



What does Christ Community Church affirm about... Communion?

Overview and Introduction

Christ Community Church affirms a memorial meal of bread and wine*, which we call Communion, believing by faith that the Lord Jesus Christ himself is present *at the table but not in the elements*. The bread and wine represent his body and blood. This tradition was inaugurated by the Lord Jesus Christ himself and subsequently celebrated by his disciples since the first century. Since beliefs and practice of this sacrament vary widely, we agree it is necessary to clarify how we practice this sacrament within the context of our local expression of the Church.

Based on this practical need, this pamphlet aims to provide brief *historical and scriptural* support for Communion, detail clearly our *position*, and explain our *practice* during our worship gatherings.

* (we substitute juice in respect of all who wish to partake)

Scriptural and Historical Support

Communion began with Jesus' own inauguration of the practice (see Luke 22:17-20). Although referred to by different names (e.g. *Holy Communion, The Eucharist, The Divine Liturgy, The Lord's Supper, and Mass*), we commonly use the word "Communion" to represent our practice. It is an act of worship encompassing a celebratory meal of bread and wine, in which participants honor the sacrificial death made on our behalf by the Lord Jesus Christ. In the beginning of its practice, early Christians celebrated Communion around an actual communal meal; many later believers adopted the bread and wine as simply expressions of this memorial.

The earliest source document is found in Paul's letter to the Corinthian church, dating to 50 AD:

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, 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." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

Subsequent documents, such as the Didache and letters penned by our early Church fathers such as Ignatius of Antioch and Justin Martyr, bear witness to the significance of this practice in the early church.¹

Matthew, Mark and Luke each affirm that Jesus began this Communion meal.² Further, the Gospel of John speaks of Jesus being the "bread of life" and indicates a follower's need to feed on him by "eating his flesh and drinking his blood" (John 6:35-38). Although this language doesn't directly address the practice of Communion, it seems to bear witness to "Eucharistic" or "thanksgiving" thinking pertaining to this communal meal.

Our Position on Communion

The Reformation saw enormous change for the church. At that time, significant debate arose surrounding both the presence of Christ in the meal and the significance of this rite to Jesus' atoning sacrifice. This debate continues today. Christ Community does not seek to correct the various practices of this rite within the current church at large, but to clarify our beliefs surrounding this rite.

As such, we affirm – by faith – the mysterious presence of the living Christ *at the table but not in the elements* of the bread and wine. In other words, Jesus is present by faith both at the table and, more specifically, in the hearts of the people in his gathered Church. As such, we do not believe the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Jesus, a concept known as transubstantiation.

What does Communion accomplish? Fellowship with the Lord - not salvation! We believe Jesus finished the work of redemption on the cross and his subsequent resurrection, and both are sufficient unto salvation for the believer. Therefore, at the table, we thankfully celebrate his finished work of atonement for our sins. We believe the Living God can and does draw near to us as we celebrate communion in faith.

Our Practice of Communion

At Christ Community Church, we offer an “open” Communion table. By “open”, we mean that any and all who call Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior are welcome to participate with us at the Communion table.

When we serve Communion during our worship service, we will typically have the congregation form two lines up the center isles of our church as the elements of bread and wine are distributed to each person. We allow any of our members to serve the elements; they do not have to be ordained clergy. Parents decide on the readiness of their own children to receive the elements, upon their profession of faith. The wine we use is actually grape juice, avoiding the use of alcohol to love well those who struggle with alcoholism and to respect the consciences of abstainers. Yet, we recognize the “wine” used in the early church most likely contained alcohol.

Communion is a continuing rite within the visible Church and an essential expression of our worship at Christ Community Church. If you would like to discuss our position, we invite you to speak with an elder.

¹ 1 Corinthians 10:16-21, 11:17-34, Ignatius, *letter to the Philadelphians*, circa 135 or 150, Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, circa 165-167

² Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:17-20