understand the full significance of family meals, but we feed them at our family tables and at Christ's family table. Young children experience love by being fed and can sense the difference between being included and excluded. Parents should decide when it is time for a young child to begin to participate in Holy Communion.

What about food allergies and health or hygiene concerns?

United Methodist churches may include rice cakes or gluten-free bread as an option for persons who have gluten intolerance. Be sure to let the pastor know if you have such a need.

United Methodists recognize the health and hygiene concerns of people who participate in Holy Communion. Special care is taken to ensure that plates and cups are clean and that all servers wash their hands before sharing the elements.

Learn more about it . . .

For more information about Holy Communion in The United Methodist Church, speak to a United Methodist pastor or:

- Read "This Holy Mystery: A United Methodist Understanding of Holy Communion," the report on Holy Communion adopted by The United Methodist Church's highest legislative body, the General Conference. The report is available for download at http://www.gbod.org/worship. Click on the "Sacraments" link, then on the report title.
- Go to http://www.umc.org and enter the word *Communion* in the search window; or go to http://www.gbod.org/worship and enter the phrase *Lord's Supper / Communion* in the search window.
- Read *Eucharist: Christ's Feast with the Church* by Laurence Hull Stookey (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), available at 1-800-672-1789, http://www.cokesbury.com, or at your local Cokesbury store.

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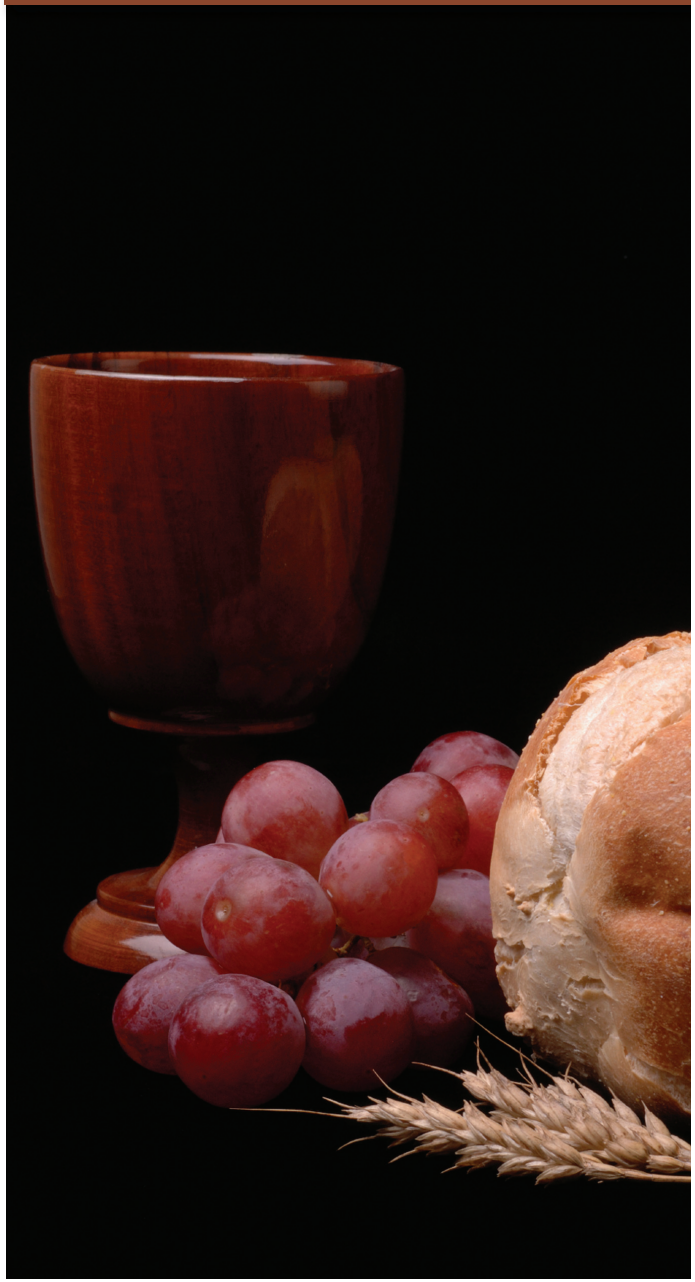
Communion and United Methodists



Communion and United Methodists

Holy Communion is a sacrament.

The word *sacrament* comes from a Latin word for *vow* or *promise* and a Greek word for *mystery*. Sacraments are ritual practices that connect us to the mystery of God's love and grace and call us to respond in faith. While there are many ways of opening to the love and grace of God, United Methodists recognize two rituals as sacraments: baptism and Holy Communion. These are the only two practices that Jesus specifically commands in the Gospels (see Matthew 28:19-20; Luke 22:14-21). Baptism is our welcome to the family of Christ; Holy Communion sustains and nourishes us on our journey of faith.

What is Holy Communion?

Holy Communion is the meal of bread and drink (cup) shared by the family of Christ that opens us to the power and presence of the Holy Spirit and reminds us of Christ's sacrifice in giving up his body and shedding his blood to show us the way to freedom and eternal life. It nourishes and sustains us as we seek to live as faithful disciples (followers) of Christ. It is a celebration of our life together as the living body of Christ in and for the world.

According to three of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), on the night before Jesus was arrested and later killed, he gathered with his followers and began this sacred tradition by sharing with them bread and wine, everyday foods of that time. He told them (and us) that whenever they eat bread, they should remember that his body was broken for them; whenever they drink wine, they should remember his blood poured out as a sign of the new covenant (holy agreement) between God and humanity—a covenant of forgiveness of sins and new life in becoming like Christ through the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit.

Why do United Methodists call the sharing of bread and cup by different names—Lord's Supper, Holy Communion, and Eucharist?

Each of these names from the New Testament highlights different meanings of this sacrament. Calling it the *Lord's Supper* reminds us that Jesus began this sacred meal and is our host at the table whenever we share it. Calling it *Holy Communion* reminds us that it is an act of the most holy and intimate sharing, making us one with Jesus Christ and part of his body, the church. Calling it the *Eucharist,* a term taken from the New Testament Greek word meaning thanksgiving, reminds us that giving thanks to God for all that God has done is an essential part of the meal. By using different names we acknowledge that no single term can contain the rich wealth of meanings in this sacred act.

Do the bread and wine actually change into Christ's flesh and blood in this sacrament?

United Methodists believe that the Communion elements, the bread and cup, bring about powerful, spiritual change. These elements do not become the actual body and blood of Christ, but as symbols of his body and blood they help us be Christ's body in the world today, freed from sin by Christ's blood. We pray over the bread and the cup that they may make us "one with Christ / one with each other, / and one in ministry to all the world" (from *The United Methodist Hymnal,* copyright 1989 by The United Methodist Publishing House).

Why do United Methodist churches serve grape juice instead of wine for Holy Communion?

The practice of using grape juice instead of wine began in the late nineteenth century, when Methodists were active in the temperance movement. It continues out of concern for recovering alcoholics, to allow the participation of children and youth, and to support the church's stand on abstinence. During the Communion service, you may hear this element referred to as the cup, wine, or juice.

Who can receive Communion in The United Methodist Church?

Holy Communion is the Lord's Supper, not ours. United Methodists practice an "open table," which means that "Christ our Lord invites to his table all who love him, who earnestly repent of their sin and seek to live in peace with one another" (from *The United Methodist Hymnal*). We do not refuse anyone who desires to receive. This includes those who have not yet been baptized, although they are encouraged to seek spiritual teaching. In The United Methodist Church, whether you should receive Communion is between you and God. If for whatever reason you do not choose to receive Communion, simply remain seated when others go forward, or pass the bread and cup along if they are passed to you, and no one will question what you do.

Two thousand years ago Jesus ate with sinners and those on the margins of society. He still does. None of us is worthy, except by God's grace. Thank God we don't have to earn worth in God's eyes by our goodness or our faith. Each person's sacred worth is God's free gift. No matter what you have done or what your present condition, if you want Christ in your life then you are welcome at his table. Holy Communion provides the opportunity for you to confess your sins, to receive forgiveness, and to indicate your intention to lead a new life.

May young children receive Communion?

When some of Jesus' disciples tried to keep children away from him, he said: "Allow the children to come to me. Don't forbid them. God's kingdom belongs to people like these children" (Mark 10:14 CEB). Do young children understand the full meaning of this holy sacrament? No, and neither do any of us. It is a wonderful mystery, and children can sense wonder and mystery. Children cannot