



Communion Online Guidelines

In this present crisis of a pandemic, we find ourselves in new territory opened up by the technological innovations of our age. United Methodists have been in conversation about possible adaptations to online worship services so that the church may celebrate the sacrament of communion. As of this month, Bishop Lewis and the Cabinet of the Virginia Conference have provided an option to celebrate online communion. This is an allowance for this specific time, and not a settled practice.

Though physically separated from one another, we are still bound together as family through our baptism and as the children of God. As members of the household of God we are joining together virtually, yet we are still present to one another as we gather from across the miles. This presence is marked by our shared praises and prayers, our shared hearing and affirming of God's Word, and now our shared partaking of God's Holy Meal that transcends both time and space as a means of grace.

Virtual communion, an electronic extension of Christ's Table, is necessarily communal in nature. Therefore, those who are worshipping "live" at 11:15 a.m. are part of the public gathering of the community online and will be able to participate in the sacrament. Those who are worshipping with the recording at a later time will be invited to bear witness to this sacrament with silent prayers during that portion of the service. If you are yearning to participate but cannot do so at home, we invite you to attend one of our 2 in-person services.

Below is a list of frequently asked questions that may be referenced in preparing to celebrate communion in online worship this Sunday:

What type of elements are acceptable?

If, at all possible, use bread and grape juice. The type of bread does not matter (i.e. sandwich bread, wheat bread, buns, pita, flatbread, etc.). In place of bread, a cracker would be an acceptable substitute. If grape juice is not available, simply use a suitable substitute (i.e. juice, water).

What if I don't have those elements available or don't want to participate?

If you do not have the necessary items available or were unable to secure them prior to the service, or if you do not want to participate, use this time for prayer. We will pray a blessing over those not taking part in communion.

How should we set up Holy Communion?

Consider the following ideas:

1. Find a plate and cup/glass in your home that is NOT used on a frequent basis. Perhaps it's a piece of fine china, a plate you picked up while traveling in a foreign country you've never eaten off of, a crystal goblet, or a dish used only during the holidays, or items that are family heirloom pieces and are typically for display. Following this guideline will allow the bread and cup to be set apart for this sacred purpose and not seen as regular or ordinary.
2. Before the service starts on Sunday, take the bread out of the container, place on the plate and cover it with a napkin. Second, pour the grape juice into your cup. Cover the juice with a napkin.
3. Once you have prepared your Communion elements place them in a special location. Try to create a holy space for them so that your family sees them. Perhaps a mantle or the center of your dining or kitchen table. Allow them to be the centerpiece rather than another item on an already crowded surface.

What do we say as we share the elements?

Break the bread into pieces and say to one another, "The body of Christ, given for you." Once everyone in your family has a piece of bread, you can then share the cup and say to one another, "The blood of Christ, given for you." Each member of your family should take turns dipping the bread into the cup, and then everyone can receive the elements together.

Afterwards, the pastor will pray a prayer of thanksgiving and then transition into the next portion of the service.

What do we do with leftovers?

Please remember that these are consecrated elements. You are welcome to eat and drink them. You may also dispose of them in a sacred fashion. Since the elements came from the ground (wheat, grapes, etc.) they should go back into the ground. Break the bread into small pieces and scatter them outside and pour the juice onto the ground.