) we simply do not immerse. We have a large measure of uniformity in this regard. I dare say that hearing of a baptism by immersion in any Lutheran Church would not only be highly irregular, but would cause many to wonder if that church or pastor were by extension incorporating Baptist theology on the matter as well.

Besides for not encouraging baptism by immersion in the slightest, we also don’t say merely that “sprinkling is preferable” or “some prefer to immerse because of the symbolism of being drowned....” but rather “this is why we baptize the way we do and why.” If someone came to us and asked us to perform a baptism by immersion in one of our churches, most any faithful Lutheran pastor (or laymen) would at least have concerns for the reason it was being requested and would want to explore the reasoning behind such a request further.

There is also a practical concern in regards to baptisms by immersion in our churches, namely we are not equipped to have them. However, we were also not equipped to use individual glasses/cups either when the movement was made toward them. At least 100 years ago, it would have been simply mind boggling to envision a LCMS church *not* using a chalice, or needing anything else but one. Apparently, the practical concern was remedied because it was deemed important enough to do so.

But it must be asked: Why did we not have similar concerns and reaction with the movement from the chalice to individual cups when they were likewise introduced by the Reformed when the practical result of their theology of the Lord's Supper, or lack thereof, made it a necessity!?!



### **CHRIST'S COMMAND – *A Scriptural & Confessional Perspective***

Let me make it clear: I believe that the command of Christ, “*This do,*” embraces the entire action of taking bread and wine, consecrating this bread and wine with the Words of Institution, distributing this bread and wine to the people, and eating this bread and wine. Wherever this Word-action is present, according to Christ's institution, the Sacrament of the Altar is truly and actually being celebrated, regardless of whether the Chalice or the individual glasses are being used.

But, having said that, let's take a closer look at Christ's command, especially the words of Jesus recorded by St. Matthew:

*And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body.’ Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. (Mt. 26:27-28, NKJV)*

What about the command, “*Drink of (from) it all of you*”? What does “it” refer to? Is “it” not a mandate to drink from the cup that Jesus is offering? And if so, which cup is He talking about?

Here again, I think Bougher is especially helpful in his treatment of Article XXII of the Augsburg Confession concerning the Chalice. Article XXII has specifically to do with the reception of “Both Kinds in the Sacrament.” According to the German in the Tappert edition:

Among us both kinds are given to laymen in the sacrament. The reason is that there is a clear command and order of Christ. “Drink of it, all of you.” (Matt. 26:27) Concerning the chalice Christ here commands with clear words that all should drink of it. (Tappert 49:1-2, the Latin uses the word “cup” instead of “chalice).

Again, Melancthon is not arguing our point, but he indirectly makes the point just the same, namely that when Jesus commands for us to “Drink of it, all of you”, “it” clearly refers to the Chalice/Cup and not the individual cups present in the context of the Passover meal. Yes, wine is assumed, but it is the Chalice/Cup that is mentioned.

Bougher writes:

Here we have a most strange thing: the Roman part of the Church Catholic, against whose practices this article was directed, has at least made a recommended option in most places of following this command, which is a complete reversal of Roman Catholic prohibitions common in Reformation times and shortly thereafter forbidden for centuries by the Council of Trent. And the Lutheran part of the Church Catholic, which restored, then once stood for this truth, practices it in fact scarcely at all, pretending the command of Christ has been changed from “Drink of *it* (a



pronoun whose antecedent is clearly the chalice, since the antecedent of wine would preclude the use of the genitive, and simply say “Drink it”), all of you” to “Just get a little bit of wine (or something else if you don’t like wine).” And that’s *not* the command of Christ.

Note Luther:

“In reference to this particular cup, then, Matthew and Mark may be understood as saying that each of the apostles had a cup before him on the table, or at least that there were more cups than one. But now, when Christ gives a new, special drink of his blood, he commands them all to drink out of this single cup. Thus, in proffering it and with a special gesture, Christ takes his own cup and lets them all drink of it, in distinction from all the other ordinary cups on the table, in order that they might better observe that it was a special drink in distinction from the other draughts which had been given them during the meal.” (*Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper*, 1528, AE 37:11)

So do we receive what Christ desires to give us in the Sacrament without the use of the Chalice? Sure. But are we being completely faithful to His command to “Drink of it, all of you,” if we disregard the “it”(the cup) in favor of something else?

There is an important distinction between what Jesus does and what He tells us to do. Passion plays obviously recreate the physical atmosphere of the Last Supper more closely than do our celebrations of the Eucharist in our churches. After all, we don’t recline on pillows, hold the Meal in a locked upper room and the like? If such things were essential, we had better all run to Spearfish, SD to receive the Sacrament! :-)

However, we don’t do something only because Jesus did it that way, but rather because He has told us to do it. As regards the bread, it is simply said, “*Take, eat,*” and nothing is said as regards to how. Was the bread passed around on a plate? Did they simply hand the loaf around and break a piece off as it came to them? We do not know (though we do know that the Holy Supper was referred to throughout the Pauline letters as the “breaking of the bread.”) However, we do know that Jesus says, “*Drink of it, all of you*” and that “it” refers to the one Cup/Chalice which “all” were to drink from. Here our Lord speaks of both what we are to do (“Drink”) and how we are to receive it (from the Cup).

Obviously, and again, the wine being joined to the Word is what makes the Sacrament the Sacrament. We don’t take into our bodies the metal from the chalice after all, but the wine it contains. But that doesn’t render the Chalice unimportant. Moreover, it is simply untenable to argue that the Cup/Chalice is a matter of mere “preference” or is necessarily and completely unessential when it is clearly spoken of by Christ as a part of His express command, in addition to His action concerning it.



### **ONE FAITHFUL WITNESS – *A Voice in the Wilderness***

It is not as if the replacement of the Chalice with individual cups went totally unnoticed among 20<sup>th</sup> century North American Lutheran theologians. Rev. Dr. Carroll Herman Little (1872 - ?), a professor of New Testament/Systematics at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary had these stern words to say on the matter in 1931.

QUESTION OF THE WINE AND OF THE CUP IN THE LORD'S SUPPER  
by C. H. Little, D. D., S. T. D.

...The change of the container from the one cup to the many individual cups has been even more widely adopted in our Lutheran Churches. This innovation first found favor with the Reformed, and entered into our Lutheran Churches through Reformed influence. In the case of the Reformed, as they were dealing only with earthly elements of a symbolic nature, they had not much to lose. It came in their case also after they had long substituted grape juice for wine. Without the alcoholic content, which was antiseptic, they felt that there was real danger of infection. Consequently they made the change without any scruples in the matter.

But why should Lutheran Churches take up with this Reformed innovation and depart so radically from the Lord's institution, which in every instance speaks of the cup as one? How can we face the Reformed and charge them with changing the word "*is*" into "*signifies*," when we just as perversely change the word "*cup*" into "*individual cups*"?

Besides this, the innovation utterly destroys the symbolism of the Lord's Supper as the Sacrament of union with one another and of brotherly love. It also goes against the whole history of the Church, displays a lack of faith in our gracious Lord, and diminishes the solemnity of the sacramental administration.

May the time soon come when this modern innovation is done away with! Else we may yet arrive at the further innovation to which some Reformed Churches have already succumbed, and be found using paper cups, which after use are gathered up and destroyed. When a Church looses itself from the old and safe moorings and starts upon a course of innovation, there is no telling how far it may go or where it will stop. Our Church as an historical Church should beware of innovations.

One could hardly imagine a stronger statement from a theologian of the Church. To Dr. Little it was certainly not a simple matter of "preference." I might add that based on his last paragraph and the fact that plastic was not yet in vogue seventy years ago, one might have liked to ask Dr. Little what he would have responded to the question, "Paper or plastic?" in regards to disposable communion cups ? :-)

In a *Logia* Article "Reflections on the Appropriate Vessels for Consecrating and Distributing the Precious Blood of Christ," (Epiphany/January 1995, Vol. IV, number 1, pp.11-19), Dr. John Stephenson of Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary of St. Catherines, Ontario seminary points out that Little's argument is five-fold.

1. Jesus used one cup, not many, at the Last Supper.
2. The use of one container of consecrated wine per communicant destroys the symbolism of the "efficacious sign" that both produces and expresses the unity of the mystical body of Christ.
3. Acceptance of the innovation of "individual cups" goes against the grain of the loyalty to historic Christian precedent which has always been a mark of the "Conservative Reformation."
4. Embrace of the Reformed mode of distribution through "individual cups" betrays a distressing lack of faith in the real presence and hence in our Lord Himself.
5. The use of individual glasses "diminishes the solemnity of the sacramental administration." Reformed style can only erode Lutheran substance (There are similarities here to the contemporary music debate. Some say that "style" or "mode" does not matter, yet we know it does. Why do we not argue similarly in terms of the use of individual glasses?)

It is likewise interesting to note, that Little's aversion to individual cups was greatly shared by R.C.H. Lenski (writer of a common commentary system on the NT that most Lutheran pastors use), who actually switched his congregational membership over this issue (I guess he didn't see it as simply a matter of "preference" either!) In his treatment of the Epistle for Maundy Thursday, Lenski delivered the following judgment:

"When now we use wafers as the bread, this casts no reflection whatever on the first institution of the Sacrament of Christ. I am unable to say the same when now in late years the wine is placed into many little individual cups."

Further Stephenson:

Some may be minded to counter Little's second argument by pointing out that the Lord's body is not now customarily distributed under the form of a single loaf: if the unleavened bread of eucharistic celebration is placed in the ciborium or on the paten in the shape of separate hosts, what objection stands in the way of dividing up the wine to be consecrated into "individual cups"? Such a line of thought breaks down when it is remembered that bread must be "broken" in order to be distributed; wine can without difficulty be shared through one single chalice. (p.12)

In fact, one can rather easily and sufficiently argue that it is much easier to distribute wine from the chalice. The trays commonly used today were actually designed for passing up and down the aisles. Surely it was easier for Jesus to pass the one Cup around, then to pour from the one Cup into individual cups. At best it adds extra opportunities for distribution problems as opposed to the alleviation of them.



### **THIS IS THE FEAST! - *"Jesus is Coming! Quick, grab the finery disposables"***

The Scriptures speak at length about feasting. Heaven itself is depicted as a feast of no earthly proportion and the Lord's Supper is constantly viewed as a "foretaste" of that feast to come. In both the OT and NT there are 136 references to "the feast." In the Old Testament God's people looked toward the feast which Jesus inaugurated by His coming into the flesh (a feast to get ready for "the" feast). There was a mother of OT feast's (the Passover), but by Christ's institution it was not disposed of but revolutionized in His very being, and even it has an eschatological element of waiting and anticipation for the feast that is to come.

The disciples approached Jesus on the feast of unleavened bread and asked Him where they should prepare the Passover. (Mt. 26:17). Jesus parents went to Jerusalem every year at the "feast" of Passover (Luke 2:41). Jesus taught His disciples that when they went to a "feast" to not sit down in the seat of honor (Luke 14:8), and that they should invite the poor and the blind when they held a "feast" (Luke 14:13). The Wedding at Cana was a great "feast." (John 2:8). Paul urged the Corinthians to continue to keep the "feast." (1 Cor. 5:8) We constantly say that Jesus spoke in His parables using simple analogies common to his audience. Well, what does that say of his Parable of the Wedding Banquet (Matt. 22:1-14)?

In short, the Biblical narrative is a culture of festivity. They completely understood the concept of feasting. So is it any surprise then, that the Lord's Supper throughout the ages has been viewed as a Feast, an eternal banquet layed out for us here on earth. And why shouldn't it be seen as a "Feast"? If according to the Verba (i.e. Words of Institution) we believe (as we do) that the bread and wine has become our Lord's very Body and Blood, then how do we treat it, and perhaps more crucial for our discussion, how do we serve it!

The use of the Chalice says something about feasting that individual cups do not and can not. When we have a meal to mark a special occasion in our homes, chances are that we set the everyday dishes and glasses aside, and bring out the fine china and wine glasses (perhaps those given to us for a wedding gift). We would not give honored guests anything less than our best. This is an acknowledgment of the reverence and importance that such an occasion demands.

But when do we use disposable cups, plates, and the like? We do so when it is an informal occasion, or perhaps we just want a break from having to take the time to clean. Well, what does it say then when we use that which is disposable to hold and present to others the most precious thing we could dare hold in our hands, namely the very body and blood of Christ, and when we do so as His honored guest so He can give us His very self to eat and drink? Indeed, the food or drink tastes the same, and gives the same benefit, regardless of the container it is offered in, but the container does say something about the occasion! The container says something about what you believe the contents are and the importance you place on what you are doing and receiving.

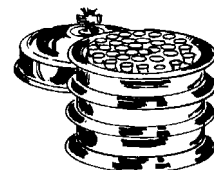
There is only one reason I have ever heard offered for the use of disposable cups and it is not financial or theological, but practical - TIME. Simply put, it takes time to clean individual glasses (though of course, cleaning one chalice and perhaps a cruet would take relatively little time). What a shame it is that whether stated or unstated, some have developed the posture, that it simply is too much work to care for the sacred vessels that hold our Lord's Body and Blood or moreover, that a costly chalice or other communion vessels are simply not worth the money, though what they contain is the priceless gift of salvation itself.

When one uses disposable paper plates and cups, once the party is over, they quickly pull out the trash bags and simply sweep it all up so that they can get it thrown away as fast as possible! That is the point! But is this really the message we want to convey about the importance and centrality of the Lord's Supper? Is this what "keeping the feast" is all about? Have we created a disposable place setting for a heavenly meal?



## THE UNIVERSAL WITNESS OF THE ARTS

### The Visual Arts



One doesn't normally argue a theological point on the basis of artwork. However, theology is greatly elevated by its artistic expression, and helps form or solidify our understanding of theology. You will be hard pressed to find even modern artwork that depicts individual cups. It is almost exclusively the chalice that is represented in artwork that represents the Lord's Supper from everything from ancient woodcuts to CPH bulletins and most modern clip art. No big deal? Could you imagine, Durer's famous woodcut of the angels (at left) gathering Christ's blood into chalices (presumably for distribution to God's people) with individual glasses (which run about \$1.10 a piece, much less plastic disposable cups which cost less than 2 cents a piece).

Artwork demonstrates just how much the Whether one chooses to drink from the they are realistically and visually exposed to they actually receive the Lord's Supper (if

Concerning the artwork to the right, offended to see a stack of trays in than the chalice!?! But again, it in reality!?!)

### Lutheran Hymnody

A survey of our three main hymnals the word "cup" is used in basically two ways, either referring to the cup of woe or bitterness, or the cup of the Lord's Supper. But even when spoken of in the former, it still speaks of "the cup" rather than "the cups." Anyway you look at it, there is a unity whenever the "cup" is spoken of. Moreover, there is simply no reference to "individuality" in terms of the manner of reception of the Lord's Body and Blood present in our hymnody. While, we have lost such unity in actuality of practice, our singing of such unity remains, though for some it is a logical inconsistency when they sing of the unity of the cup while drink from individual cups/glasses.

### 1. The Lutheran Hymnal

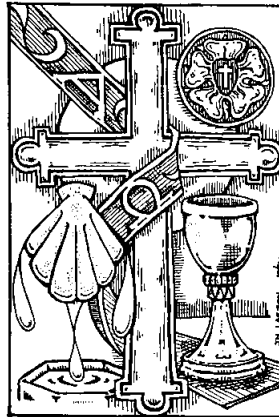
I can find no reference to "chalice" but perhaps that is because it is harder to rhyme. There are however plenty of references to "cup" but never "cups."

TLH 305:4 "Soul, Adorn Thyself with Gladness"

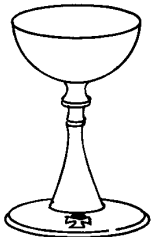
Ah, how hungers all my spirit  
 For the love I do not merit!  
 Oft have I, with sighs fast thronging,  
 Thought upon this food with longing,  
 In the battle well-nigh worsted,  
 For **this cup** of life have thirsted,  
 For the Friend who here invites us  
 And to God Himself unites us.

TLH 306:4 (LW 246:1) "Lord Jesus Christ, Thou hast prepared s

We eat this bread and drink **this cup**,  
 Thy precious Word believing  
 That Thy true body and Thy blood



chalice is a symbol of unity. chalice or not, the only place anything but the chalice is when by individual cups). would we not be almost the lower right quadrant rather must be asked, if in art, why not



Our lips are here receiving.  
This word remains forever true,  
And there is naught Thou canst not do;  
For Thou, Lord, art almighty.

(Interestingly in LW, they changed it from “we” to “I”. Nonetheless, even when singing of it in an “individual sense” the common cup is extolled)

TLH 308:2 “Invited, Lord, by Boundless Grace”

How holy is this Sacrament  
Where pardon, peace, and life are spent!  
**This** bread and **cup** my lips have pressed;  
Thou blessedst, and my soul is blessed.

TLH 312:2 (LW 248:2) “Lord Jesus Christ, Thou Living Bread”

Thou me to pastures green dost guide,  
To quiet waters lead me;  
Thy Table Thou dost well provide  
And from Thy hand dost feed me.  
Sin, weakness, and infirmity  
Am I: O Savior, give to me  
**The cup** of Thy Salvation.

TLH 314:4 (LW 250:4) “Lord Jesus Christ, We Humbly Pray”

One bread, **one cup**, one body, we,  
United by our life in Thee,  
Thy love proclaim till Thou shalt come  
To bring Thy scattered loved ones home

TLH 316:1 “O Living Bread from Heaven” (also LW 244:1)

O living Bread from heaven,  
How richly hast Thou fed Thy guest!  
The gifts Thou now hast given  
Have filled my heart with joy and rest.  
O wondrous food of blessing  
**O Cup that heals our woes!**

TLH 521:3,5 (LW 422:3,5) “What God Ordains Is Always Good”

What God ordains is always good.  
His loving tho’t attends me;  
**No poison can be in the cup**  
That my Physician sends me.  
My God is true; Each more anew  
I’ll trust His grace unending,  
My life to Him commending.

TLH 639:2 (LW 325:2) “For Many Years, O God of Grace”

Here children have been born anew  
As manifold as morning dew,  
Their vows to Thee confessing.  
Here many found a table spread,  
They ate Christ’s body with the bread  
And drank **the cup of blessing**.

## 2. Lutheran Worship

Many of the above hymns (as noted) are likewise in Lutheran Worship. There is one reference to “chalice” in Lutheran Worship.

LW 412:5 “The King of Love My Shepherd Is”

Thou spreadst a table in my sight;  
Thine unction grace bestoweth;  
And, oh, what transport of delight  
From **thy pure chalice** floweth!

(But wait some believe that the chalice can contain impurities in terms of germs? Could someone who is scared of germs for that reason logically and confessionally sing this?)

LW 244:3 “O Living, Bread from Heaven” (see TLH 316:1 above)

You gave me all I wanted;  
This food can death destroy.  
And You have freely granted  
**The cup** of endless joy.

## Hymnal Supplement 98

Six of the nine designated hymns in the “Lord’s Supper” section contain a reference to either the Chalice or Cup.

HS 848 “Now the Silence”

**Now the vessel brimmed for pouring**  
Now the Body Now the Blood

(Indeed, a “vessel brimmed for pouring” is only an indirect reference, though one can hardly imagine individual cups designed for such a purpose, though some chalices are in fact brimmed)

HS 850 “What is This Bread?”

What is this wine? The blood of Jesus shed for mine;

**The cup** of grace Brings His embrace

HS 853 “The Infant Priest Was Holy Borne”

The body of God’s Lamb we eat  
A priestly food and priestly meat.  
On sin-parched lips **the chalice** pours  
His quenching blood that life restores.

(“The chalice pours” is an interesting description. A chalice lends itself to pouring more than do glasses, much less disposables. “Pouring” also gives the sense that it is something being done for you, as opposed to you picking something up and doing it for yourself)

HS 854 “Eat this Bread”

Eat this bread, drink **this cup**, come to Me and never be hungry.  
Eat this bread, drink **this cup**, trust in Me and you will not thirst.

As often as you eat this bread and drink **this cup**,  
you show My death until I come again.

(We don’t sing “Eat this bread; Drink “these cups” but “this cup.”)

HS 855 “You satisfy the Hungry Heart”

“Is not **the cup** we bless and share The blood of Christ outpoured?  
Do not **one cup**, one loaf, declare Our oneness in the Lord?”

(It is not, “Are not the cups we bless The Blood of Christ outpoured?” Yet that would be more logical to sing where individual cups/glasses are being used)

HS 856 “Come, Risen Lord”

We meet, as in that Upper Room they met.  
Thou at the table, blessing yet dost stand.  
“This is My body”; so Thou givest yet;  
**Faith still receives the cup as from Thy hand.**

(If Jesus had come into the modern age in which we live, would He have been concerned about hygiene and therefore instituted the Supper with individual glasses, or would He institute the Meal as He did on that most holy night in which he was betrayed!)

HS 867 “Thine the Amen Thine the Praise”

Thine the harvest then **the cup**  
Thine the vineyard then **the cup** is lifted up lifted up

Again, even in places where cup is used in terms of a cup of bitterness or suffering, there still is an inherent oneness being alluded to. We are a body of Christ. We are one. What we receive from the hand



of our Lord contributes to that oneness, and we likewise suffer as one, not as individuals. Again, no reference to individuality in the Lord's Supper is expressed in our hymnody

So how is it that we love to sing of "the cup" and all its unity, but not drink from it when it is offered!



## THE UNIVERSAL WITNESS OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY

There is a whole host of "non-theological" information available with regard to the possibility of catching a disease/illness from the communion chalice [as though actual science would somehow a) disagree with or b) be better than the simple fact that Jesus was 'smart enough' to have mandated separate cups if he had so desired!].

Obviously, the Word brought to the element makes the Sacrament, and not the vessel containing the element; for those, however, who might wish to receive the Lord's blood via the chalice or, indeed, have been doing so, but have worried about detrimental effects upon their health, perhaps the following studies will be helpful.

### Study 1 - Bride of Christ Pamphlet (1988) Quoted in CPH Altar Guild Manual

As noted at length in an appendix in the new Altar Guild Manual (CPH, 1996, authorized by the LCMS Commission on Worship), "the combinations of the noble metal of the chalice (such as gold or silver) and the alcohol content of the wine makes the possibility for germs to be transmitted almost nonexistent. Quoted is a pamphlet from *The Bride of Christ*, vol. XII, no. 3 entitled "The Common Cup and Disease":

Can I get sick from using the common cup? No! The use of the common cup was traditional in all Christian churches until this century and was eliminated because of fears about sanitary matters concerning the transmission of disease. The question about disease transmission is answered best by the scientific community. A thorough study on the use of the common cup was done by professors Burroughs and Hemmers in 1965 and was reported in the *Journal of Infectious Diseases*. Their conclusion was:

Experiments on the transmission of organisms from one person to another by common use of the chalice showed that 0.001% of the organisms transferred even under the most favorable conditions and when conditions approximated those of actual use, no transmission could be detected.

Recent concerns about the transmission of AIDS confirm this study. Dr. David Ho in the *New England Journal of Medicine* (December 1985) provided documentation that verified that there was no spread of the AIDS virus in saliva through common eating or drinking utensils. In effect, AIDS is spread only through sexual contact or the exchange of blood. No case of AIDS victims studied to date has shown any possibility of communicating the disease through saliva. Concerns about the chalice and AIDS are motivated more by fear than by scientific research, since no scientific research exists to connect the two.

It is through hands that most disease is transmitted, which makes Communion by intinction more prone to disease than receiving the common cup, since those who give the Sacrament touch both

the Host and Wine. And how many hands touch the “little glasses “? The alternative is to reject the command of Christ and refrain from Communion altogether.

Lutherans should remember that Martin Luther restored the cup when Roman Catholics had all but eliminated it from the peoples’ Communion. He did it because his loyalty was to the command of Christ in the Bible. The use of the common cup was normative until the late nineteenth century and was eliminated in those churches in which Communion was not understood as being the Body and Blood of Christ.

Some Lutherans allow other methods of distribution, believing that the method of distribution does not matter. However, the use of the common chalice retains that which Our Lord indicated was His desire. And its effect, where used, is to transmit not only salvation but also the oneness that comes from sharing the Blood of Christ from the Chalice in common with one’s sisters and brothers. All the faithful respond to Christ’s words: “*Then He took a cup, and when He had returned thanks, He gave it to them, ‘Drink all of you from this,’ He said.*” (St. Matthew 26:27, Jerusalem Bible)

The above is perhaps the best and most succinct explanation in distribution at this time. Since it was written in 1988, Dr. David Ho, mentioned in it, was named the “Man of the Year” by Time magazine for his AIDS research.

## **Study 2 - American Society for Microbiology (1997)**

In a study presented at the 97<sup>th</sup> General Meeting of the American Society for Microbiology, May 4-8, 1997 in Miami Beach, FL, Anne LaGrange Loving concluded:

*Holy Communion is not a health risk*  
(Paper Number: Q-298 Session Number: 208)

The potential risk of infection when one receives Holy Communion has been debated for more than a century, and investigated in numerous scientific studies. Although anecdotal information would seem to indicate that Christians who choose to receive the bread and wine are no less healthy than their fellow human beings who choose not to participate in Holy Communion, no recorded research was found in support of this hypothesis.

The detailed survey of 681 individuals compared illness rates among the following groups:

1. Christians who receive the sacraments
2. Those who go to church but do not receive
3. Individuals who do not attend Christian services

No significant difference in health was found among these groups, indicating that receiving Holy Communion as often as daily does not increase one's risk of infection.

In addition to supplying demographics, each participant answered detailed questions regarding respiratory, intestinal, skin, systemic and other illnesses, physical illnesses, and medications. Respondents also reported church attendance and participation in receiving the sacraments every week for ten weeks. The ages of the participants ranged from one year to 84 years, with the number of people living in the household ranging from one to 60 (0.1% of the participants were nuns, living in a convent). Attendance at church during the ten weeks ranged from zero visits to

71, and participation in Holy Communion ranged from zero to 71 times. The reported health of the participants ranged from no illness to being sick the entire ten weeks.

Structured statistical analyses of the data were performed, comparing church attendance/non-attendance, participation in the sacraments, reported illnesses, and number and ages of individuals living in the household. There were no differences between those who received the sacraments, those who attended church but did not receive, and those who never attended church.

Nuns and priests who attended church and received the sacraments as often as daily, including some who consumed the "dregs" at the end of Communion, showed no significant differences in health problems as compared with other respondents. Households with children reported illness more than those without children.

The findings of this study indicate that an individual is more likely to become ill when living with children under the age of 12 than when one attends church and receives the sacraments as often as every single day.

### **Study 3 - Center for Disease Control and Prevention (1998)**

For more than 2 decades, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has stated an official position to inquirers (eg, lay public, physicians, nurses, and other health care professionals) about the risk of infectious disease transmission from a common communion cup. In this letter, the CDC strives to achieve a balance of adherence to scientific principles and respect for religious beliefs.

Within the CDC, the consensus of the National Center for Infectious Diseases and the National Center for Human Immunodeficiency Virus, Sexually Transmitted Diseases, and Tuberculosis is that a theoretic risk of transmitting infectious diseases by using a common communion cup exists,(1-4) but that the risk is so small that it is undetectable.(5-8). The CDC has not been called on to investigate any episodes or outbreaks of infectious diseases that have been allegedly linked to the use of a common communion cup. However, outbreaks or clusters of infection might be difficult to detect if: (1) a high prevalence of disease (eg, infectious mononucleosis, influenza, herpes, strep throat, common cold) exists in the community, (2) diseases with oral routes of transmission have other modes of transmission (i.e., fecal-oral, hand-to-mouth/nose, airborne), (3) the length of the incubation period for the disease is such that other opportunities for exposure cannot be ruled out unequivocally, and (4) no incidence data exist for comparison purposes (ie, the disease is not on the reportable disease list and therefore is not under public health surveillance).

Experimental studies have shown that bacteria and viruses can contaminate a common communion cup and survive despite the alcohol content of the wine.(1-3) Therefore, an ill person or asymptomatic carrier drinking from the common cup could potentially expose other members of the congregation to pathogens present in saliva. Were any diseases transmitted by this practice, they most likely would be common viral illnesses, such as the common cold. However, a recent study of 681 persons found that people who receive Communion as often as daily are not at higher risk of infection compared with persons who do not receive communion or persons who do not attend Christian church services at all.(8)

In summary, the risk for infectious disease transmission by a common communion cup is very low, and appropriate safeguards--that is, wiping the interior and exterior rim between communicants, use of care to rotate the cloth during use, and use of a clean cloth for each

service--would further diminish this risk. In addition, churches may wish to consider advising their congregations that sharing the communion cup is discouraged if a person has an active respiratory infection (i.e., cold or flu) or moist or open sores on their lips (eg, herpes).

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Excerpted from American Journal of Infection Control (AJIC), 1998;26:538-40. Copyright 1998 by The Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology, Inc.

In summary, the witness of the scientific community has been and continues to be, that there is no indication of any greater infection among those who commune with the chalice than those who do not. In the words of Bougher:

Simply put, there is no scientific evidence whatsoever that drinking from the chalice in normal church use in any way contributes to the spread of any disease or illnesses. Further, little glasses/cups are not an alternative to supposed communication of disease, which is in reality a psychological manifestation of societal projection of attitudes upon the sacrament itself. (Bride of Christ, XXI, no. 4, Sept. 1997, p.3ff)

It is quite fascinating that on the one hand we trust science when it speaks concerning germs/disease and how we should appropriately respond, yet we question science (or hold on to our fears in spite of science)

when it tells us that there is simply nothing to worry about in taking the chalice. It is one thing to ponder the question if the findings of science disagree. But if Christ and science definitely agree, why is it nearly scandalous to suggest catechizing congregationally wide towards restoring the chalice and removing the individual cups. After all, many churches simply got rid of their chalices altogether when they decided to introduce individual cups. Why such the shock at the thought of doing it again in reverse?



### **THE PRACTICAL REALITY - *Exploding the Myth that Individual Cups are Necessarily “Safer”***

As noted above, it is quite a myth to assume that one is “more safe” taking the individual cups rather than the “Chalice.” Normally, the idea is that “Hey, if I drink from this individual cup I at least am controlling things and therefore have little/no risk of receiving infection from anyone else in doing so.” But in addition to the above three studies, here are several scenarios which demonstrate that one may also be running the risk of receiving germs when receiving the wine through the individual cups (and may, in fact be at greater risk in doing so).

Keep in mind that:

1. You are already trusting that the Altar Care individuals in handling both the individual cups and the chalice (as well as the wafers) washed their hands appropriately before doing so (and further that they did not touch other things during the process and then transfer such germs to the glasses)
2. Unlike the chalice (metal) you do have a potential problem with the mixture of the alcohol in the wine with either the individual cup (glass or plastic).
3. You are likewise trusting the pastor to have adequately washed his hands in his handling of the wafers during the distribution. When he hands a wafer to you (or places it on your tongue) he could very well be transferring germs from his hands to the wafer and thus to your hand, and/or mouth
4. If the pastor and/or deacon are handing you the individual glass, there is a good chance that at least a couple of their fingertips have touched the rim of the glass. The trays are quite small (and they have to be or you’d need 5 times the number of trays and that would be impractical). Thus you are trusting that the pastor and or elder/deacon has washed their hands. But of course, the last time they probably washed their hands was before the Service (if they remembered). After the Service began, they have at least been handling bulletins, hymnals, papers, and the like. However, there is also a good chance that they perhaps shook the hands of those entering the building on their way to the Divine Service and if a congregation practices the sharing of the peace, they may have shaken 15-20 hands or more, increasing the risk of germs exponentially.
5. If the communicants are the ones who pick the individual cups out of the tray you have an even greater potential germ problem. Instead of one person (i.e. pastor and/or elder/deacon) handling them besides for you, there is a good chance that because there is such little room between the cups, that when someone else before you was grabbing for a cup for themselves, they may have unintentionally touched the rim of the glasses around the one they took. This would mean that others fingertips (and fingertips are readily recognized to be more dirty than the whole hand in general), have perhaps touched the rim of the cup that you are going to drink from (and again, you don’t have the safeguard of the alcoholic content and the sterile metal environment as a safeguard).
6. If you receive the wafer in your hand and then put it in your mouth, you could also receive germs from the fact that it has been at least an hour or so since you washed your own hands, and perhaps

you have handled money (getting that cash out to put in the offering plate), driven to church with your hands on a dirty steering wheel, shaken other's hands before you entered the sanctuary or during the sharing of the peace (if your congregation practices this).



### **A TABLE DIVIDED – *The loss of “Communion”***

Today, nearly everyone has a handle on the idea of God's communication with the individual believer in the Sacrament. After all, how often don't we hear remarks (contra the historic practice of closed communion) such as “But what I receive/don't receive doesn't effect anyone but me anyway.” While perhaps understanding the vertical communion present in the Lord's Supper we have greatly lost our understanding of the horizontal communion.

My last year in seminary in Fort Wayne afforded my wife and I the opportunity to actually choose a church home for a year. During that year we went to Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church, an older congregation near downtown, a combination of both local blacks fairly new to Lutheranism and the old German multi-generation Lutherans who would still drive into downtown from the “burbs.” I will never forget the first time I communed there. I had never seen more than a handful of blacks in a given “white” church, nor a handful of whites in a given “black” church. Yet, here this congregation was evenly split between the two. Actually, they weren't split at all! There was a beautiful sense of “oneness” exhibited both spiritually and, in this case, even visually, when blacks and whites knelt next to one another at one communion rail where they were served from one chalice. I noticed this that first time (as it was a new experience) but soon I didn't even notice at all.

The sense of Holy Communion being a true communion of participants is perhaps only fully grasped in the mutual sharing of the one chalice. While it is impossible to completely gauge the effect that moving from the chalice to individual cups has had on the unity of the church, it certainly has not helped. If there is one place where we who confess the same truths should be as one it is at this most Holy Meal. We are one body – the Communion of Saints, just as we share and confess one faith. Receiving from the chalice not only fulfills Christ's command, but brings the blessing of oneness with other Christians living and dead to our lips and thus in to our already-lifted-up hearts. At the Lord's Table, if even for the only time during the week, social status, skin color, familial background, and even status in the church militant or church triumphant, should be forgotten, unessential, of zero importance. We are one!



### **CONCLUSION**

It is in my estimation a sad reality that the historic and scriptural innovation of individual cups has made its way into our churches to the point that, at least for many, the thought of using the Chalice is non-existent. However, fellow Lutherans should not be condemned who use individual glasses as a matter of course. They should be catechized though as to what they are doing and what has been given up. As with other salutary practices that have gone into disuse, such as the goal of restoring every Sunday Communion, we should not fail in encouraging our fellow Lutherans to continue to learn and teach why

they do what they do (or don't do). What should not pray God happen is that our congregations simply accept individual glasses a priori (without examination). Moreover, if the Chalice is reintroduced in a congregation the same degree of catechization needs to take place as well.

But to dismiss the use of the chalice as an adiaphora is to miss the point. Not only is the chalice closer to the manner in which Christ distributed the Supper, but it is preferable for the very reasons it has gone into disuse. We should constantly find ourselves asking: What best fits our theology? Which is most faithful?

Individual glasses:

1. are not scriptural. In spite of arguments over the validity of their use, none could disagree that they are definitely one step away from what our Lord actually did when He instituted this Holy Sacrament.
2. emphasize individualism at the expense of the biblical emphasis upon the unity of the Church as most intimately expressed in the Holy Communion.
3. are a concession to erroneous human concerns for germs, disease, etc., a concern that Christ did not have when He administered the first Holy Communion through a common Chalice, a concern which the Disciples did not have as they received it, and a concern that the witness of the church catholic and our Lutheran forefathers certainly never had.
4. were originally designed for Protestants who used grape juice instead of wine, and who deny the doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ in His own Supper.
5. are extremely difficult, cumbersome, and impractical to administer for a variety of reasons.

The Chalice:

1. is Scriptural. It is the exact method used by Christ and is what he was referring to when he said, "Drink of it all of you."
2. emphasizes the Biblical unity contrary to individualism.
3. is in line with the practice of Christ, the Disciples, the early church, the church catholic and our Lutheran forefathers, and as such is a confession of faith that Christ would not give us anything that would contain that which would bring illness
4. is more in line with the doctrine of the real presence and those churches that confess it.
5. is simple and practical to administer (especially compared to the individual cups/glasses).

I have rarely found an individual who, having learned and considered with an open mind, the nature of this debate, has not chosen the chalice when given the opportunity. God grant that such catechesis might be continued and promoted among us. If perhaps, more faithful and informed catechesis and reflection had been done before ceasing the use of the Chalice and the incorporation of individual glasses, much confusion might have been avoided.

But why do we search for reasons to not have the chalice instead of catechize each other in the reasons we have always had for using it? Let us dust them off and bring them back to use. Most congregations who don't use them still have them tucked away somewhere (after all you can't get rid of the chalice even if you don't actually want to use it :-). Let us unashamedly and without reservation defend the one, common Chalice as the scriptural and historically Lutheran way to administer the Blood of Christ to His faithful people and at the very least, where it is not offered, seek to re-introduce it (at least) along side individual cups so that those who do rightly understand its use, have faith in Christ's command, and desire it, are not denied such an opportunity simply because of the misunderstanding, and in some cases, lack of faith, of their brothers and sisters.

Seeking to restore this salutary scriptural, historic, and catholic practice is not about the law, as some might contend. If the use of the chalice was about the law, individual cups would never have been introduced in the first place. Rather, the Chalice is a symbol of grace, an emblem of the Gospel itself. It's restoration might just have salutary effects beyond our even wildest contemplation.

Ultimately, at the heart of the matter, it is a matter of faith. As John Stephenson points out:

“Sacred Scripture leaves us in no doubt that some have fallen sick and even died through their partaking of Holy Communion, while making it clear that unworthy Communion rather than deficient hygiene is to be regarded as the culprit (1 Cor. 11:30)

***What God ordains is always good.  
His loving tho't attends me;  
No poison can be in the cup  
That my Physician sends me.  
(TLH 521:3 / LW 422:3)***

