

The Sacraments

How We Celebrate Communion

In the Presbyterian/Reformed tradition, Communion is an act of thanksgiving and remembrance for Christ's perfect sacrifice of love. Just as the Passover Seder that Jesus celebrated with his disciples remembered the liberation of the Israelites from slavery, when we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we remember God's miraculous gift that frees us from sin and death.



There are several terms for the church's ritual of sharing bread and wine, and each focuses on a different aspect of the feast. **The Lord's Supper** refers to the establishment of the sacrament on the night of Jesus's arrest. **Eucharist**, from the Greek "to give thanks," emphasizes our offering of thanksgiving for God's gift of redemption. **Communion** originally referred to the specific act of sharing of bread and wine, and for many it denotes the sacrament and its entire associated liturgy.

There are many ways to distribute the elements during communion, and the *Directory for Worship* says they should be "distributed in the manner most suitable to the particular occasion." The people may gather at the Table to receive the bread and the cup, they may come to the servers, they may receive the elements in the pews. The elements may be served from trays, or received by intinction, when the bread is dipped into the cup. While the elements are shared, the people may sing hymns, the choir may sing anthems, organ or instrumental music may be played, or people may pray in silence.

The 2006 PCUSA sacrament study *Invitation to Christ* recommends that the chalice and paten (cup and plate) be placed on the table every Lord's Day to remind us that we live "a life of thanksgiving for who we are in Christ."

How We Baptize

The sacrament of baptism is the sign and seal of the covenant of grace, and publicly joins us with the community of those who have also been incorporated into the body of Christ, the Church. The origins of baptism are found in ancient liturgical washings such as the purification rites in Jewish tradition called *Tvilah*, a full body immersion in a pool of water called a *Mikveh*. The baptism of Jesus by John may have been a form of *Tvilah*.

Here at Third Presbyterian Church, we practice infant and child baptism; youth and adults who profess their faith may also be baptized. In the Reformed tradition, infants and children of believers are heirs to the covenant of grace, and it is God who acts graciously through baptism. Just as circumcision does not create faith in an 8-day-old Jewish boy, baptism does not create faith in a child; it is a sign of membership in the visible covenant community.

Parents who wish to have their child baptized are asked to profess their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, renounce evil and affirm their reliance on God's grace, and declare their

intention to provide for the Christian nurture of their child. The congregation also has an obligation to the child, and is asked to share in the responsibility for the nurture of those baptized. The baptismal font is always in full view of the congregation every Sunday to remind us of the new life that is ours in Jesus Christ.