

**FAITH
COMMUNITY
CHURCH**

ABOUT HOLY COMMUNION

This position paper seeks to outline Faith Community Church's (FCC) position on the doctrine and practice of Holy Communion.

Holy Communion Biblical Roots

A. Jewish Passover (Exodus 12)

The practice of Holy Communion has its roots in the Jewish Passover. The Jewish Passover marked the beginning of the Jewish new year and was, therefore, of great significance to the Jews historically, culturally, and spiritually.

As described in Exodus 12:7, 22, the blood of a sacrificial lamb covered the doorpost of each house and protected the residents within the house from the angel of death.

"When the Lord goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down." (Exodus 12:23)

There were three essential elements of the initial Passover meal, as described in Exodus 12:8

- a. The lamb
- b. Unleavened bread
- c. Bitter herbs

The meal symbolically and ritualistically represented the salvation of the Jewish nation from the bitterness of slavery by the hand of the Lord and marked a turning point in their national history and identity formation as a nation, for it was after their deliverance that the covenant of Moses was established at Sinai and the national identity of Israel was formalized through the covenant.

B. First Century Passover

Fast forward to the first century and we see the first Holy Communion celebrated by Jesus with His disciples during Passover (Matthew 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:7-20). In other words, the first Holy Communion was a Passover meal.

The practice of the Passover had evolved over time, which was to be expected, and while there were many similarities with the Passover described in Exodus there were some slight differences. As with the Passover described in Exodus, a sacrificial lamb and unleavened bread were eaten as part of the meal, however, there is no mention of bitter herbs, instead wine is described as a key part of the meal.

Jesus was reconstituting the Jewish Passover as a New Covenant practice, imbuing its elements with new significance that centred on Him and His death.

It is interesting that the elements that carried sacramental significance were the bread and the wine. The former representing Jesus' broken body and the latter representing His blood poured out for the forgiveness of sins. These continue to be the key elements of the rite as practiced

today. However, the sacrificial lamb was bestowed no ritual significance. Why? Because Jesus, as the lamb of God, would be the final lamb that would be sacrificed for sins. If he used the lamb as symbols of his sacrifice, then lambs would continue being slaughtered in commemoration of His death. However, this is not so. His blood is the last drop of blood shed for sins and his body the last body broken for sins (Hebrews 10:12, 14).

Four Views on the Nature of the Elements

The following table outlines the four primary views that are held by the different branches by the Church.

Key Denomination	Catholic/Orthodox*	Lutheran	Reformed/Presbyterian	Other
Technical Name	Transubstantiation (Catholic) / Divine Mystery (Orthodox)	Consubstantiation / Sacramental Union	Receptionism	Memorialism
Key Historical Figure	Aquinas	Luther	Calvin	Zwingli
Summary	The bread becomes Christ	The bread coexists with Christ	Christ is spiritually present in the bread	The bread symbolises Christ
Who can perform?	Ordained bishops (only those recognised by the Catholic church)	Usually a minister will perform communion but any lay person can perform it	Usually a minister will perform communion	No restrictions
Who can participate?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Those who are in a state of grace: free from mortal sin e.g. murder, promiscuity Recognised member of the Catholic church 	Those who are worthy = Anyone who believes in Christ	Baptised believers. Some churches welcome all to participate.	Varies from church to church. Can range from being restricted to baptised believers to being open to anyone.
Spiritual significance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bread and wine literally become the body and blood of Jesus. This occurs when the elements are consecrated by the minister Deepens unity and intimacy with Christ, since we literally receive Christ into our bodies Forgives venial sins (venial sins injure our relationship with God) Strengthens resistance against mortal sins 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bread and wine coexist with the physical and real body and blood of Jesus. This happens by faith in the promise (and command) of God and the power of the revealed Word. The body and blood are “in, with, and under” the bread and wine – this is the common description for the Sacramental Union In communion, believers receive “forgiveness, life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Christ is not physically present, but spiritually present. Bread and cup do bestow and convey real spiritual nourishment of Christ’s body and blood. However, key differences are: Elements do not confer any real benefit in and of themselves Spiritual benefits are obtained by the faith of the recipient, the power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spiritual nourishment is gained from the contemplation of the gospel. Christ’s sacrifice can be felt and experienced more tangibly and intimately through this symbolic act. No spiritual benefits from the elements themselves

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (mortal sins sever our relationship with God. Therefore, dying while guilty of these sins would result in being condemned to hell. These sins can only be removed by confession and penance) 	<p>and salvation.”¹ Not that the communion elements are the source of these benefits, but are the means through which God distributes it to His church.</p>	<p>of the Word of God, and work of the Holy Spirit.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Therefore, “gospel is certainly seen in the supper ... the gospel is not the Supper.” 	
Sacramental**	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

* While the Orthodox and Catholic church share very similar doctrinal views on this issue, primarily the Catholic position will be considered in this overview.

**A sacramental view of the Eucharist believes that partaking of the elements conveys grace to the worthy recipient. This grace refers to a spiritual benefit that is specifically obtained by partaking of the bread and cup. The nature of this grace varies depending on theological position.

¹ <https://ecumenicallife.com/2013/10/05/holy-communion-in-the-lutheran-tradition/>

Excursus: The Four Views of Holy Communion

This section attempts to briefly explicate the four views presented in the table above, highlighting key details of each view.

I. Transubstantiation

Note: *Orthodox tradition does not hold to the doctrine of transubstantiation, rather they believe change from one form to the other is a "divine mystery."*

This view postulates that the elements of the bread and wine literally and physically **transform** into the body and blood of Christ.

The transformation is in substance not form. In other words, it looks like bread, but it is really the body of Jesus; it looks like wine, but it is really the blood of Jesus. This transformation is achieved by the blessing of the minister over the sacraments.

The Biblical basis for this belief is the literal interpretation of Mark 14:22, 24.

²² While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body."

²⁴ "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them. (Mark 14:22, 24)

The interpretative linchpin is the interpretation of "is" as being "identical with." Therefore, those who hold to this view assert that when Jesus says, "this is my body" and "this is my blood" He was making a literal statement. The bread was literally His body and the wine was literally His blood.

The implications of this are significant and affect the practice of the meal in a few ways:

- i) Early Catholic belief was that Christ was considered to be sacrificed in the meal. However, Catholics now generally hold to the Lutheran understanding that Christ is not re-sacrificed in the meal but the full effects of the cross are present in the event. Therefore, spiritual nourishment in the form of forgiveness of sins and strength to resist sins are obtained by partaking of meal. In this sense, the meal is considered sacramental.
- ii) Who presides over the event is extremely important because they are primarily, if not solely, responsible for the transformation of the elements into the body and blood of Christ.
- iii) Who participates in the meal is also extremely important because those who eat and drink of the bread and wine are literally partaking of the body and blood of Jesus. It is for this reason that only those who are in a "state of grace" may participate in the meal.
- iv) The overall effect is that the Holy Communion is viewed as a central element of a believer's worship and a very sacred practice that is usually engaged in regularly.

II. Sacramental Union (Consubstantiation)

This view postulates that the bread and wine fully coexist with the real body and blood of Christ. The difference from the Catholic view is subtle but significant. Unlike the Catholic view, this view does not believe the elements transform into the body and blood of Christ and therefore change in substance, rather the bread and wine are substantially still bread and wine but coexist with the body and blood of Christ which are literally present.

The Biblical basis for this belief is the literal interpretation of John 6:55.

For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. (John 6:55)

Based on this, Christ is believed to be truly present in the elements.

The practical implications of this are similar to the Catholic view presented earlier with slight modifications:

- i) Spiritual nourishment is obtained in the partaking of the elements, however a distinction is made that the elements are not the source of spiritual nourishment but the means of spiritual nourishment. Christ Himself is still the source of all spiritual nourishment which is mediated to the believer through the sacrament of Holy Communion. The spiritual nourishment that is obtained is "forgiveness, life, and salvation."²
- ii) The true presence of Christ is by faith in the promise and power of the Word of God. Therefore, while a minister usually presides over the meal, it is not incumbent upon their consecration of the meal for the presence of Christ to be present.
- iii) Given that the emphasis is on faith, the fundamental requirement for participation in the meal is faith in Christ and the promise of His revealed Word.

III. Receptionism

This view postulates that Christ is spiritually present in the meal. Therefore, the bread and wine do not contain the physical body and blood of Christ. In this sense it is distinct from the previous views.

Similar to the previous views, Holy Communion is a means of conveying spiritual nourishment to the participating believer. However, holders of this view make the distinction that the elements do not convey spiritual nourishment in themselves, rather it is actually the faith of the believer in what the elements represent that truly convey grace and spiritual nourishment.

IV. Memorialism

There is a spectrum of nuances within this view, but the common denominator is that Holy Communion is fundamentally symbolic in nature.

The elements are signs and symbols of gospel truths that believers already possess in Christ. As such, the emphasis is on the remembrance of Christ's death and sacrifice.

Therefore, the Lord's presence is with the church whenever we gather and is within each believer through the Holy Spirit. However, it is not limited to when we partake of the Holy Communion. In this sense, this view is slightly different from the previous three views.

² <https://ecumenicallife.com/2013/10/05/holy-communion-in-the-lutheran-tradition/>

The significance of Holy Communion is in the “engagement of the senses” – “the senses which usually distract the mind when it seeks to contemplate Christ, are brought into line and actually aid the contemplation. The presence of Christ, therefore, is felt more intimately and intensely.”³ Therefore, communion’s significance is in what it points us to – it points us to the grace of God, but it doesn’t bestow the grace of God; it points us to the gospel, but is not the gospel.

For these reasons, the Memorialist position is non-sacramental in nature and distinguishes itself from the previous three views which are sacramental.

FCC’s Beliefs and Practices

I. What is FCC’s doctrinal position?

We believe that Holy Communion is the remembrance of and participation in Christ’s death and sacrifice. Therefore, Holy Communion is both a sign and symbol pointing to and reminding us of what Christ has done, and a means of spiritual participation in the realities of His sacrifice. As such, Holy Communion is not purely a symbolic ritual, nor can it be purely classified as non-sacramental in nature. There is spiritual nourishment in partaking of the Holy Communion, but the source of such nourishment is not the elements themselves but Christ who uses the elements to spiritually nourish believers by faith. Therefore, Holy Communion is considered sacramental in nature.

However, we would not go so far as to say that Christ is spiritually present in the elements. The elements are still fundamentally symbols of the true spiritual realities we have in Christ that we participate in spiritually by faith.

As such, FCC’s position is a mixture of the Memorialist and Receptionist view.

II. Who can preside over Holy Communion?

Given that we believe in the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:5-9) and we do not believe that the elements transmute into another substance, any believer can technically conduct Holy Communion in a communal context.

Meaning that Holy Communion can be partaken in a wide variety of communal contexts e.g. small groups, families. The only requirement for the person presiding over the meal is that they must be a believer of Christ.

In a typical worship service, it is our usual practice that a pastor will preside over and lead the congregation in Holy Communion. This is to help ensure that the teaching of the spiritual significance of Holy Communion is in line with the church’s position.

III. Who can participate?

There are two issues when it comes to the question of who can participate in Holy Communion.

³ Moore-Crispin cited in Bruce A. Ware, “The Meaning of the Lord’s Supper in the Theology of Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531)” in *The Lord’s Supper*, eds. Matthew R. Crawford and Thomas R. Schreiner (Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2011), 446

A. Believers only?

What is very clear is that Holy Communion was and is only truly meaningful for believers. It was not meant to be an evangelistic tool. If by partaking of Holy Communion, we are participating in and unifying ourselves with Christ and His sacrifice, it makes no symbolic or spiritual sense for non-believers to participate.

However, we do not explicitly prohibit unbelievers from partaking of the elements because it is unclear as to whether Scripture explicitly prohibits unbelievers from partaking of the meal.

When it comes to this issue, the primary passage in contention is 1 Corinthians 11:27-34. Paul is primarily speaking to Christians and the manner in which they partake of the meal. The judgement that he is referring to is primarily falling on Christians who harbour unrepentant sin against the Body of Christ. What we can clearly ascertain from this passage is that this meal is primarily for Christians, and Christians who participate in the meal should examine themselves for unrepentant sins against other believers. While there is space for this to also apply to sins committed against Christ e.g. sexual sins, the nature of the sins in view is primarily sins against other believers. What is unclear is whether the application of judgement against unworthy participation can also be applied to unbelievers who do so in ignorance.

Therefore, at FCC we seek to emphasise that Holy Communion is only truly meaningful for believers, but we will not outright prohibit unbelievers from partaking of the elements.

B. Baptised only?

We do not require participating believers to be baptised. While we acknowledge that most believers, if not all believers, in the early church would have been baptised prior to participating in Holy Communion, we are also mindful that in the contemporary church baptism is practiced differently from the early church.

The spiritual significance of baptism would have been immediately understood by many in the 1st century since baptism was a prevalent rite in many religions. This is not the case in contemporary culture, where baptism is not widely practiced by society and therefore its spiritual significance cannot be assumed as common knowledge but must be taught to new believers.

As such, in the contemporary church, there may be genuine believers that have confessed their faith in Christ but have not yet participated in the rite of baptism. It is for this reason that we do not require baptism as a prerequisite for participation in Holy Communion.

IV. What are the Spiritual Benefits?

Remembrance

1 Corinthians 11:24-25

²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

The clear emphasis from the passage above is that Holy Communion reminds us of what we have in Christ. It is a reminder, celebration and proclamation of the gospel.

Each element carries spiritual significance as outlined below.

Christ's broken body makes us whole:

- I. Individually
- II. Corporately

Individually	Corporately
Summary: In Christ, believers are made whole in every sense.	Summary: In Christ, believers are united as a new family
Spiritually alive (Eph 2:5)	Believers are one in Christ through the Holy Spirit (Rom 12:5)
Renewed mind (1 Cor 2:16, Rom 12:2)	"Like-mindedness" (Phil 2:2; 1 Pet 3:8) – similar beliefs and values, and directed by the one Spirit.
The peace of Christ guards our hearts and minds (Phil 4:7)	Peaceful relationships (Col 3:12-14; Rom 12:9-13)
Physical healing (James 5:14; 1 Cor 15:53-54; miracles of Jesus)	We eat this meal together sharing the same food (1 Cor 10:17)

Christ's blood makes us clean and establishes a new covenant (relational contract) in Christ:

I. The Blood of Christ

- Redeems and saves us (Eph 1:7)
- Provides forgiveness of sins (Heb 9:14)
- Cleans sin from our lives (Heb 9:22; 1 John 1:7)

II. Establishes a New Covenant

- Covenants were established with blood e.g. Abraham and the Lord (Gen 15)
- Jesus Christ established a new covenant between God and humans by using his own blood to seal the contract
- Therefore, we are no longer bound by the Old Covenant (and therefore no longer bound to the Law) but a New Covenant made in Christ.

Participation

1 Cor 10:16-17 - ¹⁶Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? ¹⁷Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf.

The word translated as "*participation*" is the Greek word *koinonia*, which means "*fellowship, close involvement, partnership, sharing*".

It is in Holy Communion that we share in the sacrifice of Christ – His broken body becomes our broken body and His shed blood becomes our shed blood. He died in our place, and it is in Holy Communion that we actively and spiritually make that a present reality in our lives.

Holy Communion does not confer this grace upon us, for the sacrifice of Christ is bestowed upon us by faith. However, just as baptism is the physical participation in the death of Christ and marks our transition from death to life, Holy Communion is the physical participation in the ongoing spiritual nourishment that Christ provides us.

Thanksgiving

1 Cor 10:16

Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?

Holy Communion reminds us of what we have received and continually receive in Christ, and this should prompt heartfelt thanksgiving to God.

As such, Holy Communion should be a joyous occasion as we thank the Lord for what Christ has done for us.