

Lent, Reformation 500th, and Confession/Absolution

On the back of the tri-fold insert tucked into the worship bulletin each week, under the section entitled “**During Your Time in the Lord’s House**” is a standing invitation to “**Confession & Absolution**”. It reads: “Individual confession and absolution, pastoral care and spiritual counsel are available by request to one of the pastors.”

As a Lutheran congregation, Confession/Absolution is *always* available — it is the Gospel itself! — even as it stands at the very beginning of every Divine Service. With the onset of the 40-day penitential season of Lent (Ash Wednesday, March 1st) and its theme of repentance and renewal—and since we are rejoicing with the whole Church at the **500th Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation**—it is certainly “good, right and proper” for us to hold out and hold up this immeasurable gift from our Lord Jesus for the life of every Christian.

From Martin Luther’s *Large Catechism* (part VI) [“When I urge you to go to confession, I am simply urging you to be a Christian”] and the very first of his *95 Theses* [“When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent’ (Matt 4:17), He willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance”], the faith-life of the Christian is described simply, and fully, as *repentance*. And since it is taught in the Lutheran Church that private confession and absolution should be retained and not wickedly allowed to fall into disuse (see *Augsburg Confession XI, Apology to the Augsburg Confession XIII*), we encourage it as a regular habit for the Christian just as we teach it from the *Small Catechism*.

Faith comes *to us* (from *outside* of us!) by hearing the voice of the Lord (Rom. 10, John 10). He speaks to us by His Word which He delivers through His Church and Ministry. In Holy Absolution, we hear Christ Himself speaking the forgiveness of sins (see the *Divine*

Service, John 20, and *Apology XIII*) and, “This is just as valid and certain, even in heaven, as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself” (Luther, *Small Catechism V*) because it is He alone who deals with us!

For your pastors, and many others at St. Paul’s, individual confession and absolution is a regular part of our life in Christ. If the practice is new to you, don’t be frightened off by unfamiliarity. We follow the simple, brief order found in our *Lutheran Service Book* (p. 292) which is based on the rite you learned in Luther’s *Small Catechism*. The pastor will be happy to guide you through it, and he is, of course, ordered and obligated to respect the confidential nature of what is confessed.

A proper preparation for private confession (as well as for “Confession and Absolution” in the weekly *Divine Service*) is self-examination using God’s Law which you know from the Ten Commandments and the “Table of Duties” in the back of the *Small Catechism*, as well as to pray one of the penitential psalms that God provides (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, or 143—one for each day of the week!). Then come gladly, without compulsion, to unburden your heart and mind of the sin that troubles you that you might rejoice to receive God’s “absolution, that is, forgiveness, from the pastor as from God Himself, not doubting but firmly believing that by it our sins are forgiven before God in heaven” (SC V).

During the season of Lent, a pastor will be available for individual confession and absolution in the chapel each Wednesday from 5:45 to 6:30 pm (prior to the midweek Lenten service) and by appointment (as usual).

Pastor Peter C. Cage