Holy Communion in the Bible and The United Methodist Church

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A little bit about me…

Elder, Indiana Conference 1997-Present

Director of Worship Resources, Discipleship Ministries, 2005-Present

Chair, Consultation on Common Texts, 2014-present

Member, The North American Academy of Liturgy, 2008-Present


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Let us pray.
Meanings of Holy Communion

  “And having taken the bread, and having given thanks, he broke and said to them, ‘This is my body which is given on your behalf. Do this for my remembrance.’”
  “And having given thanks he broke it and said, ‘This is my body for your behalf. Do this for my remembrance.’ And likewise the cup after the supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. As often as you drink it, [do it] for my remembrance.”

- **Ἀνάμνησις** -- **Re-membering**–
  - Re-membering– putting the memory/mind together in the present time
  - Remembering Jesus– not just the last supper
  - Re-membering– (in English usage)putting the body back together
Meanings of Holy Communion

“Communion” is *with* the whole gathered community—
I Corinthians 10:17
“Because there is one bread, we, the many, are one body, because we all share in the one bread.”

Sacrifice— Romans 12:1, I Peter 2:5
“So I exhort you, sisters and brothers, through the mercies of God, that you present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, well-pleasing to God, your reasonable service.”

“And you yourselves, like living stones are being built together as a spiritual house into a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

- A prayer as a sacrifice offered with our whole selves, body, mind and spirit
Meanings of Holy Communion

- A sharing in the whole of the Triune God
  - We praise the Father
  - We give thanks for Jesus, the Son
  - We call upon the Holy Spirit

- Receiving the body and blood of Jesus—John 6:54-56

  “Those who chew upon my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them.”
Meanings of Holy Communion

■ A foretaste of the Great Wedding Feast of the Lamb
Revelation 19:6-7, 8b, 9

“And I heard as the voice of a great crowd, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders, saying:

‘Alleluia! For the Lord, God Almighty, reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad, and give glory to the Holy One! For the marriage of the lamb is come, and the bride has made herself ready; and it has been given to her to be clothed with fine linen, shining and pure, for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.’

And the voice says to me, ‘Write: Blessed are they who are called to the supper of the lamb!’”
Who May Participate in Holy Communion?

Any and all present with you who can respond to the invitation to the table – age, denomination and even religion are NOT barriers. (Matthew 11:28 – Come to me ALL who are weary and heavy laden; Let the children (including infants) come to me! (Luke 18:16)

“Christ our Lord invites to his table all who love him, who earnestly repent of their sin, and who seek to live in peace with one another.”

- All who love him– if we love Jesus, we will follow him and do his commandments, especially to love our neighbors as God has loved us (John 13:34-35, 14:23)
- Who repent of their sin– Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand (Mark 1:14-15)
- Live in peace with each other– Matthew 6:23-24 (call to reconciliation)
Who May Participate in Holy Communion?

Systems for confession, pardon, peace and reconciliation are essential.

*Early Methodism*: Bands, ritual, class leaders

*At a minimum*: confess sin, confess sins, offer pardon, extend peace as pledge of forgiveness and hope for reconciliation, not simply as a greeting.
Praying the Great Thanksgiving

An elder or the appointed pastor presides using our ritual.

The role of the presider is to lead the whole congregation in offering themselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice.

From after the opening dialog on, the whole Great Thanksgiving is prayer addressed to our Triune God.

Not story told to the people

Not magic words spoken for the people
Holy Communion and Baptism

- Jesus commands us to offer both and do both
  - Holy Communion—Matthew 26:26-29
  - Baptism—Matthew 28:18-20

- The historic pattern is baptism first, then communion. United Methodists affirm this historic pattern in principle.

- In practice, we say which happens first is less important than that both happen. Persons coming to the table without baptism should be counseled to prepare for baptism at the soonest possible time.
Elements for Communion

- Bread and wine just like Jesus used is the normal pattern around the world.
- The bread is what you use for bread— and one loaf that you all share. (I Corinthians 10:17)
- The wine is wine or grape juice, or, if these are unavailable in your part of the world, what you use as your regular drink from nature that best symbolizes life and joy.
- When you finish, dispose of all “leftovers” with reverence.
  - Eat, drink, bury, or pour/scatter to the earth.
  - Do not throw anything into the trash or sewer.
Extending the Table

- Bread and wine blessed at the regular gathering of the congregation may be taken and shared later that day (if possible) with persons who could not attend (the sick, prisoners, the infirm, those who had to work).

- Either laypersons trained for this task or clergy may take and share these elements with those who could not attend at the regular time.

- Precedent for this ministry is recorded as early as 150 AD (The First Apology of Justin Martyr, Section 67; “to those not present it is sent through the deacons”).
Using ALL the Means of Grace

“It is expected of all who desire to continue in these societies that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation…

Thirdly: By attending upon all the ordinances of God; such are:

The public worship of God.
The ministry of the Word, either read or expounded.
The Supper of the Lord.
Family and private prayer.
Searching the Scriptures.
Fasting or abstinence.”
Inappropriate Practices: Preconsecration

**Practice:**
The practice of consecrating elements ahead of time for the convenience of the pastor not having to go to small or remote congregations, weekend camps, or other such occasions is inappropriate and contrary to our historic doctrine and understanding of how God’s grace is made available in the sacrament (Article XVIII, The Articles of Religion, *BOD*; page 64). If authorized leadership is not available for celebrating the Lord’s Supper, other worship services such as love feasts, agape meals, or baptismal reaffirmations are valid alternatives that avoid the misuse of Communion elements. – *This Holy Mystery*, p. 32

_Elders itinerate from church to church. Elements do not._
Inappropriate Practices: Self-Serve Communion

“Both ‘self-service’ Communion, where people help themselves, and ‘drop-in’ Communion, where the elements are available over a period of time, are contrary to the communal nature of the sacrament, which is the celebration of the gathered community of faith.”

– This Holy Mystery, p. 23
Inappropriate Practices: Online Sacramental Practice

1. Parallel to Field Preaching? (Reaching people where they are)

2. The Community *IS* Gathered?

3. No limits to the “effective range” of the Great Thanksgiving?
Inappropriate Practices: Online Sacramental Practice

4. A Converting Ordinance—So Why Not?

“But in latter times, many have affirmed, that the Lord’s Supper is not a converting, but a *confirming* ordinance. And among us it has been diligently taught, that none but those who are converted, who have received the Holy Ghost, who are believers in the full sense, ought to communicate.

“But experience shows the gross falsehood of that assertion, that the Lord’s Supper is not a converting ordinance. Ye are the witnesses. For many now present know, the very beginning of your conversion to God (perhaps, in some, the first deep conviction) was wrought at the Lord’s Supper.”

*Journal, Friday, June 27, 1740*
Inappropriate Practices: Online Sacramental Practice

4a. “I don’t think that means what you think it means…”

“The term [converting ordinance] was rarely used in Methodist literature prior to the 20th century. When used after that time, the phrase was taken up generally without relating it precisely to the original context of its use: the controversy with Molther on the means of grace and "stillness." In addition, by the time of this rediscovery, the language of evangelism had changed. "Unconverted" or "unbeliever" generally no longer referred principally to the "unassured of faith," but to those altogether without religion. Different conclusions were reached when Wesley's writings were read without an eye to their original context and time period. The converting ordinance was thus [inappropriately] reinterpreted to mean a remedy for those totally without faith.” – Karen Westerfield Tucker, “Table Etiquette, Means and Manners”
Summary

1. Holy Communion is spiritual and physical participation in the life of the Triune God now and a foretaste of the age to come. In it, we are led by our authorized presider to offer ourselves to God in a sacrifice of prayer and thanksgiving for all God has done to save us and renew the universe. Having offered our sacrifice, we seek the Spirit’s blessing on us and the gifts of bread and wine. We receive the body and blood of Jesus, and so are renewed as the body of Christ redeemed by his blood.

2. The baptized of any age and all who can respond to the conditions of the Invitation (love Christ, earnest repent, seek peace) are welcome to join with us in offering and receiving.

3. Holy Communion is offered to those unwillingly absent.

4. Holy Communion is a means of grace that can both spark faith and sustain us in the faith.
Questions?
Comments?
Additional Resources

http://bookstore.upperroom.org/Products/DR457/this-holy-mystery.aspx

http://bookstore.upperroom.org/Products/DRPDF9/living-into-the-mystery.aspx

http://www.amazon.com/This-Holy-Mystery-Study-Children/dp/1878009540/

http://bookstore.upperroom.org/Products/DR553/extending-the-table.aspx
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