

A Little Bread, A Little Wine: Communion Practices





**Why is
Holy Communion
important to you?**

**What does it mean
for your faith?**

Historical Practices

Early Church

- Communed infants for the first 1000 years; a symbolic sense of holy initiation into the Body of Christ at baptism
- Fear in the Western church that the blood of Christ would be spilled; wine taken away from the laity

Historical Practices

Martin Luther

- Upset that the people were just watching the practice of Holy Communion from afar
- Insistent that God is going to come to us in ways that we can understand and not in a mystical fashion. Argued that the bread and the wine are signs of God's real presence.
- Favored weekly communion

Historical Practices

21st Century

- Frequency
 - 1940s – 4 times/year
 - 1960s – monthly
 - Today – weekly, every other week



**How old were you
when you first received
Holy Communion?**

**What do you
remember?**



The Gospels: Mark 14, Matthew 26, Luke 22, John 6
Paul: 1 Corinthians 11

1 Corinthians 11

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread,²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'²⁵ In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.



**Lutheran Confessions: The Small Catechism
The Large Catechism
Solid Declaration**

The Large Catechism

Therefore let all heads of a household remember that it is their duty, by God's injunction and command, to teach their children or have them taught the things they ought to know. Because they have been baptized and received into the people of Christ, they should also enjoy this fellowship of the sacrament so that they may serve us and be useful. For they must all help us believe, to love, to pray, and to fight against the devil.



Official Documents: 1969 Joint Commission (ALC, LCA, LCMS)

The Joint Commission of 1969

Children should be taught about Holy Communion at the level of understanding at which they are at. The stage of maturity needed in order to be prepared for this sacrament is generally reached at the fifth grade level.

However, the age for First Communion should be chosen on the basis of the children themselves, who being baptized into God's family need to live and grow there, making use of all resources God gives them. The church should invite to Holy Communion those baptized children who have been prepared and who then in the pastoral judgment of the congregation are ready to participate in the sacrament.



**Official Documents: 1997 The Use of the Means of Grace:
A Statement on the Practice of Word & Sacrament**

The Use of the Means of Grace

Since the 1969 adoption of the Joint Commission report, a number of congregations have continued to lower the age of communion, especially for school age children.

In all cases, participation in Holy Communion is accompanied by catechesis appropriate to the age of the communicant. When infants and young children are communed, the parents and sponsors receive instruction and the children are taught throughout their development.



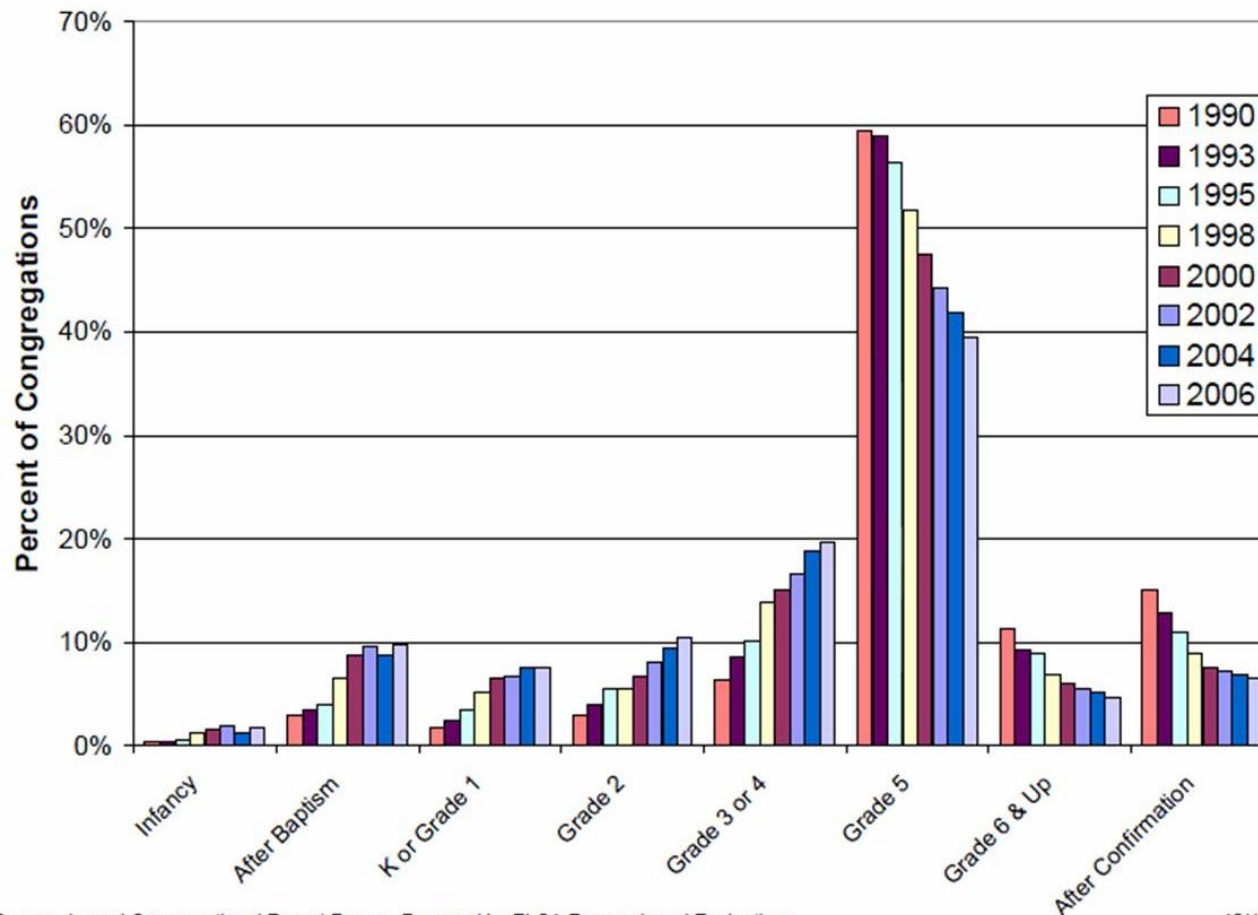
**Official Documents: 1997 The Use of the Means of Grace:
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The Use of the Means of Grace

There is no command from our Lord regarding the age at which people should be baptized or first communed. Our practice is defined by Christ's command ('Do this'), Christ's twin promises of his presence for us and for our need, and the importance of good order in the Church. In all communion practices congregations strive to avoid both reducing the Lord's Supper to an act effective by its mere performance without faith and narrowing faith to intellectual understanding of Christ's presence and gifts. Congregations continually check their own practices and statements against these biblical and confessional guides.

ELCA Congregations

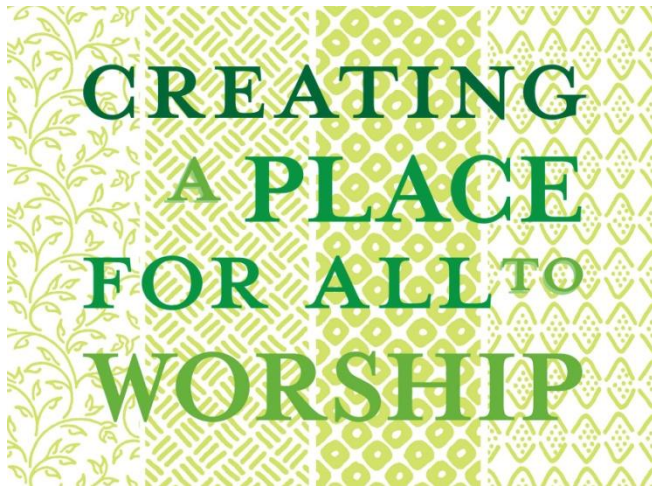
Age at First Communion for ELCA Congregations



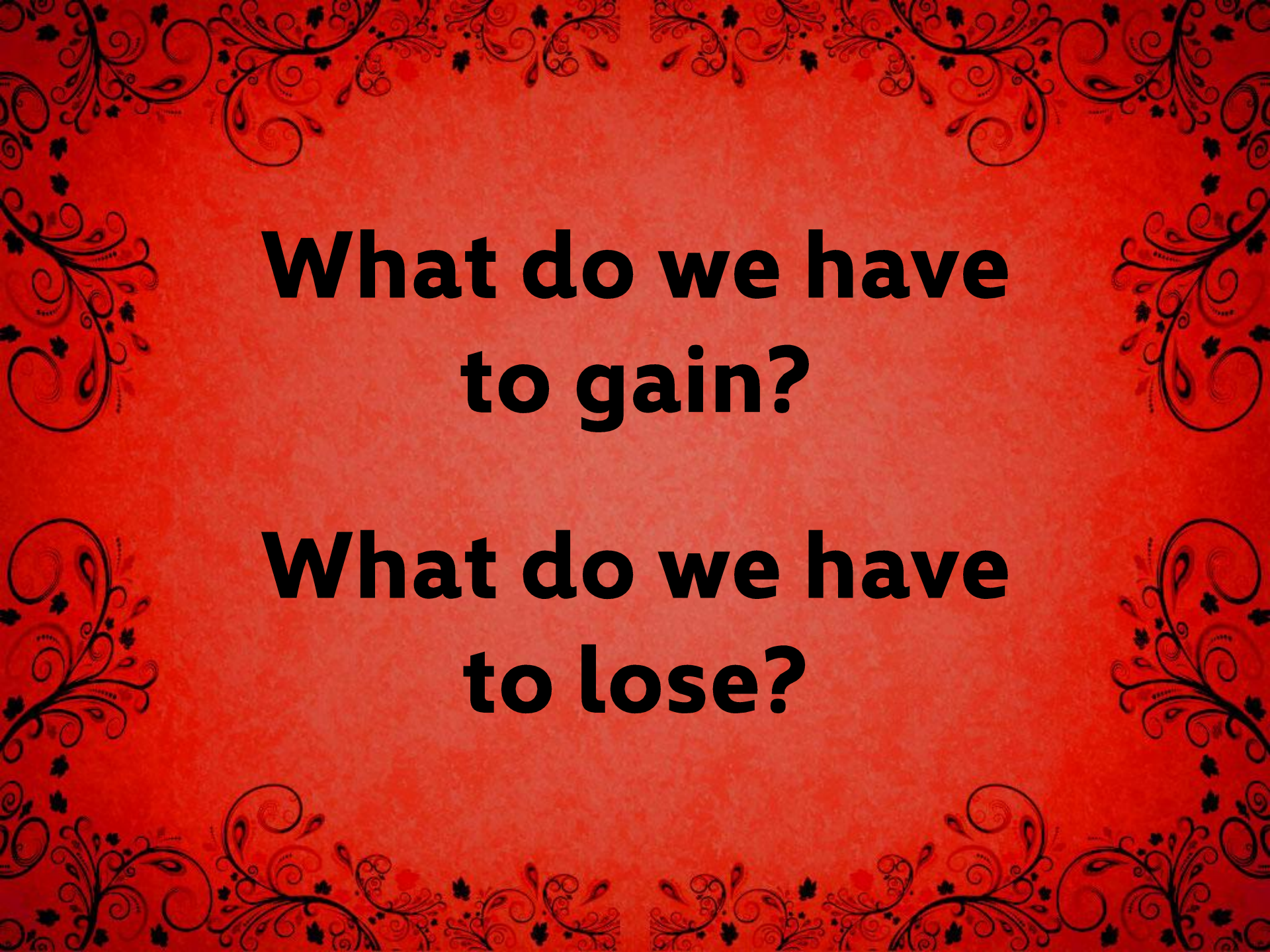
ELCA in Rochester

- Zumbro 5th grade class
about 10-12 families with younger children communing
- Bethel** 5th grade class
- Gloria Dei invite parent/child to meet with pastor (as of this year)
still milestone ministry at 5th grade
- Good Shepherd** open table for all ages
2nd grade class
- Mount Olive open table for all ages
periodic classes for parents/children
- Our Savior's** open table for all ages
4th grade class
- Hosanna 5th grade class
- People of Hope** open table for all ages
individual conversations with parent/child/pastor

What are we doing?



Council	Fall 2011
Adult Forum	January 2012
Youth Ed Team	February 2012
Zumbro Current	March 2012
Listening Posts	March 2012



**What do we have
to gain?**

**What do we have
to lose?**

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It should be clear that at no time in the individual's life is he completely competent to receive the sacrament in a worthy manner. Every time Communion is offered, the individual finds himself changed; the sacrament comes as a new experience to him where he is.