



West Ohio Conference

Guidelines for Online Communion

In Extremis

In this season in which we find ourselves, many have asked about the administration of the Sacrament via various forms of social media and other digital outlets. It is the position of Bishop Palmer and the Cabinet that, yes, you can administer the Sacrament of Communion, as long as you and your congregation understand the notion of In Extremis.

In Extremis is a Latin term that came out of the European black death plague. It means *in an extremely difficult situation* and came into being around the year 1530. ¹*In Extremis*; arising out of contexts marked by extreme suffering and/or injustice ... is marked by a willingness to respond to the invitation to go beyond one's own situation and capacities, to accept overwhelming and powerlessness, (and) to adopt the undefended posture of Christian hospitality ... ²*In Extremis* is the position of engaging in ministry because we are dealing with an extremely difficult situation that requires us to assume the posture of Christian hospitality.

In Extremis has some more modern examples. For example, on the other side of the 9/11 attacks on The United States in September 2001, the Roman Catholic church in the New York City area approved allowing the full Requiem Mass versus a Memorial Mass. The difference is the presence of a physical body, and in a Requiem Mass, Communion is served. While no body was present for most of these services, a Requiem Mass was allowed. This policy change was *In Extremis* and was deeply meaningful to thousands of people in the affected dioceses.

My first baptism occurred when I was a clinical pastoral education student in seminary. I baptized a dying child in the hospital where I was serving. Because the child's family was Roman Catholic and I was not ordained at the time, the rite was conducted *In Extremis*.³

Later, as an ordained pastor in the West Ohio Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church, I served Communion to a member who was a patient on a respirator. I held up the Bread and the Cup. No one in the room received the elements, but everyone knew we had received the body and the blood of Christ. It was Communion *In Extremis*.⁴

This, however, is not a license to continue this practice when life returns to normal. Within our Wesleyan heritage, we must remember the place of Elders, Deacons and Local Pastors licensed for sacerdotal (priestly) ministries.

It is the position of the Bishop and the Cabinet, that this privilege is for a season and that there will be a return to practices in accordance with our liturgy. (*West Ohio Cabinet vote In Session, March 19, 2020.*)

¹Merriam-Webster Dictionary, Online publication, 2020, Incorporated.

²Slee, Nocola, *Theological reflection in extremis: remembering Srebrenica** Pages 30-43, Published online: 01 Apr 2019

³ & ⁴Rev. Dr. Todd D. Anderson, Conference Superintendent, The West Ohio Annual Conference, The Ohio River Valley District, The United Methodist Church.



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Specific Guidelines for Practice for Online Communities

Instructions for Leading Online Communion

“We believe the Sacraments, ordained by Christ, are symbols and pledges of the Christian’s profession and of God’s love toward us. They are means of grace by which God works invisibly in us, quickening, strengthening and confirming our faith in him.

“We believe the Lord’s Supper is a representation of our redemption, a memorial of the sufferings and death of Christ, and a token of love and union which Christians have with Christ and with one another. Those who rightly, worthily and in faith eat the broken bread and drink the blessed cup partake of the body and blood of Christ in a spiritual manner until he comes.” *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, Paragraph 104: Article VI – The Sacraments, pages 73-74.*

With this in mind, people of your congregation may participate in Holy Communion from their homes as you lead online worship.

As with each pastor and local church, there numerous expressions of presenting and receiving the bread and the cup, Christ’s broken body and shed blood.

Here is what is necessary for any expression, celebration or participation.

1. Scriptural setting: Holy Communion is celebrated in the context of worship. When you worship online, you are part of the context. When a Scriptural context has not been presented, read one of the following Scriptures to set the context: *Matthew 26:26-30; Mark 14:22-26; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-29.*
2. Service of Word and Table: Communion liturgy found in The United Methodist Hymnal, The United Methodist Book of Worship, or other appropriate source. The consecration of the bread and the cup provides the opportunity for the whole community to participate in the broken body and shed blood of Jesus.
3. Grape juice (have enough available for those gathered in your location): Grape juice is preferable. If you do not have grape juice, use your best judgment on a replacement. The point is to participate in the body and blood of Christ.
4. Bread or crackers (have enough available for those gathered in your location): Use your best judgment on what to use.
5. Pastor to lead the liturgy: You, as the pastor, should take the lead. Participating online will have special meaning and benefits. Holy Communion is still a community act of worship.
6. Share your experience: After receiving Communion online, please email your district office letting us know that you participated in receiving Holy Communion. If possible, snap a quick photo and include it with your email as well. We share because we have not been here before. We are all learning. Sharing your experience helps all of us learn, grow and find new ways of being in relationship as the body of Christ.