

# What do we believe about ... **Holy Communion?**

**Holy Communion**  
Christian grace mercy  
Sacrament spirituality  
bread manna sacrifice  
Israel blessing  
blood passover  
discipleship sacrificial  
humanity love  
forgiveness nature  
wine justice  
sharing God  
bounty Jesus



# *What do we believe about* **Holy Communion?**

## **The roots of the meal**

The Lord's Supper, also known as Holy Communion, is one of the two 'sacraments', along with baptism, that the United Reformed Church believes to have been instituted by Christ. Holy Communion is a symbol meal during which we meet the risen Lord through the activity of the Holy Spirit.

*'bread and wine are  
signs of God's blessing'*

The meal finds its roots in Scripture. In the Old Testament, bread and wine are signs of God's blessing. Bread or Manna was sent

down from the heavens for the people of Israel when they were hungry in the desert before they entered the Promised Land. Wine and vineyards are symbols of God's bounty and blessing as providing security and safety (1 Kings 4:25). The beloved people of God were described as a vineyard, who were to bear fruit revealing God's justice and mercy. God expected it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes with bloodshed and cries (Isaiah 5:7). Jesus declared himself to be the true vine (John 15:5), the true Israelite who did bear the fruit of self-sacrificial love and justice.

Primarily, though, the sacrament of Holy Communion is a meal which arose out of the Passover meal, in which Israelites commemorated God's work in saving the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt. Death passed over the Israelite houses because they



marked their doorposts with the blood of a sacrificed lamb. In so doing, their ‘first born’ were saved (Exodus 12). That sacrificial meal was given new significance by Jesus in his last meal with his disciples when he used bread and wine to refer to his body and blood. Eating these symbols came to be seen as participating in his offering of his life to bring salvation for the world. Sharing the bread and wine in Holy Communion is a recollection of the past event of Christ’s death on the cross in a way that enables the past to become real and present for us today. Through the Holy Spirit what Christ accomplished through his death is made available to us today: the forgiveness of sin, the overcoming of evil and death, and God’s grace and mercy.



## The meal and the future

Holy Communion is also a means of prayerfully waiting for God's future. In identifying bread and wine as means of conveying to us the benefits which result from his sacrifice (salvation), Jesus promises not to drink wine again until he drinks it in his Father's kingdom (Matthew 26:29). Paul's account of the Lord's Supper identifies it as 'proclaiming the Lord's death until he comes' (1 Corinthians 11:26). In this way, Holy Communion also anticipates the fulfilment of salvation in the future kingdom of God.

When we share in the meal, we remember what Christ did in a particular place and a particular time. But this leads us to focus not on the past but on how new life in Christ affects the present and points us to God's future when all things shall be made new (Revelation 21:5) and God is all in all (1 Corinthians 15:28).

## Sharing the meal

There have been different practices in various times and places in the history of the Church, as well as controversy and disagreement over what happens at the Supper. In the United Reformed Church, it is usually a minister of the Word and Sacraments who presides at Holy Communion, and the words spoken will include thanksgiving, a reminder of why we eat bread and drink wine together in accordance with Christ's example and command, and a prayer to the Holy Spirit to enable communion. In the United Reformed Church, there is no single way of celebrating, though it is common for Elders to serve the congregation by handing out bread and individual cups to people in the congregation, often asking them to hold their portion until all are served, so that the congregation shares together and thereby shows its unity in Christ.



One feature of modern practice of Communion in the United Reformed Church is to welcome all who wish to share in the meal. No one is refused access to the Supper, regardless of what church they belong to or their personal piety. Yet there

‘welcome all who wish to share in the meal’

is no obligation to partake and, for whatever reason, those present can exempt themselves without being subject to the judgement of any of those present.

The general practice in the United Reformed Church is to hold the sacrament once a month in worship. There are no rules, however, and it is for the local Church Meeting to decide how frequently Communion should be celebrated.



**This is one in a series of booklets about the United Reformed Church. The booklets can be read and downloaded at [www.urc.org.uk/believe](http://www.urc.org.uk/believe)**



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Produced by the Communications Team of the United Reformed Church on behalf of its Faith and Order Committee.

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