



A Letter to the United Methodist Clergy of the Western Jurisdiction
The United Methodist Church

From the College of Bishops

Beloved Servants of Christ,

We write, as your episcopal leaders, in these unprecedented days of social change due to the COVID-19 crisis. We are grateful for the many ways you have responded, learning new skills and experimenting as you seek to respond to the pastoral needs of your people.

We have received many questions about online communion: Is this possible? Ordained elders of The United Methodist Church have been set apart to care for the Sacraments in the life of the Church. Local pastors appointed to local churches are extended this privilege as well. How are we to be the body of Christ in these days we are living when we cannot meet in each other's presence but instead gather online or through other means?

The Sacrament of Holy Communion is a means of grace in our Wesleyan tradition. Through it we experience the mystery of God's prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace. In this meal we experience Christ fully present to us as we come to the Table with penitent and grateful hearts to remember what God has done through Jesus Christ for our sake and the sake of the whole world. Through Holy Communion, we are brought into saving relationship with Christ and with one another as members of Christ's body across time and space.

In these times when we cannot meet in person, we believe it is important to offer one another this vital means of grace. We are not prescribing that Holy Communion be celebrated in all of our congregations in this time of social distancing. However, we stand with our clergy who through reflection and prayer have come to the place of believing that their congregation would be strengthened in this hour through the sharing of Holy Communion. We trust the wisdom and the faithfulness of our Clergy to discern such pastoral matters in their own context.

Especially in this time of physical separation from one another, Holy Communion can be a conduit of God's healing power. We remain open to what God is teaching us in this moment. We believe in the importance of being community, present together at the Table of our Lord, repentant of our sin and seeking to live in peace with one another. We support you our Clergy in your efforts to find ways to bring the means of grace to God's people knowing that the Holy Spirit who alone can make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, is unfailingly with us. Remember that you have been entrusted with this sacred meal. Reverently prepare your congregation to receive the gifts of God that are meant for the people of God:

Some of you are gathering through live-streaming, Zoom, and other face-to-face platforms. Still others are connecting by phone, or are relying on printed material or a DVD disc. Here are some things for you to consider:

1. In advance of providing Holy Communion through these new means, tell people what they will need to have on hand to participate, being mindful that we don't want to increase people's anxiety or jeopardizing their safety by requiring a trip to the grocery store during this time. What basic elements might people have on hand that are familiar and could be used? Give your church members and others who may choose to participate with you in Holy Communion enough guidance to help them observe it fully present to Christ our Lord.
2. Moving to online communion provides us with an opportunity to deepen our congregations' understanding of Holy Communion. As you gather your faith community for Holy Communion, discuss our theology of the Eucharist and how it is a means of grace that binds us to Christ and one another. [This Holy Mystery: A United Methodist Understanding of Holy Communion](http://qbod.org.s3.amazonaws.com/legacy/kintera/entry_8350/19/THM-BYGC.PDF) is a helpful resource that holds us together in our common understanding. It can be found at http://qbod.org.s3.amazonaws.com/legacy/kintera/entry_8350/19/THM-BYGC.PDF
3. For those who are unable to connect with the worshipping congregation through technology and thus the elements cannot be consecrated online, we recommend that:
 - a. You purchase pre-filled communion elements (for example, see: https://www.concordiasupply.com/Church-Supplies/Communion-Supplies/Pre-Filled-Communion-Cups?utm_term=%2Bchurch+%2Bcommunion+%2Bcup&utm_campaign=PPC_Search_Supplies_Communion&utm_medium=cpc&msclkid=ccc77d0b9abf1ea3760e23736366c69b&utm_source=bing&utm_content=Communion+Cups+-+Church). If you choose to use these elements, consecrate them before having them sent to church members and constituents.
 - b. You may choose to mail these consecrated elements or with the help of lay leaders deliver them to people's homes while practicing social distancing.
 - c. Some congregations already have communion visitation teams in place. We advise that pastors who do not already have these teams create them to assist in participating in the sharing of Holy Communion.
 - d. We believe human contact is critical for those unable to join by livestream. When these consecrated elements are sent to people's homes, it should be followed with a call from the pastor or visitation team member so that communion prayers can be offered together. You may want to add a written liturgy to the elements when you send them forth. Don't forget to practice safety precautions.

We continue to pray with and for you. You are providing a vital center of community connection and the hope that is found in the Good News of Jesus Christ. May God continue to equip and strengthen you for the ministry to which you've been called.

In service with you,

Robert T. Hoshibata, President
Minerva G. Carcaño, Secretary
Grant Hagiya
Elaine J.W. Stanovsky
Karen P. Oliveto

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