



Celebrating the Lord's Supper (Communion) as a Small Group

What is communion?

It is the regular remembrance and celebration of the Lord's sacrificial death. The breaking and eating of bread has to do with Christ's body being broken on the cross. The drinking from the cup has to do with the shedding of Christ's blood whereby we are forgiven (Matthew 26:26-28; 1 Corinthians 11:23-24).

The spiritual significance of the Lord's Supper is: that Jesus' sacrificial death instituted the "new covenant", an unbreakable commitment from God to man for all those who believe; that it is a feast of remembrance so that believers can have a visual reminder of their continuing relationship of being united with God; that it is a way Christians proclaim to the world the reality of Jesus' death until he comes again; and that it is a participation of fellowship with all other believers. It is a holy and grace-filled ceremony where Christ is present.

The West Church bylaws state: The sacrament of communion is a proclamation of the Lordship of Christ, union with the Father, Son, and Spirit, and spiritual fellowship with people of like faith. Communion is an outward sign of our common union with God through faith in Jesus Christ and his completed sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin.

Our communion table is open to all who know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and so, as you celebrate as a small group, all who know Jesus and profess faith in him are welcome to participate.

What is the purpose of communion?

The primary purpose of communion is to take time to remember all that the Lord did for us. It is a time to worship and give thanks for the forgiveness of our sins and the new life and relationship that we have in Jesus Christ. This time of remembrance was initiated by Jesus just before His death. Because we tend to be forgetful people, in the Old Testament, believers were called to remember the faithfulness of God through various memorials.

In the New Testament, this is the way Jesus wanted us to remember His love and forgiveness of our sins (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). These verses also explain that communion is a time of personal examination. It is a time to examine our relationship with the Lord and others (1 Corinthians 11:27-32).

Finally, the purpose is to have a specific way to experience the supernatural reality of being connected with the risen Christ.

Who can serve communion?

Biblically speaking, anyone can serve or facilitate communion. Although some religious traditions require that an ordained person serve communion, West Church has no such restriction. The celebration of this sacrament can be a time when believers share their common faith and love for the Lord Jesus no matter the size or location of the gathering. Our community has experienced the sharing of the Lord's Supper on mission trips, retreats, in small group gatherings, as family units, in hospitals and nursing facilities, and in many other meaningful settings.

How can we serve communion?

There are many ways to serve communion. The Bible does not dictate a certain method. Feel free to be creative. You could celebrate communion after a meal together as often modeled by the early church (Matthew 26:26-29; Acts 2:42-46; 1 Corinthians 11:20-26). You could make this the centerpiece of your time together or you could partake in it before or after you complete a study and discussion time, or a time of prayer. The important thing to remember is that this is a time of deep worship. This is a time of celebration of the gift of God's salvation. This is a time of remembrance and reflection of his love, goodness, grace, and sacrificial death.

Some ideas to get you started:

1. Place a loaf of unsliced bread, or crackers, or a small roll on a platter and some grape juice (or wine) in a nice cup on a table in the middle of your group. You may want to think about individual cups. In remote locations, we have seen tortillas and Kool Aid used as the communion elements. As long as the elements used are recognized with reverence and a desire to honor God, the simplest food items will suffice.
2. Begin your time of celebration by reading some selected passages of Scripture that remind you of the Lord's death, burial, and resurrection. If you are celebrating communion with family members or a few others, they might prepare for your time together by choosing one of their favorite passages about Jesus and his loving grace and sacrifice.

Here are some Scriptures to consider:

- Psalm 22 • 1 Corinthians 15:1-8 • Galatians 2:16-21 • Ephesians 2:1-10
- Philippians 2:1-11 • Isaiah 53 • Mark 15:21-29 • John 19

3. You may want to "welcome" God by reading a version of Psalm 46, alternating with a leader and respondents, such as:

Leader: God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

People: Therefore, we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling.

Leader: There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved. God will help her when morning dawns.

People: The nations rage, the kingdoms totter...

Leader: The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

People: Come, behold the works of the Lord.

Leader: Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth!

All together: The Lord of hosts is with us: the God of Jacob is our fortress.

4. You may choose to recite together the Apostle's Creed, affirming our faith.

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father

Almighty.

From thence he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church,
the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

5. After reading the chosen Scriptures, and reciting the Apostles Creed, read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

6. Pass the bread around and ask each group member to tear off a small piece. Remind them that this bread represents the body of Jesus which was broken on our behalf.

You may want to say, to each person, something like: “_____ (fill in the name of the person), this is the body of Christ, which was broken for you.” Each person may serve the person beside them, saying their name in turn.

You may want to have music playing or ensure that there is silence during this time.

You may wait to eat the bread together, or each one may eat the bread after the plate has been passed to the next person, or you may want to hold the bread so that it may be dipped into the cup, served next.

7. Next pass the cup around. If you are dipping your bread, have each person dip and then eat. If you have eaten the bread, then you may either use the same cup to drink from (using a cloth for wiping the cup rim), or you may use the prepared small individual cups.

As the cup is served, remind the group that the cup represents the blood of Jesus which was shed for us. Again, each person may serve the person beside them, saying, “_____ (name) This is the blood of Christ, shed for you.”

8. After the bread and juice have been consumed, encourage everyone to spend a few minutes in prayer and reflection. You may want to have everyone pray short prayers of thanksgiving or praise or requests for the needs of the world or for God’s love to be made known. You may wish to pray for God’s mercy, for the healing of the nations, for all those who are fearful or sick or helping those in need. You may want to pray for God’s deliverance, for hope, for wisdom for leaders and ourselves, for a heart to serve others in times of stress, and for God’s good will.
9. Conclude your celebration by singing a song, listening to a praise song, reading the words of a hymn (such as Great is Thy Faithfulness), or talking about how you each experienced God in this time together.

There are many ways to serve communion. The Bible does not dictate a certain method. The important thing to remember is that this is a time of worship and celebration. It’s a time of remembrance and reflection, given to us as a holy connection between God and those he redeemed.