



May 28, 2023

Dear Southwood Family,

Your elders want to share with you about some upcoming changes to the way we celebrate the Lord's Supper at Southwood. This sacrament is one of the most important ways we "feed the sheep" because it so powerfully and personally connects us to the Good Shepherd who gave his life for us. The Lord's Supper is also one of our favorite ways as elders that we get to share in his grace with you as we serve the elements, pray with, and speak to you and your children. These changes are not driven by conviction that we are doing things "wrong" at the present time but rather by the desire to feed the sheep more effectively, as our Good Shepherd would have us.

Frequency of Celebration

As I said in this morning's sermon, it is largely in light of this goodness of the Lord's Supper and the wonder of God ministering his grace to us through the shared meal that we have decided to celebrate the sacrament more often as part of our worship services. Presently we celebrate the Lord's Supper monthly (on the second Sunday) plus at some other special services (e.g. Maundy Thursday, Christmas Eve). The primary change will be to add another Sunday each month where we celebrate the Lord's Supper, thereby roughly doubling our frequency and celebrating the Lord's Supper approximately every other Sunday. We will continue celebrating on the second Sunday of the month and typically add the fourth Sunday as well.

With our current schedule, it doesn't take much more than a sick child one week, a week serving in the nursery, and a work trip or vacation another week to leave one missing the Lord's Supper entirely for several months. We hope that the more frequent celebration of the sacrament will aid in our members receiving more regularly this means of God's grace and so being strengthened more helpfully to live with and for Jesus.

We also want you to know that we will be evaluating the impact this has on our hearts and would greatly value your feedback in the weeks ahead. We want prayerfully to encourage all of us to regular, heartfelt, and meaningful engagement in the Lord's Supper and don't believe God directs the exact frequency in his Word. As a result, this could mean what is best for the honor of Christ and the hearts of the sheep at Southwood is maintaining this new schedule, returning to our monthly schedule (as some other churches do), or increasing to weekly celebration (as yet other churches do). Please let us know any thoughts or experiences you have as we continue to evaluate this practice (as always, you can reach all of us simultaneously at elders@southwood.org).

Elements

As we have considered our celebration of the Lord's Supper, we have also considered the elements we use – the bread and the cup that are signs for us of the body and blood of Jesus. The bread Jesus used to celebrate the Passover would have been unleavened as part of a

reminder of God's deliverance of his people from Egypt in that great act of redemption. Many are surprised to know that the bread we have used for many years at Southwood is unleavened and happens to taste quite good, which aids our celebration, too! So, the bread will continue to be the same with the addition of a gluten-free option labelled at a central table in both the front of the sanctuary and the back.

The same grape juice will likewise be served in the same cups in the same communion trays. The only change with the elements will be the addition of wine in purple cups, which will be in the inner rings of each tray and labelled to distinguish it clearly from the juice. This will help our children, any members struggling with alcohol abuse, and any others preferring juice for any reason to know which cups contain which drink. Regardless of which drink one chooses, you should not feel you are missing out on the full experience of the Supper, as you are not. The Spirit unites you to God and one another by faith in Christ as we celebrate together.

In light of that reality, you may wonder why bother adding wine as an option at all. A brief answer is that Jesus instituted this Supper with wine, and it's clear the early Church celebrated this way as, for example, those who drank too much at the Supper in Corinth were chastised for getting drunk (I Corinthians 11:21). This continued to be the typical practice through church history until the Prohibition era in 1920's America. While we believe grape juice is appropriate as a substitute for wine in the sacrament, wine does well represent the bitter and sweet aspects of our Savior's death on the cross, so that we remember both the bitterness of his paying the penalty for our sins (Revelation 16:19) and the sweetness of joy his forgiveness brings to our hearts (Psalm 104:15). In summary, we are not seeking to placate personal taste or be cool or relevant to culture; rather, we are seeking to be faithful to God's Word while remaining considerate of all our brothers, sisters, and young people who celebrate the Supper with us.

We did not use wine in our celebration of the Lord's Supper this morning so as not to surprise or unsettle anyone unnecessarily. We love you and want to give you opportunity to process any questions or concerns you may have with a pastor, elder, or Women's Advisory Team member. Two-way communication is often so much more helpful than one-way letters like this one! If you want to learn more about the Lord's Supper, watch/listen to this morning's sermon at southwood.org or ask me to share with you some of the material we've used to help us work through these decisions. We look forward to continuing to celebrate (even more often!) this great and gracious meal with our God and with you in the days ahead.

Grace and Peace in Christ,



Will Spink, Senior Pastor
For the Southwood Session