

THE LORD BE WITH YOU

DAD: C'mon, Holly, we'll be late for church!

HOLLY: *(From upstairs)* I'm not going.

DAD: Holly, we go through this all the time. Finish getting dressed and let's get going. It's Communion today.

MOM: *(To dad)* Actually, I think that's the problem, Frank. Holly was talking with me earlier this week. I don't know what it is, but Holly seems to want to avoid going to church when we have Holy Communion.

HOLLY: *(Coming downstairs)* Okay, I'm ready. But, I don't want to go.

DAD: Holly, is there something we should talk about? Mom says she thinks you're avoiding something—something about Communion. Can you tell me about it?

HOLLY: I don't know, dad. It's just that—well, we learned in class that Communion is a happy time, but I don't think anybody believes that. Have you ever watched those people? They all look miserable. I just don't want to be there.

MOM: Maybe we should talk to the pastor about this. I've noticed the same thing.

• Have you ever paid attention to the people in your church when they go to Holy Communion? In many congregations, the seemingly sad attitude that bothered Holly bothers others, too. It can cause one to wonder if Holy Communion really is a joyous thing.

With this session we begin a study of the Sacrament of Holy Communion. You'll learn what Christians receive from it and think about our own attitudes toward it.

3 STATEMENTS

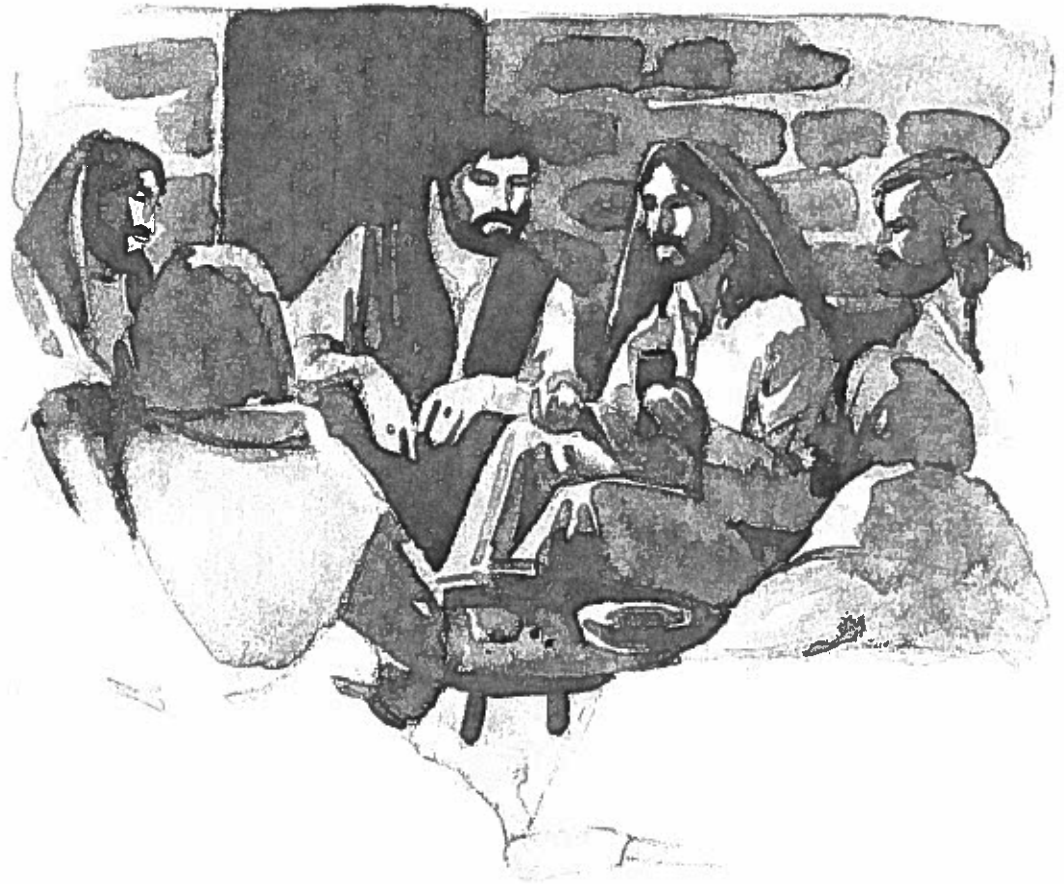
- Holy Communion was begun by Christ as a gift to his followers.
- In Holy Communion, your relationship with God is renewed "for you."
- In Holy Communion, God refreshes the relationship begun in Holy Baptism.

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Source

HOW DO WE KNOW ABOUT HOLY COMMUNION?

We know about Holy Communion from four passages in the New Testament. Three of the gospel writers—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—tell about Jesus offering the last supper to his disciples. The apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians set out to teach the Christians in Corinth more about the sacrament by describing it to them. These four descriptions are the basis of what we know and believe about this sacrament.



Holy Communion was begun by Christ as a gift to his followers.

Take a look at the four passages. They are Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:14-20, and 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. First, read each one. Can you find three things that are the same or similar in all four accounts? Can you find three things that are different?

Each of the accounts is similar, but no two of them are identical. Which one is closest to what you have heard said during Communion services?

Even though there are differences, it is easy to tell that all four accounts tell us the same basic things about the very beginnings of the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

- Bread and wine were used.
- The bread was called Jesus' body; the wine was called Jesus' blood.
- Jesus shared this bread and wine with his closest followers shortly before his crucifixion so that they could continue in his name after his death and resurrection.

WHAT DOES MARTIN LUTHER SAY?

Find Martin Luther's explanations to Parts 1 and 2 of the Sacrament of Holy Communion (see page 172). In Part 1, Luther says that Holy Communion is "the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ given with bread and wine, instituted by Christ himself for us to eat and drink."

Do you think Luther got his definition right? Check out the passages you were just reading. Is there mention that Holy Communion is the body and blood of Jesus Christ? Yes. Are bread and wine mentioned? Yes. Did Christ begin this practice? Yes. Is there anything to cause us to believe that the sacrament is for us to eat and drink? Yes.

In Part 2, Luther mentions several benefits we receive in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Draw a circle around the benefits that Luther mentions. Did you draw a circle around the words *forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation*?

FOR YOU

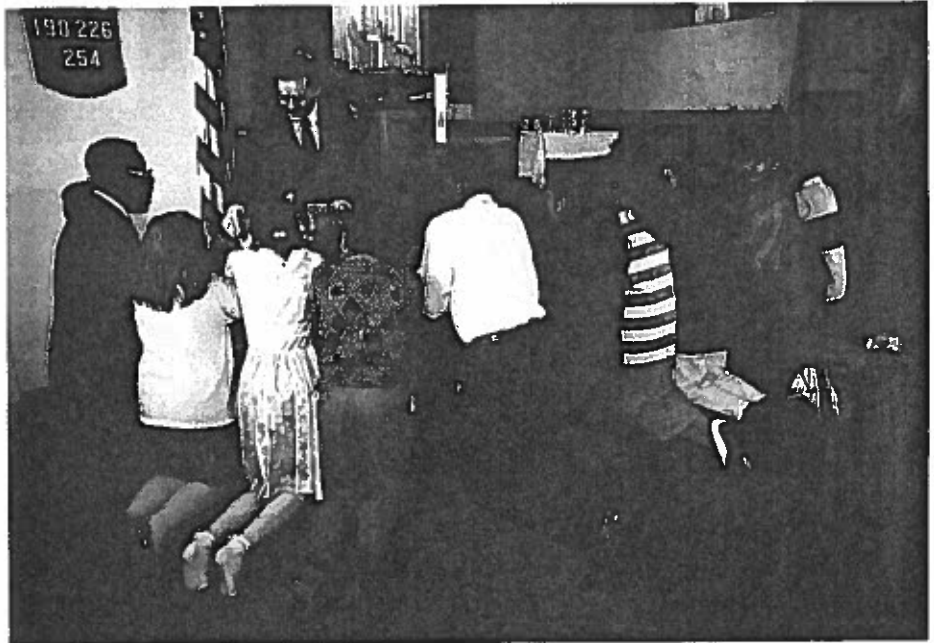
It is clear from the Bible passages we studied that *Holy Communion was begun by Christ as a gift to his followers*. But it wasn't just to the followers who were with him that night. It is for all followers in all the ages. That includes us, too!

Jesus knew the things he was teaching about the coming of God's kingdom were growing less and less popular with the people. Many wanted him to become a king and drive the Romans out of Israel. Others thought that he was claiming too much for himself and wanted him out of the way before people began to take him too seriously. Still others were offended by the way that Jesus always stuck up for the poor and the powerless. Many people wanted Jesus silenced.

Jesus knew this when he gathered his followers together that night; he knew that he would not be with them much longer. But how could he leave his followers with the sure hope that what he had said and done would not vanish with him?

The answer was this last meal with his followers. Jesus took the bread and wine—ordinary things—and gave them new meaning. Jesus promised that whenever they gathered in his name and wanted him in their midst, he would be truly present. Christ gave his body and blood in the bread and the wine. Whenever his followers needed to know his presence, they could share this sacrament and know he was with them. Whenever they needed a powerful reminder of God's readiness to forgive their sin, they could share this sacrament and know that it was so. Jesus does this for us, too. With his command, we can be certain he is always with us, from beginning to end.

Look again at the passage from 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. Do you notice how directly it says that this is done "for you"? Martin Luther believed that the power and the wonder of the whole sacrament is wrapped up in those two little words. This is not something that just gets done because we are supposed to do it. Receiving the Sacrament of



Holy Communion is a very personal gift "for you"—for each of us who knows how impossible it is to live a perfect life! *In Holy Communion, your relationship with God is renewed "for you."*

In Holy Communion, your relationship with God is renewed "for you."

FOR US

Holy Communion, though, is not only a very personal gift to you, it is a wonderful gift to us, too. *In Holy Communion, God refreshes the relationship begun in Holy Baptism*. This sacrament, then, is something not only *for you*, but also something *for us*—something that continues to bind us together as brothers and sisters in Christ. In Holy Baptism we are made brothers and sisters with each other. In Holy Communion, that relationship with God and with our brothers and sisters is renewed again and again.

You might think of it in terms of a loving husband and wife. Once, years ago, they were married to each other and became partners for life. But each morning, they say "I love you" to each other and renew and refresh that relationship.

We are baptized only once. But we need the repeated refreshment of that relationship from God or else we can begin to lose confidence in it or use it improperly.

PICTURING THE RELATIONSHIP

Look carefully at the pictures that are on page 34 of your book. Each of these pictures is an artist's attempt to share his or her understanding of Holy Communion. As you look at each picture, try to discover what you think was important to that artist about the sacrament. For instance, does one picture seem to focus more on Jesus? Does another seem to say more about the relationship between Jesus and his followers? Look carefully at each one and then jot your ideas in the margin on page 34.

Shaping life

A RIGHT TIME, PLACE, OR WAY?

If you have ever visited another church on a Sunday when Holy Communion was being offered, you may have already noticed how many differences there can be in the way people receive the sacrament. You may recall we discovered the same thing a while back when we remembered how many different ways Holy Baptism can be celebrated.

See if you know (or can find out) the answers to the following questions about your congregation's Holy Communion procedures.

- How often is Holy Communion offered?
- At what age do members of your congregation usually receive first communion?
- Is Holy Communion taken to the homes of shut-ins and to the hospital

In Holy Communion, God refreshes the relationship begun in Holy Baptism.

beds of the sick? If so, who takes it to these people?

- What kind of bread is used?
- Is wine used or grape juice or both?

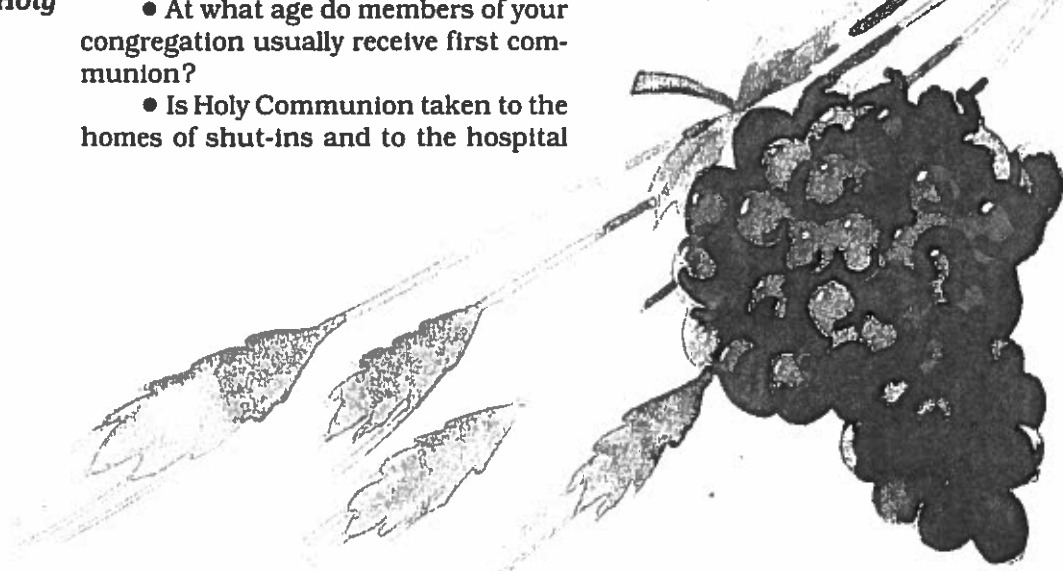
Within Lutheran congregations, there is a wide variety of practices. Some congregations offer Holy Communion a few times a year while others offer it daily. Many young people now receive first Communion around fifth grade. But there are a few congregations where it is offered at a younger age and others where it is offered at an older age.

In almost all congregations, Holy Communion is taken to the homes or bedsides of those who are sick or physically unable to come to church. Some congregations are beginning to use specially trained and commissioned lay people to help distribute the sacrament to persons who are sick and shut-in. In most places, however, it is still the pastor's responsibility to distribute the sacrament.

All different kinds of bread are used. Many congregations use specially prepared wafers. In others, members of the congregation bake special loaves of bread for use in Holy Communion. A number of others use pita bread because it is similar to the bread that Jesus would have used.

Years ago some Lutherans received grape juice at Communion. Now wine is commonly used. Many congregations offer both to permit an alternative for those who do not wish to consume alcohol or are allergic to it.

No matter how the sacrament is offered, it is still the sacrament.



FURTHER

opportunities

Bible Reading and Reflection

Read the following Bible passages and reflect on how many different ways God has found to love us and keep us in the special relationship with God.

- Matthew 14:22-33
- Matthew 15:22-28
- Luke 19:1-10
- John 6:32-40
- John 6:41-51

Memory

Turn to page 172 of your book and begin memorizing Martin Luther's explanation to Parts 1 and 2 of the Sacrament of Holy Communion. In Part 1, you need only memorize the answer to the question "What is Holy Communion?"

Activity 1

Try one or more of the following art projects. (They could take several weeks.)

- On page 34 you looked at pictures created by several artists that show their understanding of Holy Communion. Create your own. Try a collage (pasting pictures on a piece of cardboard), a drawing, photography, a banner, a painting, embroidery, or any other style you can think of to show your own understanding of the sacrament.

- If time and materials permit, you could make a chalice or a paten to be used in distributing Holy Communion to your congregation. This would be a big project and would require some special guidance by someone who knows how to make and finish pottery.

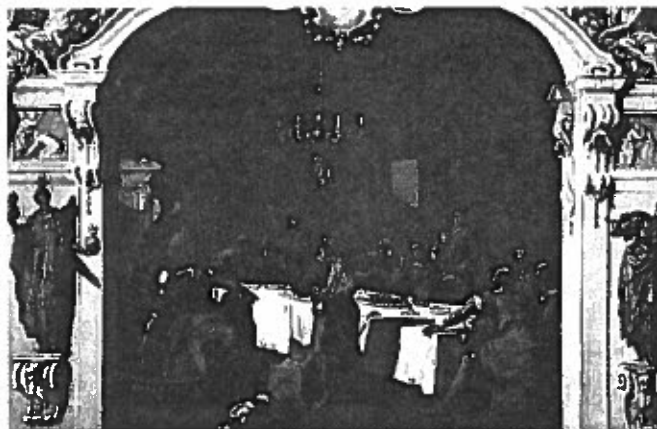
- Design a bulletin cover for an upcoming Holy Communion Sunday. Check with your pastor or the worship committee to arrange for a Sunday when it can be used. Check with the church office to see if your congregation has the equipment necessary to reproduce your design.

Activity 2

Conduct an interview about Holy Communion. Select a person such as a parent or guardian or someone else special to you and interview that person about his or her understandings and experiences with Holy Communion. You might want to use these questions.

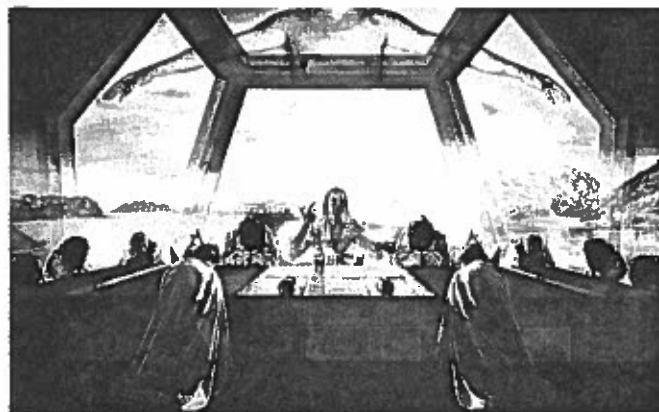
- What was your first Communion experience like?
- What do you do to prepare yourself to receive Holy Communion?
- What special meaning does Holy Communion have for you?
- Have you ever seen something funny happen at Holy Communion?
- Have you ever received Holy Communion at some place other than the church building? If so, where and why?

The Last Supper
 William Blake
 (British 1757-1827)
 National Gallery of Art,
 Washington
 Rosenwald Collection
 Date: 1799
 Canvas: 0.305 x 0.482 (12 x
 19 in.)



The Last Supper
 Sebastiano Ricci
 (Venetian 1659-1734)
 National Gallery of Art,
 Washington
 Samuel H. Kress Collection
 Date: 1713/1714
 Canvas: 0.67 x 1.04 (26½ x
 40¾ in.)

*The Sacrament of the Last
 Supper*
 Salvador Dalí
 (Spanish 1904-1989)
 National Gallery of Art,
 Washington
 Chester Dale Collection
 Date: dated 1955
 Canvas 1.667 x 2.670 (65¾
 x 105⅞ in.)



FOCUS

ON
 "FOR YOU"

"The Lord's Supper is given as a
 daily food and sustenance so that our

faith may refresh and strengthen itself
 and not weaken in the struggle but
 grow continually stronger. For the new
 life should be one that continually de-
 velops and progresses."

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 THER, translated by Robert H. Fischer, copyright ©
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