

Communion (Heath Church of Christ)

The fundamental goals of the Heath Church of Christ are to experience unity among all Christians while standing firm on the truth of God's word. It is our conviction that those two goals work in tandem, that returning to the truth of God's word will bring unity to the church. Therefore, we attempt to restore the doctrine and practices of the New Testament church in order to be faithful to God's inerrant word and also in the hope that such restoration will bring unity among Christians.

Why do you choose serve communion on a weekly basis?

Regarding the observance of the Lord's Supper, we desire to imitate the New Testament church. In Acts 2, when the church first started, it is recorded that "every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts (2:46)." Every day the believers were together and it is possible that they were celebrating communion every day as they ate meals together. As the church grew they were participating at least weekly in the celebration of communion and doing so on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). Therefore, we participate in communion at least weekly at our corporate worship services.

The New Testament does not dictate how or how often a Christian should (or should not) partake of communion (Jesus simply said, "Do this in remembrance of me" Luke, 22:19, I Cor. 11:24-26 says "as oft as you do this..."), therefore we do not consider the frequency of observance to be a test of fellowship. If an individual Christian or another congregation decides to take communion more or less often than once a week, or on a different day of the week, this should not be a cause for division. However, we do believe that the Lord's Supper has real spiritual significance for the Christian and therefore to observe communion less than weekly seems unwise. Participating in communion every week at HCC provides a rich reminder of the work of Christ, but it also presents a challenge because the frequent observance of communion can tempt a person to treat it as routine or ritualistic.

What do the bread and juice symbolize in the communion service?

When Jesus gave the Lord's Supper, he said about the bread and the wine, "This is my body . . . this is my blood" (Luke 22:19-20), but since he was still physically with them it seems obvious that he was speaking symbolically. The same can be said of Paul's teaching about communion, "is not this bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?" (I Corinthians 10:16). The Bible never refers to communion as a re-sacrifice of Christ. In fact, the New Testament says Christ died "once for all" (Heb. 7:27) and refers negatively to "crucifying the Son of God all over again," reserving this behavior for apostates who attempt to return to Christianity (Heb. 6:6). Jesus did say, "My body is real food and my blood is real drink" (John 6:55), but later on in the passage he indicated to his disciples that he was speaking spiritually (John 6:63).

Therefore, we believe that the bread and the wine are spiritual representations of the body and blood of Christ (or symbols) but do not actually become (in substance) the physical body and blood of Christ. While some churches believe that the bread and wine are changed into the physical body and blood of Christ when the priest speaks the words of institution during the mass (as in the Roman Catholic Church), or co-exist within our bodies as the physical body and blood of Christ when they are consumed (as with some Lutherans and other churches), we accept that communion has real spiritual significance, but that it occurs without a literal transformation of the elements into the physical body and blood of Christ.

Are there any requirements to be met before an individual participates in communion?

According to the New Testament, participation in communion serves several purposes. Each participant is to "examine himself," remembering the sacrifice Christ made on the cross (I Cor. 11:28-29). At HCC we practice open communion where each individual determines whether or not to partake. While we emphasize that communion is designed for those who are immersed believers in Christ, we have no age or membership requirements for one to partake of communion. We only ask that each person examine him or herself and remember the sacrifice of Christ. However, our church's children's ministry does guide younger elementary-aged children in the partaking of communion.

In regards to children, communion is offered on a weekly basis during children's worship to all students who are immersed believers. Students not participating in the partaking of communion are reminded by the worship leader why we take communion and are directed through a song to focus their thinking on remembering what Jesus has done for us. Small Group Leaders are helpful with redirecting students if there are questions about baptism, but our practice is to not bar anyone from receiving communion.

If there are continued questions, follow up with parents is initiated by the Children's Ministry Director collaborate with families on the student's next step of his or her faith journey.

Beyond personal experience, however, the Lord's Supper is also a communing together with other believers; an intimate time of fellowship when we declare our unity through Jesus Christ. "Because there is one loaf," the Apostle Paul wrote, "we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf" (1 Cor. 10:17). Usually at HCC we partake in unison, displaying our unity in Christ, other times we partake individually. Regardless, each time we do it, the Bible says it is a proclamation of Christ's return. "Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11:26).