

The Practice of the Reception of Holy Communion: A Guide for Parishioners and Visitors

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You may receive Holy Communion in the Episcopal Church as an adult if you have been baptized. Additionally, according to the Book of Common Prayer, the church canons, and the guidance of the House of Bishops, communicants (those who receive Holy Communion) are invited to:

- have examine their lives before God
- repent of their sins
- seek to be in love and charity with all people, and
- seek the Real Presence of Jesus Christ.

If ever you have concerns about your readiness for reception then please talk with the priest afterwards.

It is possible to come forward and choose not to receive the Sacrament but receive a blessing from the priest instead. This is common with infants and toddlers who are unable or not yet willing to receive. The parent should quietly inform the priest that the child does not receive.

In the case of adults, you may wish to receive only a blessing if you know you are not baptized or otherwise not ready to receive Holy Communion that day. The adult should cross their arms across their chest. The priest will still announce the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ without conferring the bread and then offer a blessing. The chaliceist will announce the Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ without conferring the wine.

In this manner the altar is hospitable to all who wish to come even though they may be unable to receive the Sacrament at that time.

We do use real wine. If you do not wish to receive the wine due to personal convictions about alcohol or in response to your sobriety then cross your arms over your chest at that time. You can still receive the bread.

If you have wheat allergies and wish to receive gluten-free bread then extend a single hand. If you extend both hands nested in each other as usual then you will receive wheat bread.

It should also be noted that, since the institution of the 1979 prayer book, the understanding of the Church is that **baptized children should receive the Sacrament as soon as they are able.** The validity of the Sacrament does not rest entirely on the intellectual or spiritual capacity of the communicant but is also a function of the faith of the gathered community. Intellectual and spiritual understanding will come in time as

Christian formation continues. In the mean time it is important that all baptized children of the Church, insofar as they are able, receive the Sacrament.

The normative manner for receiving the Sacrament of Holy Communion is in “both kinds separately”. This means eating the bread and drinking from the cup. This has been the way that Holy Communion has been received throughout the history of the Church except during the Middle Ages when the bread only or neither bread nor wine was communicated to the congregation. Receiving both kinds separately is the normative expectation of *The Book of Common Prayer*.

When receiving in this manner it is best to have your right hand resting in your left, open and elevated toward the priest in order to receive the bread. To eat the bread, move your hands directly to your mouth instead of picking it up with your fingers. To drink from the chalice, gently grasp the foot of the chalice and help the chalicist guide it to your mouth and tilt it so as to be able to drink. Ladies are encouraged to wear minimal lipstick when drinking from the chalice.

There are two exceptional practices which are allowed:

1. Receiving in “both kinds simultaneously” may be allowed if the Bishop approves and in a manner of which the Bishop approves. This practice is commonly called “**intinction**”. Communicants may receive the Sacrament in both kinds simultaneously by either (1) the communicant dipping the bread into the chalice or (2) by letting the chalicist intinct for the communicant. In the latter option this involves leaving the bread in your open hand and waiting for the chalicist to take the bread, intinct, and place the bread directly on your tongue.

It is important that when the Sacrament is received by intinction that care is exercised so as not to touch the wine in the chalice with the fingers. This is one reason why some communicants prefer the chalicist to intinct the bread since they are trained to do this carefully.

2. Receiving the Sacrament in “one kind alone” most often occurs when a child or adult receives the bread but for various reasons may decline the wine. It is customary to signal to the chalicist that you are declining the wine by crossing your arms across your chest. The chalicist will still announce the Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ even though you are not receiving the wine. The fullness of the Sacrament is still received in this manner. Receiving the Sacrament in one kind alone may also occur in receiving when sick, in the hospital, or otherwise homebound. In this case the priest may bring and give only the bread.

The question arises every year during cold/flu season about the safety of receiving Holy Communion.

The Sacrament of Holy Communion is a sacred family meal of the gathered Body of Christ which in fact makes us the Body of Christ. The normative practice is to receive the Sacrament by using the chalice. However, it is not unusual for communicants coming from protestant churches which use separate cups for Holy Communion to have some hygiene questions about receiving from the chalice—and especially during cold/flu season.

The general response of medical and church professionals has been that the risk of infection from receiving Communion is quite low. This is due to the alcohol content of the wine, the silver of the chalice, and the chalice wiper wiping the chalice with the purificator cloth.

It still ends up being largely a personal decision. But, if you wish to maximize the safety of yourself and your pew mates then you may consider these points:

1. If you have a fever, had a fever less than 24 hours prior, or have other significant symptoms of the possible onset or existence of cold or flu, then generally stay home. If you have to come to church for some urgent reason, then wash hands religiously, cover any coughing, refrain from any close contact, and refrain from Communion.
2. Receiving by intinction (dipping the bread in the wine) obviously involves less contact than drinking from the chalice.
3. Receiving the bread alone—and then crossing your arms over your chest to refrain from the wine—is also considered full participation in the sacrament and yet the least contact.