

Back to In-Person Work Group Statement on Holy Communion

While the pandemic has prevented us from gathering for in-person worship, and while a moratorium is in place for online Communion, there is a hunger for the Eucharist in our congregations, a hunger to experience Christ's presence in this sacrament that changes us through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We recognize that there also are challenges to celebrating the sacrament of Holy Communion, both theologically and practically, during this time.

Theologically, we know that this sacrament is a powerful means of experiencing God's grace, love, forgiveness, nourishment, and sustenance. Holy Communion is a communal act of worship, in which the gathered community of faith remembers Christ's redeeming sacrificial love, confesses its sins, gives thanks for God's divine grace, and experiences a foretaste of the kingdom of God. We believe that just as God's grace is offered to all people, likewise the Lord's Table open to all people.

Due to the restrictions of the number of people permitted for in-person worship, not all people can be invited to come to the Lord's Table. Additionally, clergy are not able to extend the table to persons gathered in their homes. Fortunately, while we are not able to fully gather together in person, we also have other acts of worship which invite us to participate in confession, thanksgiving, and remembrance.

In congregations where the Eucharist may now be shared, we believe intentional steps should be taken to do no harm when celebrating the sacrament. Therefore, we call upon churches to utilize these practical ways to safely preside and serve Holy Communion during Stages 1 and 2:

For Indoor Worship

- Only pre-packaged communion elements should be used. For example:
<https://www.christianbook.com/christianbook-prefilled-communion-cups-box-100/pd/96133?event=ESRCQ>
- The communion table should be prepared by volunteers using gloves and face masks/coverings.
- Pre-packaged Communion elements should be on the Communion table during the service and Communion liturgy.
- Churches are encouraged to also include a loaf of bread and cup of juice on the Communion table to be visibly blessed, broken, and lifted by the Presider
- The Communion table should be at least 6 feet from where worshippers are seated.
- The Presider must wear gloves and face mask/covering.
- Following the consecration of elements, the pre-packaged communion elements should be moved to a table near the exit(s) for worshippers to receive as they leave (using a tray or other container to move them from the communion table without touching them).

- Worshippers will pick up the pre-packaged communion elements as they leave the worship space (these should not be handed out by volunteers/staff, as the 6 feet social distancing would be challenging).
- Before partaking of the elements, worshippers should practice good hand hygiene.
- Worshippers are invited to partake of the elements once they are in their cars, where they can safely remove their masks, and are asked to dispose of the packages at their homes.
- If worshippers cannot practice safe hand hygiene or are not able to open pre-packaged Communion elements in their cars, they are invited to do so at home.
- Churches should make sure to offer pre-packaged gluten-free elements for those with gluten allergies/sensitivities.
- Worshippers may take consecrated elements to members of their immediate household who are unable to attend worship, as an extension of the Lord's Table.

For Drive-In Worship

To safely consecrate and distribute elements, we recommend two options:

1) Churches may provide pre-packaged Communion elements, to be consecrated and distributed as described above in the indoor worship practices. The consecrated pre-packaged elements should be moved to a table near exits after being consecrated where worshippers are invited to take elements and place offerings as they depart.

2) Churches may also invite worshippers to bring elements from home and follow these practices for consecrating and receiving. If churches invite worshippers to bring elements from home, please also consider how to have elements safely available for any who arrive at worship without elements, so that all may receive the sacrament (i.e. pre-packaged as described above, or other safely prepared elements as determined by HCT). These elements should be made available at the entrance to the parking lot for pickup before the service begins, so that in the service, everyone may partake of the elements at the same time.

- Worshippers should arrive at worship having brought their own bread and grape juice, as well as any necessary cups and plates needed to assure that the elements of Communion are handled reverently.
- Once the Presider has consecrated the elements, the worshippers will be directed to receive the bread and juice while remaining inside their vehicles.
- The elements on the Communion table blessed, broken and lifted by the Presider in the Great Thanksgiving should not be distributed to the congregation.
- Worshippers may take consecrated elements to members of their immediate household who are unable to attend worship as an extension of the Lord's Table.

- If worshippers cannot practice safe hand hygiene or open pre-packaged Communion elements in their cars, they are invited to do so at home and partake of the consecrated elements there.
- Worshippers should be mindful to reverently dispose of any unused bread or juice by (1) direction to consume them in a reverent manner following the service; (2) returning them to the earth by pouring (2 Samuel 23:16), burying, scattering, or burning.¹

Health and safety should be paramount as we gather as the community of the baptized during this time of global pandemic. It is our prayer that during these unusual and imperfect times, we may celebrate the sacrament of Holy Communion in ways that wisely reveal our witness to Christ our Great Physician. Together we are praying that the day will come soon when we can all safely gather as the Body of Christ.

¹ See *This Holy Mystery: A United Methodist Understanding of Holy Communion*, p. 32.