



WILLIAM T. MCALILLY
RESIDENT BISHOP

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
NASHVILLE EPISCOPAL AREA
MEMPHIS AND TENNESSEE CONFERENCES

Guidance on Virtual Communion

As the Lenten journey continues to unfold, our pastoral leaders are thinking of creative ways to engage in faithful ministry. Traditionally, Palm Sunday and Holy Week, Good Friday and Easter mark the pinnacle of our faith story. Pastors are asking how shall we be faithful in this moment to both our theology and practice? What practices bring hope, comfort and strength to our people?

Traditionally, in our congregations, the first Sunday of the month is when we celebrate Holy Communion. Creativity will emerge and I look forward to hearing how our leaders celebrate this Holy Season and engage with the holy mystery of the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

Dr. Timothy Wengert, a Lutheran who is a part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America/United Methodist Church, offers a communion dialog that reminds us that the proclamation of the Gospel is at the heart of Holy Communion. He writes: At the heart of all these things is truly God's undeserved mercy and love, on the one hand, and faith which is engendered and strengthened by them. ¹

In thinking about how we might engage our people virtually with regard to our liturgical traditions, I have reflected on John Wesley as a practical theologian as well as an innovator. He wanted pastors on the frontier to have the ability to offer the sacraments, so he ordained Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke.

After prayerful and careful consideration of the theological concerns with virtual communion, I offer the following guidelines as a way for our pastors to faithfully exercise sacramental authority.

1. There needs to be a discipling component of the service so that the theological understanding of Holy Communion is deepened in the community of faith.
2. The virtual service must be liturgically sound. Do not sacrifice the liturgy for the sake expediency. The Great Thanksgiving is our standard. Below you will find a suggested liturgy for a Global Pandemic.
3. Urge those receiving communion to maintain integrity with the elements chosen. Grape juice and bread or crackers would be preferred, but I trust your discretion in using what you have available that you feel is an acceptable substitution under the circumstances.

With these considerations, a pastor may decide to offer Holy Communion virtually only until the ban of gathering in worship in our sanctuaries is lifted.

Attached are resources for The Great Thanksgiving and the Love Feast.

These are offered with permission from Bishop Cynthia Harvey, Bishop of the Louisiana Episcopal Area.

- [A Eucharistic Prayer for the Global Pandemic](#)
- [Comfort Food: A Feast of Love](#)

¹ Dr. Timothy Wengert: *Holy Communion under Quarantine*