



## On Observing Communion Virtually

The FMC encourages its members to receive Holy Communion as often as it is offered. Our ordained clergy vow to receive whenever possible and are authorized to consecrate the elements used in communion and officiate over communion services in the church. As Free Methodists, our doctrine and practice stands within the great traditions of classic Christianity. We confess that the Lord Jesus has given the church two sacraments, Baptism and Holy Communion, as means of grace, and commands that we receive Communion regularly.

Presently the global Body of Christ worships and witnesses in a world threatened by the pandemic, COVID-19. As a result, it is impossible in many places for congregations to assemble physically for worship. For now, it is not possible to be together, consecrate the same bread and juice pastors will offer, and receive the elements so consecrated. Here is our counsel for times such as these with respect to Holy Communion, based on scriptural principle.

*God Condescends.*

Throughout the history of the People of God, God has consistently and lovingly condescended to the weaknesses, vulnerabilities, and circumstances of His people to offer saving grace. Whatever the circumstances, if God did not stoop to our human level, we could not receive the grace God extends and God's people need. This is especially true in times of crisis when our normal routines are disrupted.

*We Participate in the Meal in a worthy Manner.*

The Apostle Paul instructs the church in Corinth to discern the Body of Christ when they gather together for the communion meal, to receive the bread and the cup in a manner worthy of Christ and his Body, and thus to proclaim the Lord's death until he returns (1 Cor. 11:26-29). In our present circumstances, when normal protocols cannot be followed, how may we receive the bread and the cup?

*Jesus offers His "flesh" and His "blood" as Gifts of Life in the Spirit*

Jesus identified himself as the living bread given to our world to enliven all who will receive him (see all of John 6, but especially vv. 41 and following). In this context, he asserts: Whoever eats his flesh and drinks his blood enters and enjoys life eternal (vv. 53, 54, 55, 56). Without fully understanding the "how," we simply note that Jesus offered the grace the church later expected to receive in communion—his "flesh" and his "blood."

This was shocking and off-putting to many who heard Jesus make such claims. In fact, many decided no longer to follow because of this hard saying (vv. 60, 66). They puzzled, how could



he give us his flesh and blood? Jesus' response was that it is the Spirit who gives life, not the flesh; and that these words I am speaking are Life and Spirit (v. 63). That is, receiving grace in Jesus' "flesh" and "blood" comes by trust in Jesus' Spirit enlivening and empowering his Word concerning his sacrificial death for us. The "eating" and "drinking" offer, nurture and sustain Life because the Spirit enlivens or empowers the elements to do so when received in faith.

Therefore, on the basis of these biblical principles, in our current emergency situation we counsel our pastoral leaders to prepare the people to receive communion in virtual assemblies.

- In advance, instruct the people to prepare their hearts and minds for communion, and to prepare simple elements in the places where they participate in a virtual worship time.
- When assembled virtually, at the appropriate time, the Pastor and people will proceed with the service of Communion.
- During the words and prayer of consecration, let the people take the elements they have prepared and lift them up to the Lord.
- Once consecrated in this spiritual and virtual way, as guided by the pastor, let worshipers receive each element in turn in concert with others in virtual assembly.

During this pandemic, we encourage Pastors to celebrate the Lord's Supper, to receive Jesus' "flesh" and blood" by faith in Jesus' sacrifice for their sins and the world's, by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

*Note: For further study, see 2015 Book of Discipline Paragraphs 123, 125, 3411, 8100, 8110 (The Ritual).*