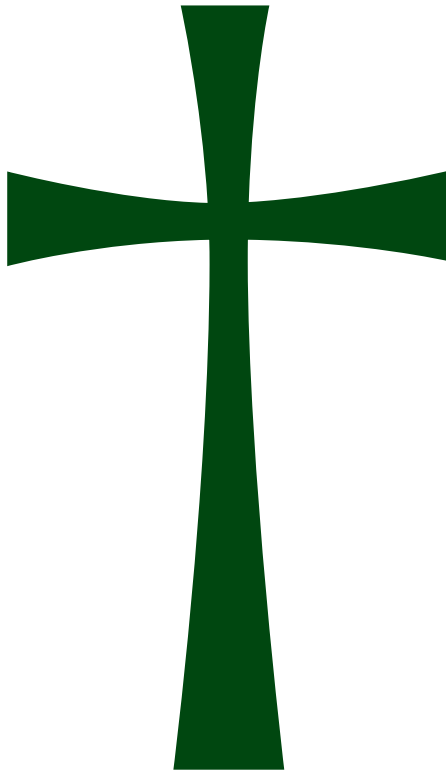


**A Short Summary of the
CLC Confession (1961)**
entitled
**CONCERNING CHURCH
FELLOWSHIP (CCF)**



The Church of the Lutheran Confession

www.clclutheran.org

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A Short Summary of the CLC Confession (1961)

entitled

CONCERNING CHURCH FELLOWSHIP (CCF)

This summary is prepared for use with the confession adopted in 1961. Scripture references not included will be found in the text of the CCF.

FOREWORD

Much has transpired since the original document on fellowship was adopted in 1961. However, the history of what inspired the original CCF is essential to understanding both the content and the tenor of the confession. In keeping therefore with other confessions of the Lutheran Church that are prefaced with an historical background, the reader is encouraged to read the foreword in the original confession.

Statement of Controversy

- 1 A disagreement has arisen on whether the Lord requires all Christians to be fully agreed on all teachings of His Word before joining in the exercise of church fellowship with one another.
- 2 Among those who agree that full agreement in all the doctrines of Scripture is necessary, disagreement has arisen on what degree of fellowship may nevertheless be tolerated with certain false teachers and groups so long as they do not blaspheme the Word of God. Under such circumstances some would allow limited fellowship. Others would not.

Purpose of this Confession

- 3 The purpose is to set forth the true teaching on these questions plainly and clearly, as well as to reject the false teachings that have arisen.

I. STATEMENT OF TRUE DOCTRINE

A. Need for Full Agreement

The Scriptural Standard of Unity

- 4 There is true unity within the Holy Christian Church (Galatians 3:28, John 17:21, Romans 12:5).
- 5 The issue is not the unity enjoyed within the Holy Christian Church, the members of which are known only to the Lord. When Paul addressed himself to errors in the Corinthian congregation, he spoke of divisions as actually existing among them. Such divisions undermine the witness of the church.
- 6 While there are different degrees of understanding and differences in manner of speaking among Christians on the earth, it is the Lord's will that the Truth spoken must always be one and the same (Romans 15:6).
- 7 There are no divisions in the Holy Christian Church, the Body of Christ. Thus there is to be no allowance for divisions in the church on earth. Christians are instructed to speak the same thing and be joined together in one mind and judgment in matters of doctrine and faith (1 Corinthians 1:10).

This Speaking Is Restricted to the Scriptures

- 8 The Holy Christian Church is to speak and confess the Word of God. Therefore as members of the Holy Christian Church, Christians on this earth are to speak and confess the Word of God faithfully and in truth (1 Peter 4:11, 1 John 1:3).
- 9 Confessing Christians on this earth are to reflect the witness of the early church and confess the apostolic doctrine steadfastly (Acts: 2:42, Acts 20:27, Deuteronomy 4:2).

The Scriptures Are Inerrant

- 10 Since the Scriptures are verbally inspired (God breathed) by the Holy

Ghost, they are different from any other book on earth. Inasmuch as they are God's Word and are the foundation of faith, only the Word of God (Divine Revelation) is to be proclaimed in the Church (2 Timothy 3:16, John 10:35, Romans 3:2, 1 Corinthians 2:13).

11 We reject the notion that Holy Scripture is not in all its parts the Word of God, or the idea that it is in part the Word of God and in part the word of man.

The Scriptures Are not to be Violated

12 Since the Scriptures are without error and are the foundation of what is to be taught in the church, nothing is to be added to or subtracted from the Word of God. The Lord tolerates no tampering with His Word (Proverbs 30:5ff, Revelation 22:18).

The Scriptures Are Clear

13 By their own testimony the Scriptures are clear. Where they seem to be unclear, the fault lies not with Scripture, but with the perversity of men, the inability of men to understand, or the unwillingness of men to bow to the Word. We study Scripture itself to understand the meaning of difficult passages (Psalm 119: 105,130, John 8:31-32, 1 Timothy 1:7).

All Aberrations Are Condemned

14 The Word of God is Truth. What is false is not to be mixed with Truth. The Lord condemns any teaching contrary to what He has given in Scripture and pronounces His wrath upon any who would teach contrary to the Word (Jeremiah 23:28, 2 Timothy 1:13, 1 Timothy 1:3, Galatians 1:9, Psalm 119:53).

15 Error is error. Scripture makes no distinction between a small error and a great error. All the doctrines of Scripture are interrelated. One who makes a distinction between what he defines as a small error or a great error is showing an attitude of disrespect to God and His Word.

B. Separation from All Who Deviate from the Word

16 Christians are to separate themselves (practice no religious fellowship) from all who deviate from, or deny the doctrines of Scripture. The Lord has given this directive for the sake of protecting and preserving His Word among us, since it is the only source of faith, life, and salvation.

Summary of Our Belief

17 We agree on this subject with the 1932 *Brief Statement* of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LC-MS)- Article 28 (1 Peter 4:11, 1 Timothy 6:3-4, John 8:31-32, Matthew 5:15, Romans 16:17, 2 John 9:10, 2 Timothy 2:17-21).

Two Kinds of Churches

18 On this earth, there are two kinds of churches—heterodox, and orthodox. A heterodox church teaches contrary to the Word of God. An orthodox church teaches in accord with the Holy Word of God and administers the Sacraments as instituted by Christ (Acts 20: 29-30, 1 Corinthians 11:19).

19 While we acknowledge that there are children of God in heterodox churches where Christ and His Gospel are still proclaimed, such reality is not excuse or permission to set aside any part of God's Word (1 Corinthians 11:19).

Christians Are to Test all Churches

20 What is taught in any church is to be compared to and measured by the Scriptures. Truth and/or error is not determined by subjective opinion but by the Word of God. What is contrary to the God's Word is to be rejected along with the false teachers proclaiming it (1 John 4: 1, Matthew 7:15).

...and Are to Act Accordingly

21 False teaching and false teachers are to be avoided because of the dangers to the faith. Christians on earth are to have fellowship only with those teachers and fellowships where the Word of God is taught in its truth and the Sacraments administered according to Christ's institution (Romans 16:18, 1 Timothy 6:3-5, 2 John 10).

22 As we are to avoid any false teaching because it is dangerous to our faith, it follows that Truth and error are incompatible as light and darkness, and therefore church fellowship with any open deniers of God's Word is to be avoided (2 Corinthians 6: 14- 18).

23 Since God is not the author of that which is false, what is false is of the devil and divides the church on earth because it opposes Truth. For

that reason we are to avoid all error regardless of its source, as well as those who teach falsely.

24 When it is determined that teachers—as well as heterodox churches—adhere to and promote false teaching alongside true doctrine, they are to be avoided for the protection of faith (Romans 16:17).

The Confession Is the Basis

25 All believers in Christ are members of the Holy Christian Church.

However, since we cannot read the heart, church fellowship—prayer, altar, pulpit, church work—is to be practiced only among and between such as publicly are of one confession.

26 Faith born of the Spirit creates brothers within the Holy Christian Church. But since church membership identifies one with the teaching and practice of a particular church, we are to practice fellowship only with such as identify with us in that church in which the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity (Romans 10:10, 1 Corinthians 4:5).

27 While brothers in the Holy Christian Church, on earth we acknowledge and identify brotherhood with such as “continue in the teachings which we have learned.” The basis of fellowship is not the faith in the heart, but what is actually *publicly* confessed (1 John 4:2-3).

28 Fellowship and spiritual brotherhood are not identical. We acknowledge that there may be believers in Christ in a heterodox fellowship, even as there may be hypocrites in an orthodox fellowship. The refusal of fellowship with heterodox churches is a reminder to believers among the heterodox to come out from among them.

This Includes All Who Deviate

29-30 Any error is a threat to faith and to those who are in heterodox churches. As error undermines Truth, those who sit at the feet of false teachers are in danger of losing the Word altogether, as well as putting their salvation in jeopardy. Therefore the Lord instructs Christians to avoid false teachers (Galatians 5:9, 2 Timothy 2:17-19).

Such Exclusivism is Evangelical

31-32 The practice of true fellowship (avoiding the false teacher and his error) is considered by many to be loveless. However it is in fact an act of love, since at the heart of true fellowship practice is love for the Word of God, as well as concern for the salvation of souls for whom Jesus died and whose salvation He desires Romans 5:18).

Wrong Exclusivism Rejected

33 If separation from errorists is born of pride or a sense of superiority, such exclusivism is wrong. Any separation should have the interest of God's glory at heart, as well as the continuation of the pure Gospel and the love of souls as its only motivation.

Examples from Scripture

34-41 Scripture gives many examples of "separation for the sake of preservation." It also points out consequences of the failure to avoid, and the dangers of compromise with error and idolatry and with those who practice the same Genesis 6:1ff, Joshua 20, Judges 2).

C. All Manifestations of Fellowship Are Involved

42 Three manifestations of the exercise of fellowship are pulpit, altar, and prayer. The activities are different. The purpose is the same—to glorify the Lord and to edify those who are participating in such fellowship.

43-44 All manifestations of fellowship in the church are born of the Word of God and are rightly considered an expression of unity in the Word of God. Therefore all fall under the instruction of the Lord to be of one faith in the expression of them (Acts 2, Acts 4).

45 When speaking of avoiding church fellowship with those who deviate from the Word, we are not speaking of activities in purely secular matters, though we will want to be careful particularly when a clear-cut confession is called for. In all circumstances we want to guard against causing confusion (*Concordia Triglotta*, Formula of Concord [Article 10]).

D. Suspension of Established Fellowships

46 Established or existing fellowships are to be terminated when it is ascertained (determined) that a person or group is teaching contrary to the Word of God, causing divisions and offenses in the church through false teaching and practice.

47 The only true basis for fellowship is unity in the Word and doctrines of Scripture. Worshiping and communing together where there is not such unity is itself contrary to Scripture and to God's express command (Acts 20:30).

48 Patience, love, and admonition are called for in times of difficulty in the church. However, when it has been ascertained that false doctrine is present, and teachers are in fact not weak brethren but are publicly teaching contrary to the Word of God, the Lord instructs us to avoid both the error and the false teacher.

II. REJECTION OF FALSE DOCTRINE

A. Limiting the Extent of the Application

49 Refutation (setting forth the opposite) of counter-arguments to the proper exercise of fellowship as we believe and teach it from Holy Scripture.

(Limited) to Non-Christian Bodies

50 Some who mingle truth with error still confess that Jesus is the Lord but they do not define what they mean by the statement, "Jesus is Lord." Whatever they mean, mingling truth with error is contrary to God's Word.

(Limited) to Those Who Deny Redemption

51 Some restrict the separation principle to those who deny the doctrine of redemption of sinners. Since all of Scripture is God's Word, it is contrary to Scripture to count some doctrines as more important than others in applying the principle of separation.

(Refutation of Arguments)

Argument from John 17

52 The Lord was not speaking of external (outward) union of churches as some suggest, but of the unity of faith which is manifest within the HCC.

On "Strength"

53 The argument that the church is stronger if it unites is not true when such union denies or compromises the Word of God.

54 It is error to suggest that the goal of the Church is to fight social ills. The commission of the Church is to proclaim the Gospel of salvation, the effectiveness of which lies in the Word and promise of God, not the power or size of organizations.

On "National Interest"

55-57 The Church is not identified in Scripture with a particular nation or government. Nevertheless, disobedience to the Word of God brings down God's wrath upon a nation. The church serves the welfare of the nation when it remains faithful to God's Word.

(Limited) to Those Who Err in Fundamental Doctrines

58-59 The distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental doctrines is of human origin. While the distinction is appropriate, both are still the Word of God. As such it is error to suggest that the separation principle is to be applied differently when speaking of a fundamental doctrine as compared to a non-fundamental doctrine.

60 Indifference toward non-fundamental doctrines denies the clarity of Scripture and allows equal status to error. In the context of fellowship, no allowance can be made for teaching falsely with respect to any word of God (2 Corinthians 11:2-3).

Limitations in Connection with Established Fellowships

61 Separation is to take place based on the false teaching and practice that is identified and established. That the errorist is still ready to discuss the doctrine in dispute and/or listen to admonition is not reason to continue in fellowship. We are to avoid the errorist (Romans 16:17).

(Refutation of Arguments)

Argument Concerning “Weak Brethren”

62-63 We are to deal patiently and in love with weak brethren – those who may not understand the issue, or who may be weak in understanding of doctrine, or may be confused. But we distinguish between those who are weak and those who teach and defend error.

64 We will not separate from those who are weak and who are still disciples and learners. We must separate from those who teach, promote, and defend error.

65 Care is to be exercised before identifying a teacher as a “false teacher.” While it may take time to make that determination, when it is determined that one is a false teacher, admonition within a fellowship relationship ceases. We are to follow the Lord’s injunction to avoid.

66 It is not loveless to separate from those who teach falsely. Our first exercise of love is owed to the Lord, to His Word, and to the sheep and lambs whose faith is endangered by those who undermine faith by their false teaching (2 Thessalonians 3:14-15).

Concerning the Examples of Jesus

67-68 Jesus spoke clearly and emphatically against the false teachers. He did not tolerate false Jewish notions. Jesus died on the cross because

of His “exclusivism.” Jesus did not fellowship with errorists, but denounced them (John 5:38, John 7:28, John 8:21-24, Matthew 16:6-11).

From Ephesians 4

69 One who separates in accord with God’s Word from an errorist is not guilty of transgressing the teaching of this passage. They who cause the division through their false teaching are guilty of transgressing it (Romans 16:17).

From Matthew 18

70 Trying to establish impenitence of a sinner may take time. Permitting a false teacher (errorist) to spread his error endangers the souls of those who sit at his feet. The command to avoid a false teacher is not to be equated with trying to establish impenitence.

71 In the context of separation, we are not called to determine whether the false teacher intends to pursue his course. That is beyond our ability. We are to avoid based on the fact that false teaching is being taught, promoted, and defended.

72 While we are always to have concern for the erring one and correct him, such concern does not negate God’s Word which instructs us to have no fellowship with the errorist or his error (Titus 3:10, Matthew 7:6).

73 Satan does not demand that truth be silenced, only that error be given equal hearing. The errorist and false churches are always ready to listen to admonition because such a forum gives them opportunity to promote their false teaching.

Summary

74 All are to be avoided when it is clear that they are causing divisions and offenses.

B. Limiting the Intensiveness of the Application

(Limited) to Joint Worship Services

75-77 Honest confession demonstrates loyalty to the Lord. We owe such testimony to the false teacher as well as to those in heterodox churches. Loyalty to the Lord and concern for our neighbor is not limited to the worship service but to all religious exercise.

(Limited) to Prayer, but Not Joint Prayer

78-80 Prayer is prayer whether done occasionally or regularly. Prayer is worship. Joint prayer is a joining together in imploring and worshipping God; it therefore falls under the directive of separating from errorists (Matthew 18:19-20, 2 John 8:11).

“Cooperation in Externals”

81 While it may be possible to work together with heterodox churches in secular matters, such activity harbors the danger of causing confusion and offense. Where such cooperation becomes a cover for working together in religious matters it is deceitful and wrong.

Fellowship without Complicity

82 Worship or church work with the heterodox when a doctrine is not involved or mentioned or at stake, or without approval of the error, is still identifying with the errorist who is to be avoided because of his false teaching.

External Worship without Heart Fellowship

83-84 The exercise of fellowship is necessarily external—fellowship is practiced on what we hear and see. We do not practice fellowship on what we think is in another’s heart.

Protesting Fellowship

85-88 When it is unclear whether or not a questionable doctrine or practice has taken hold, one may enter what is called a protesting

fellowship while the “protester” watches, counsels, and warns against the error and so long as it is not a cover for “business as usual.” A protest to delay avoiding when the issue is clear is contrary to God’s instruction in Romans 16:17, 18.

SUMMARY

89 We reject and condemn anything that is not in accord with the doctrine of fellowship set forth from the Word of God.

IN CONCLUSION

Though separated in this life from such as teach contrary to the Word of God, we thank the Lord for the union and unity all believers in Christ share and enjoy in the Holy Christian Church.

EPITOME

Consult Concerning Church Fellowship. The Epitome is the original summary of the substance of the confessional document adopted in 1961, and found on pages 40-43.

The Board of Doctrine has also prepared a booklet “Our Glorious Fellowship in Christ.” It is available through the CLC Book House.



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