

We take part in the service. Holy Communion uses prayers, creeds and texts which go back to earliest Christian practice. We say or sing them. We share bread and wine. Once, in the history of our Scottish church, we would have taken our seats at a long table. Unfortunately that practice was lost and usually we remain in our pews, served by the elders. In some churches bread is passed from which each person breaks a portion. In others the bread is in small individual pieces. Three of the Stewartry churches use individual glasses for the wine. At Aberdalgie the common cup is still in use. Some folk may have a problem with the bread (an allergy for example), others with the wine (as in the case of an alcoholic). You can make your communion ‘in one kind’ by taking only bread or only wine if this is necessary.

Holy Communion - “The medicine of Immortality”

St. Irenaeus, second century Bishop of Lyons

“God has more room in your soul, through your receiving of the Sacrament, than he could otherwise have by your hearing of the Word only. Thus the Sacrament is very necessary, if only for the reason that we get Christ better, and get a firmer grasp of him by the Sacrament, than we could have before.”

From a sermon preached in 1589 by Robert Bruce, minister of the High Kirk of Edinburgh.

Prayers before Communion

Lord Jesus, you have invited me to meet you in the sacrament because you love me. Here you will entrust yourself to me, all you have done for me, all you will do for me. It is not my worthiness that is celebrated here but yours, not my faithfulness to God but yours. Forgive my failure and my sin. Let me relax, body, mind and spirit in your company; and when I rise from table send me out in your strength to the life you wish me to live.

In this communion I rejoice in my belonging in the company of the saints. Lord God, bless my sisters and brothers who share this sacrament in this congregation and around the world. May your Church be one that the world may see and believe. With those I have wronged I seek reconciliation. Those who have offended me I forgive.



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Holy Communion - Eucharist

Holy Communion, the Lord’s Supper, the Mass, the Breaking of Bread – by whatever name Christians know it – this is the central act of worship of the Christian Church. The name common to all traditions is *Eucharist* from the Greek for ‘thanksgiving’.

The Church carried over from the worship of the Jewish synagogue the reading of Scripture, the singing of Psalms and the offering of prayers. But the new element in worship, indeed the only instruction which Jesus gave his people about worship was to “do this in remembrance of me”.

We can imagine the first Christians gathering in someone’s house on Sunday (not yet a holiday), possibly after the day’s work and sharing a meal. During the meal the leader would take bread and break it, take the cup and bless it and distribute to the gathering. Until the Lord’s coming again Christians will do this in great cathedral, in tiny chapel, in the home of the sick, at conference or on battlefield. And in doing this they will be most truly and clearly the Church, the body of Christ.

What is happening in Eucharist?

When the bread and wine are set apart with

thanksgiving to God and prayer for the Holy Spirit to bless and use them, the risen Lord Jesus Christ is really present to his people. 'Remembrance' here is more than looking back – it is making present now all that our Saviour is, his life, death and resurrection, his ascension and his coming again at the end time – all this is present to us at Eucharist. In the Sacrament God places into our empty hands the perfect life of Jesus with all his merits. At last we have a worthy offering to hold up before our Father God. So we are strengthened and equipped for our life of discipleship.

What does the word Communion mean?

First and foremost communion means being at one with the Lord Jesus Christ and through him with God.

In the sacrament we are at one with all our fellow Christians. That is why Christians should be reconciled with one another before coming to table (Matt. 5:24). The style and language of worship around the world may be very varied but in the Eucharist we are one in Christ.

In the Eucharist we have communion also with the saints of God from earliest time and with those who are still to be born who will belong with us in the Lord.

Who is entitled to participate?

Normally Holy Communion is for the baptised. In the Church of Scotland we invite members baptised in infancy to make profession of their faith in adulthood but they are in no way barred from participating in the Eucharist before making that profession.

There may also be times when it is appropriate

for those who are not yet baptised to come to Communion. An early Scottish reformer said that the Communion is a "converting ordinance". But encountering the Grace of God in the sacrament would naturally call for a response of faith to follow.

In what sense are the bread and wine the body and blood of Christ?

Unlike some other traditions the Reformed Churches do not teach that the bread and wine (the "elements") are literally changed into the body and blood of Christ. But we do believe they are more than empty symbols. The Lord is true to his promises by the power of the Holy Spirit. In the whole action of taking, blessing, and sharing, the risen Christ is present to us in a wonderful mystery of grace where earth meets heaven.



If Eucharist is so important, why is it so seldom celebrated in the Church of Scotland?

The reformers, including Calvin and Knox, wished the Lord's Supper to be celebrated every Lord's Day but were hampered by the superstitious reluctance of people in the sixteenth century Catholic Church to

communicate often. The best they could achieve was monthly celebration. In Scotland, Knox had the added problem of scarcity of reformed ministers to preside. Infrequency of celebration for these reasons came to be accepted. In more recent times some congregations of the Church of Scotland have moved to monthly celebration. The over-solemn, wordy communion services of past years have generally been replaced by newer orders which have more of a spirit of celebration and it hoped that the reformers dream (and Jesus' instruction!) will gain favour. It is the Kirk Session of each congregation which sets the times for Holy Communion.

Can I participate in the sacrament in any tradition of the Church?

It is by the Lord's invitation that we come to the Table. He is the host, not the Church. You will find a welcome to Communion in all the churches of the Reformation including, nowadays, the Anglican churches. The Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church do not extend this invitation. It is the view of the Roman Catholic Church that Eucharist is a sign of unity and cannot be shared until that unity is achieved. We may feel it best simply to accept that this church has barred us even if the Lord himself has invited us!

How do we take part in the Church of Scotland service?

We come! We make it our priority to worship our Lord in the fellowship of the congregation.

We prepare. However we do it, we come ready to recognise the presence of Jesus in the service, listening for his word, open to a sense of his nearness.