

FAQs about Holy Communion in the United Methodist Church

1. What does the United Methodist Church basically believe about Holy Communion?

Holy Communion is a sacrament. In a sacrament God uses common elements – in this case, bread and wine/juice – as means or vehicles of divine grace. Holy Communion is a gift of God thru the grace of Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit.

2. What are some of the other names by which Holy Communion is called?

United Methodist often use “the Lord’s Supper,” and “Eucharist” which means “Thanksgiving”. Roman Catholicism uses “Mass” and Eastern Orthodoxy, “Divine Liturgy.”

3. How do Holy Communion and Holy Baptism – our sacrament – differ?

Thru baptism, we are initiated into the church, the body of Christ. Baptism is not repeated, because God is always faithful to the divine side of this covenant relationship. Through Holy Communion, we are nourished and sustained in our life of faith. Because we constantly need to receive God’s grace in order to live and grow in holiness, Holy Communion is to be received repeatedly.

4. How often should we celebrate Holy Communion in our congregation?

In the complete pattern for Christian worship, the gospel is proclaimed in both Word and Sacrament. Congregations are encouraged to celebrate Holy Communion at their weekly services on the Lord’s Day.

5. What happens when we participate in celebrations of Holy Communion?

The presence of Christ is, through the power of the Holy Spirit, a living reality in our midst. Not only do we remember what God has done for us in the past, but we also experience what God is doing for us here and now.

6. What spiritual benefits do we receive in Holy Communion?

We receive whatever grace we need and are open to accepting . Benefits include forgiveness of sins; spiritual strengthening and sustenance for our journey of salvation; healing of our brokenness; reconciliation with God and other people; empowering for our ministries of redemption, reconciliation, peace and justice; a foretaste of eternal life with Christ.

7. Who are invited to the Lord’s Table to commune?

All persons who respond to the invitation – those who need Christ, seek forgiveness of sin, desire to become more Christlike, and ant to act lovingly toward others. United Methodists welcome those from other churches to commune with us.

8. Can a person who has not been baptized participate in Holy Communion?

Yes, United Methodism does not limit access to the table of the Lord. We do recognize that the historic and normative order of the sacraments is baptism first, as birth into the Christian family, and communion following, as continuing nurture at the family table. Pastors and congregations should encourage those who participate in communion to commit themselves to Christ and the church in baptism.

9. Should children be encouraged to participate in Holy Communion?

Yes, children are members of the body of Christ. The grace available in Holy Communion is not dependent upon age, intellectual capacity, or cognitive comprehension.

10. What about who feel unworthy or not good enough to come to Holy Communion?

We do not qualify to come to the Lord's Table based upon our worthiness. No one is ever truly worthy. We come, instead, because of our need to experience God's love and receive forgiveness and healing.

11. What about those who cannot be present at worship when Holy Communion is served?

The bread and wine consecrated in the congregational service should be taken to them by pastors or laity.

12. Is it all right for pastors to make up their own communion ritual or to omit parts such as invitation, confession and pardon, or Prayer of Great thanksgiving?

No, pastors and congregations are expected to use the services of Word and Table in the official United Methodist hymnals and books of worship. Variety and creativity are encouraged as long as there is faithfulness to the theology and shape of the ritual. Abbreviation of the ritual by omitting important section is inappropriate and destroys the integrity of the service.

13. Who are authorized to preside at Holy Communion?

Ordained elders preside at celebration of Holy Communion. However, because not all congregations are served by elders, licensed local pastors are authorized to preside in the churches to which they are appointed.

14. What kind of bread should be served in Holy Communion?

The specific type of bread is not important, but it should look and taste like bread. The use of a whole loaf best signifies the unity of the church as the Body of Christ.

15. What kind of drink should be served in Holy Communion?

Historically, the Christian church has used wine and many Christian bodies continue to do so. As a result of the temperance and abstinence movements in the 19th century, Methodists turned to the use of unfermented grape juice. A common cup best symbolizes the whole body of Christ.

16. What are modes of receiving the elements?

In some United Methodist congregations, persons come forward to kneel at the rail to receive. Some practice by intinction which means persons come forward and remain standing. They individually receive pieces of bread which they dip into the cup and then eat. Some people may choose to kneel in prayer either before or after communing.

Some congregations pass plates of elements along the rows for the people to serve themselves or each other as they remain seated.

17. What should be done with the consecrated elements that are left over after all have communed?

Some may be taken to those who were unable to attend. The remainder should be disposed of reverently. The pastor and others may consume them or they can be returned to the earth by scattering, pouring, or burying.

Sources: United Methodist Hymnal, the Book of Discipline, The United Methodist Book of Worship, This Holy Mystery, By Water and the Spirit