

## Options for practicing Holy Communion during the pandemic

With vaccines being administered, research about COVID-19 continuing, and weather improving, ministries across the Greater Northwest Area have changing needs and more opportunities. We remain grateful for all of the ways you continue to adapt and for your ongoing commitment to do no harm.

For some, fasting from Holy Communion during the pandemic is a meaningful, spiritual discipline. For others, being able to receive Holy Communion feels necessary to nurture faith through this pandemic. Our [theology of Holy Communion](#) is shared globally but is often deeply personal, too. Ordained elders and licensed local pastors have sacramental authority to bless the elements, but they also have discretion regarding when and how to use that authority.

For all United Methodists, Holy Communion is a sacrament with much tradition and theology that is challenging to preserve in the face of COVID-19. None of these options are the same as in-person communion in our sanctuaries, but all offer the means of grace with various forms of liturgy, tradition, and community.

### If your pastor chooses to resume or initiate Holy Communion in ways that do no harm, here are some possibilities:

#### We want to receive Holy Communion online with beloved liturgies

- Our Western Jurisdiction bishops recognized our yearning for communion and offered the possibility of online communion to help us through this pandemic. (Read the bishops' statement [here](#).)
- Some have distributed their collection of hymnals during the pandemic, which would allow worshipers to use the communion liturgies for online communion.
- There are communion liturgies available in the public domain that are written specifically for virtual communion. ([Here's one](#) that's free to use with attribution.)

#### We want to receive communion elements from the church because we feel more like one body when we have the same elements even though we are apart.

- **NEW!** Ministries may distribute *pre-packaged* communion elements.
  - Ministries that are able to gather in person (indoors or outdoors) may distribute elements for worshipers to hold during the service and partake in later.
  - A clergy person may have all of the prepackaged elements together on the altar during the liturgy (in person or online) for no-contact distribution after the liturgy or at a later time.
  - Churches or ministries may offer elements for pick-up at a designated time/location, then celebrate the liturgy later at an online service.

## **We want to share Holy Communion together—at the same time and/or in the same place.**

- An elder or licensed local pastor may bless the pre-packed elements during online worship, then later offer them for pick-up.
  - Perhaps it's meaningful to have a particular time when the congregation plans for everyone to partake of the elements.
- Those ministries where worshipers remain in their cars may distribute pre-packaged elements for worshipers to partake within their cars during the service.
- If elements are distributed at in-person services (indoor or outdoor), worshipers may partake of the elements once they are safely in their cars.

## **If your pastor chooses *not* to offer Holy Communion until it can be safely offered in person, here are some options:**

- Celebrate an online [love feast](#)! This tradition can transform snacks or meals in our own homes into holy experiences shared with others virtually.
- A discipline of [fasting](#) can be a holy experience. What if the absence of communion as you previously experienced it is turned into a meaningful, spiritual exercise for a time?
- Some United Methodist churches and ministries are already sharing Holy Communion within these protocols, and we are a connectional church! Ask your pastor to help you connect with a United Methodist communion service (offered by a district or another UMC ministry) so that you may receive communion in our United Methodist tradition while also staying safe and fully engaged with your current congregation.

## **A few helpful things to keep in mind:**

- Homebound members often must receive communion elements long after they were blessed and may partake in them alone. For those of us who are struggling with these limitations, perhaps it's an opportunity to examine this kind of privilege.
- Long before COVID, churches without licensed or ordained clergy have had elements blessed by an elder prior to leading worship in their ministry locations.
- There are countless creative means of offering Holy Communion within these bounds!
  - Here's an example to help spark your creativity: During Facebook Live worship on Sunday morning, Pastor Susanna led the communion liturgy while standing behind the altar. She didn't have a loaf of bread, but there was a basket of prepackaged communion elements on the altar instead. On Tuesday, those pre-packaged, recently consecrated elements were available for pick up on a table in the church parking lot. On Wednesday at 6 p.m., everyone who had received elements opened them to partake in the sacrament wherever they were at that time.
- Not sure whether your plan works within the protocols? Churches and local church pastors, ask your District Superintendent. Extension ministers and other ministries beyond the local church, ask your Director of Connectional Ministries.