



Community of Christ

CHRIST'S MISSION, OUR MISSION

Guidelines for Serving the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper (Communion)

Introduction

The First Presidency released “Guidelines for Administration of the Lord’s Supper” in 1994. Those guidelines responded to action taken at the 1994 World Conference to remove the legislated prohibition on serving the Lord’s Supper to persons who are not baptized and confirmed members of the church. The introduction to the 1994 guidelines affirmed that “we now offer the Lord’s Supper to any who choose to partake of it in accordance with their own faith and practice” while not altering the church’s beliefs about the basic purposes of the sacrament.

The 1994 statement also acknowledged that questions remained, and the guidelines did not attempt to answer all of them. Church-wide dialogue on the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper was needed in anticipation of gaining additional insights.

Since 1994, theological and pastoral issues have arisen from the church’s experience with serving the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. Questions related to our practices, include:

- Can people baptized by Community of Christ priesthood members, but not yet confirmed, participate in the Lord’s Supper since others can at their own discretion?
- Can children from Community of Christ families not yet baptized or confirmed participate in the Lord’s Supper like children from non-Community of Christ families do at the discretion of their parents?
- World Conference Resolution 401 states, “That the act of conveying the emblems to those partaking forms a part of the work of ‘administering the sacrament’” which, according to Doctrine and Covenants is the responsibility of certain priesthood offices. How does this resolution relate to Communion services in which participants are not served individually by priesthood members, such as when people go to a table to take the emblems for themselves after they are blessed?
- More groups are offering opportunities for people to connect online to congregational and mission center activities. Can people participate online in the Lord’s Supper? How can that occur while maintaining the basic elements and symbols of the sacrament, and how does WCR 401 apply to these circumstances?
- Is it necessary to allocate the undesignated offerings as Oblation if they are collected during any worship that includes the Lord’s Supper? Is it important to talk specifically about Oblation and its connection to Abolish Poverty, End Suffering during the Disciples’ Generous Response element of a worship that includes the Lord’s Supper?

Consideration of these and other issues led the Presidency to decide it is time to present updated guidelines for serving the Lord's Supper. These updated guidelines do not change any provisions in the earlier guidelines for the practice of open Communion. These guidelines clarify how that practice is to be lived throughout the worldwide church. These guidelines also provide instructions on how to serve Communion in a new setting in the life of the church.

The Presidency provides these guidelines in its role as "leading interpreters and teachers of the laws and revelations of God" (WCR 386) and continued fulfillment of the direction approved by the 1994 World Conference that the "First Presidency develop guidelines for the administration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper" (WCR 1240). The responsibility of the Presidency to provide such guidelines also is emphasized in Doctrine and Covenants 164:4.

The multiyear process of exploring issues with various leadership groups and developing updated guidelines was done with the spirit and intent of several sections of Doctrine and Covenants particularly in mind:

Look especially to the sacraments to enrich the spiritual life of the body. Seek for greater understanding of my purposes in these sacred rites and prepare to receive a renewed confirmation of the presence of my Spirit in your experiences of worship.

—Doctrine and Covenants 158:11c

You have already been told to look to the sacraments to enrich the spiritual life of the body. It is not the form of the sacrament that dispenses grace but it is the divine presence that gives life. Be respectful of tradition and sensitive to one another, but do not be unduly bound by interpretations and procedures that no longer fit the needs of a worldwide church. In such matters direction will come from those called to lead.

—Doctrine and Covenants 162:2d

Generously share the invitation, ministries, and sacraments through which people can encounter the Living Christ who heals and reconciles through redemptive relationships in sacred community.

—Doctrine and Covenants 163:2b

The Presidency's reflections on these scriptures and input from the Theology Formation Team led to an understanding of our journey with this sacrament. The Spirit is calling us to recognize how strictly maintaining a rigid form and emphasizing the "worthiness" of participants can lead people to be legalist and judgmental, against which we have been strongly cautioned (2 Corinthians 3:6, Matthew 7:1–3, Luke 6:37–38). The Lord's Supper patterned after Jesus' ministry should be gracious, generous, inviting, and welcoming. It is with this awareness that these guidelines were developed.

The Presidency discussed the history and purpose of WCR 401, "Emblems of the Sacrament" during its exploration. This resolution is the response of the 1895 General Conference to a question about who should serve the emblems in relation to the meaning of the phrase "administer the sacrament" in Doctrine and Covenants 17:10–11. Evidently, in some congregations, deacons, teachers, and members were serving the sacrament, which led to WCR 401. After extended deliberation, the Presidency decided this resolution does not apply to settings, such as online participation, that were not conceivable when it was approved.

Background from the Theology Formation Team

Online technologies are transforming the world in which the church pursues Christ's mission. These cultural changes impact people's daily lives. The church must carefully discern how best to share its message in this new context.

The Theology Formation Team reflected on the question, "What are the implications of celebrating the Lord's Supper in an online environment?" The team discarded the phrases *virtual community* and *virtual Communion* early on. The term *virtual* unfortunately can suggest something is not "real." But the online communities pursuing this question are very real. They meet regularly, share testimonies, support each other pastorally, pray together, and share the good news of Christ's gospel.

Online congregations are emerging in response to the call to "create diverse communities of disciples and seekers" (Doctrine and Covenants 161:6a). Technology allows people to form community despite challenging circumstances.

The Presidency asked the team to consider the theological and sacramental issues related to this possibility. The team affirmed that this also was "ecumenical territory" because sacramental questions cannot be addressed in isolation from the wisdom of the wider Christian tradition. At the same time, Community of Christ faces specific situations that many of our ecumenical partners do not. For example, great distances often separate our congregations and members. This fact is important as we think about access to the Lord's Supper. Our identity as a prophetic people calls us to explore new, even radical, ways of being in community together, while also being "respectful of tradition" (Doctrine and Covenants 161:5, 162:2d).

The team considered the issue of the Lord's Supper in online environments by exploring the three historic markers of a sacrament: sign, word, and covenant. The repeatable "signs" of the Lord's Supper are the emblems, bread and wine. The "words" in Community of Christ tradition are the Communion prayers. In Community of Christ, celebration of the Lord's Supper, the "covenant," is evident in the practice of remembering one's baptismal covenant.

All three markers assume a gathered community. Celebrating the Lord's Supper must occur in "real time," meaning Communion is to be celebrated by all participants at the same time (see *The Priesthood Manual* [2004], pp. 177–178). "Gathered in real time" implies a visual [or audio] connection. The team held that the Lord's Supper might be celebrated online when there is a "real-time" gathering with shared live video and sound, and where the emblems are blessed and the service presided over by a priest, elder, or high priest.

Connection between Communion and Oblation

The Presidency discussed the historical and theological role of Oblation as part of the Disciples' Generous Response in worship services including the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Specifically, the Presidency and the Presiding Bishopric reviewed World Conference Resolution (WCR) 773 and two sections of the Doctrine and Covenants referenced by the WCR: 42:8 and 59:2:

WCR 773 Oblation (Adopted April 10, 1917)

That every jurisdiction should comply with the law by receiving oblations at Sacrament Communion services, as found in Doctrine and Covenants 59:2, and that the amount so received should be placed with the Presiding Bishopric in harmony with Doctrine and Covenants 42:8.

Doctrine and Covenants 42

8a If thou lovest me, thou shalt serve me and keep all my commandments.

8b And, behold, thou wilt remember the poor, and consecrate of thy properties for their support, that which thou hast to impart unto them, with a covenant and a deed which cannot be broken;

8c and inasmuch as ye impart of your substance unto the poor, ye will do it unto me, and it shall be laid before the bishop of my church and his counselors, two of the elders, or high priests, such as he shall or has appointed and set apart for that purpose.

Doctrine and Covenants 59

2h but remember that on this, the Lord's day, thou shalt offer thine oblations, and thy sacraments, unto the Most High, confessing thy sins unto thy brethren, and before the Lord.

As a result of this review, the Presidency and the Presiding Bishopric reaffirmed the practice of Oblation as still appropriate today. This practice is rooted in Community of Christ history and scripture as an act associated with Communion of acknowledging our compassion for and solidarity with the poor for whom Jesus Christ is especially concerned. In accordance with WCR 773, it is the practice of the church to have Disciples' Generous Response (offering) as part of a Communion service. It should highlight the church's ministries of abolishing poverty and ending needless suffering with undesignated offerings contributed to the Mission Initiative of Abolish Poverty, End Suffering. When collecting an offering while serving Communion is not appropriate, exceptions can be made to WCR 773 at the discretion of the presiding officer. An example would be serving Communion to someone in the hospital.

The initiative includes the church's Oblation ministries for the poor and needy as defined in WCR 773. Abolish Poverty, End Suffering/Oblation contributions are received and sent to the World Church for disbursement following established processes in response to those in need. Oblation ministries are a line item under the Mission Section of the Worldwide Mission Budget. The current budget can be found at www.CofChrist.org/financial-updates.

With this introduction and background in mind, the Presidency is pleased to present an updated version of "Guidelines for Serving the Sacrament of Lord's Supper" for use throughout the church. We commend this document for church-wide study and implementation.

Guidelines for Serving the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper (Communion)

Official Name: Sacrament of the Lord's Supper (Communion)

Description: A widely recognized Christian ritual of remembrance of the life, death, resurrection, and continuing presence of Jesus Christ, as patterned in the last supper of Jesus with the 12 apostles. In Community of Christ this sacrament also provides "opportunity for members to reaffirm their baptismal covenant, to reconcile strained relationships, and to commit together to the church's mission of promoting communities of generosity, justice, and peacefulness (Doctrine and Covenants 164:4b).

Scriptural Foundations: 1 Corinthians 11:23–26; Matthew 26:17–30; Mark 14:12–26; Luke 22:7–39; 3 Nephi 8:28–31; Doctrine and Covenants 17:22d, 17:23b, 119:5, 158:11c, 162:2d, 163:2b, 164:4, 165:3a–b

Sacrament Universals

- Connection to God and all of God's creation
- God's desire to bless people with wholeness
- God's self-revelation and interaction with humanity
- Connection to past, present, and future generations of God's people
- Recognition of God's grace and saving activity among us
- Acknowledgement of the Holy amid the ordinary
- Covenanting between the Divine and humans, humans and the Divine, and humans with each other

Primary Symbols

- Bread and wine (such as unfermented grape juice, water, or other unfermented beverages)
- Priesthood ministry
- Sacred meal of the faith community

Community of Christ Particulars Required

- Uncover the emblems (if covered) before the prayer of blessing (Doctrine and Covenants 119:5e).
- A priest or Melchisedec priesthood member(s) kneels with the congregation, as able, and reads the blessing of the bread and wine.
 - Bread (two options): Doctrine and Covenants 17:22d or contemporary-language version in the front of *Community of Christ Sings* or on the church's website
 - Wine (two options): Doctrine and Covenants 17:23b or contemporary-language version in the front of *Community of Christ Sings* or on the church's website
 - Combined bread and wine (two options): based on Doctrine and Covenants 17 or contemporary-language version in the front of *Community of Christ Sings* or on the church's website
- Following the reading of the prayer(s) of blessing by a priest or Melchisedec priesthood member(s), the emblems are served in one of the following ways:
 - Priests or Melchisedec priesthood members offer the emblems to each person.
 - The worship leader invites participants to come to a place(s) where they are served the emblems, or the emblems are made available by priests or Melchisedec

priesthood members. (Those unable to walk who desire to participate should be served the emblems by a priest or Melchisedec priesthood member.)

- Partaking the emblems is a personal choice. Priesthood members do not withhold the emblems from anyone.
- When A Disciple's Generous Response (offering) is part of the worship service, highlight the ministries of Abolish Poverty, End Suffering and contribute undesignated offerings to Abolish Poverty, End Suffering, which includes the church's Oblation ministries for the poor and needy (Doctrine and Covenants 42:8, 59:2, and WCR 773).

Community of Christ Particulars Practiced in Some Congregations, but Not Required

The following are examples:

- Melchisedec priesthood member presides.
- A priesthood member(s) prepares and arranges the emblems as needed during the worship service and before the blessings are read.
- Using white tablecloths (as opposed to colorful cloths).
- Covering the Communion table (and trays) with a large white cloth before the service; formally removing the cloth as the sacrament begins.
- Use of whole wheat bread and grape juice as the emblems.

Additional Guidance from the First Presidency

In addition to the basic information above, the following guidelines are provided to address specific questions that have arisen throughout the worldwide church.

1. Ordained and unordained persons may prepare the emblems, set the Communion table, remove any covering linens, and arrange the emblems and serving trays before the worship service. Following the service remaining emblems may be consumed or discarded by ordained or unordained persons.
2. Worship related to the Lord's Supper should focus on the sacrament itself. Worship elements should enhance participants' experience with the sacrament. The spoken message, if included, should be brief and center on the meaning of the sacrament.
3. We understand the sacraments work together as an expression of God's love, grace, and shalom. However, multiple sacraments performed in a single worship service may limit the congregation's ability to fully experience the deeper meaning of a particular sacrament. Therefore, if another sacrament is scheduled, ensure that the meaning of each sacrament is emphasized.
4. It is highly recommended that two statements be read during the worship before the emblems are blessed and served. The first is a scripture reading that roots the sacrament in scripture and Christian history. Scriptures appropriate for this purpose are 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 or other similar passages (Matthew 26:17–30, Mark 14:12–26, Luke 22:7–39). The second statement is one of invitation. It describes how Community of Christ views and practices the Lord's Supper. It usually is read just before the emblems are blessed. This is referred to as the Invitation to Communion:

Invitation to Communion

All are welcome at Christ's table. The Lord's Supper, or Communion, is a sacrament in which we remember the life, death, resurrection, and continuing presence of Jesus Christ. In Community of Christ, we also experience Communion as an opportunity to renew our baptismal covenant and to be formed as disciples who live Christ's mission. Others may have different or added understandings within their faith traditions. We invite all who participate in the Lord's Supper to do so in the love and peace of Jesus Christ.

5. Emblems are offered to all worship participants.
 - a. While serving, priesthood should not attempt to determine who should or should not partake. We offer the Lord's Supper following the example of Jesus, who generously shared table fellowship with all people, including those who were considered outcasts and sinners at the time (Mark 2:15, Luke 15:1–2). We are instructed to “Generously share the invitation, ministries, and sacraments through which people can encounter the Living Christ who heals and reconciles through redemptive relationships in sacred community” (Doctrine and Covenants 163:2b).
 - b. People recently baptized by Community of Christ priesthood members but not yet confirmed may participate in the Lord's Supper as a personal choice like others in the assembly.
 - c. Community of Christ teaches that children may be baptized when they are at least 8 years old (WCR 552). However, in the spirit of the sacrament, we accept the decisions of parents or guardians regarding whether their unbaptized children may participate in the sacrament. Some parents or guardians, whether from Community of Christ or other faith traditions, prefer that the children for whom they are responsible wait until after baptism to receive Communion. Others allow participation before baptism as an expression of the child's desire to remember and follow Jesus Christ. In those instances, the key principle is that the child understands people participate in Communion to remember Jesus Christ and commit to doing their best to follow him. If parents or guardians of children are not present or available to consult, the pastor shall determine whether unbaptized children may receive the sacrament.
6. Worship planners and leaders should make provisions to meet needs that otherwise could keep individuals from fully participating in Communion. This might include providing gluten-free bread or acknowledging that not all people can kneel, come forward, or easily hold the emblems.
7. When planning ecumenical and interfaith services that include Communion, consult with the apostle about ways to honor Community of Christ particulars while honoring the Communion traditions of others.
8. When providing the Lord's Supper to sick or homebound persons, priesthood members endeavor to establish an atmosphere of worship. The prayer(s) of blessing on the emblems is read by a priest or Melchisedec priesthood member in the presence of the participant(s) even if the emblems were blessed previously. This ensures that all required elements of the sacrament, including the prayer(s) of blessing, are experienced by the participant(s). It is not recommended to have an Oblation offering during such visits. However, if someone wishes to make an offering, it should be received with gratitude and appreciation and given to the appropriate financial officer for the designated purpose.

9. The Holy Spirit instructs in unique situations where guidelines may not. Those who preside over congregations and worship services are called to do so in accordance with the leadings of the Spirit (Doctrine and Covenants 17:9). Their pastoral judgment should be respected in situations where further interpretations may be required. The Lord's Supper should never be used to cause spiritual, emotional, or relational harm. In an unusual or unanticipated situation, simply do the best you can to uphold the purpose and meaning of the sacrament.

Online Participation in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

“Technology presents opportunities for involvement in sacraments by priesthood members and participants in separate locations” (2019 words of counsel). This may occur in many ways. The following principles should be observed when planning and providing online participation in the Lord's Supper:

1. Real-time online participation in the Lord's Supper is considered the same as being in the single physical location.
2. The emblems should be physically present for all those wishing to partake.
3. A priest or Melchisedec priesthood member should read the prayer(s) of blessing on the emblems so that those in all locations experience the blessing(s) through sight and sound, closed-captioning, or sound only. Also, participants in all locations should be encouraged to kneel, if possible.
4. If priests or Melchisedec priesthood are not available to serve the emblems in some locations, participants may take the emblems for themselves from a designated plate or location. As discussed in the Introduction, WCR 401 does not apply in the online context.