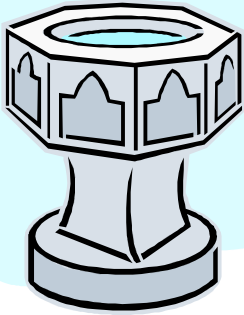


The Sacraments – Baptism and Holy Communion



The two recognized sacraments celebrated by the United Methodist Church are the sacrament of Baptism and the sacrament of Holy Communion or The Eucharist. The following information comes from books produced by the General Board of Discipleship entitled “By Water and the Spirit” and “This Holy Mystery.”



The Greek word used in the early church for sacrament is *mysterion*, usually translated mystery. It indicates that through sacraments, God discloses things that are beyond human capacity to know through reason alone. In Latin the word used is *sacramentum*, which means a vow or promise. The sacraments were instituted by Christ and given to the church. Jesus Christ is himself the ultimate manifestation of a sacrament. In the coming of Jesus of Nazareth, God's nature and purpose were revealed and active through a human body. The Christian church is also sacramental. It was instituted to continue the work of Christ in redeeming the world. The church is Christ's body — the visible, material instrument through which Christ continues to be made known and the divine plan is fulfilled. Holy Baptism and Holy Communion have been chosen and designated by God as special means through which divine grace comes to us. Holy Baptism is the sacrament that initiates us into the body of Christ "through water and the Spirit" ("The Baptismal Covenant I," *United Methodist Hymnal*, page 37). In baptism we receive our identity and mission as Christians. Holy Communion is the sacrament that sustains and nourishes us in our journey of salvation. In a sacrament, God uses tangible, material things as vehicles or instruments of grace. Wesley defines a sacrament, in accord with his Anglican tradition, as "an outward sign of inward grace, and a means whereby we receive the same" ("Means of Grace," II.1). Sacraments are sign-acts, which include words, actions, and physical elements. They both express and convey the gracious love of God. They make God's love both visible and effective. We might even say that sacraments are God's "show and tell," communicating with us in a way that we, in all our brokenness and limitations, can receive and experience God's grace.

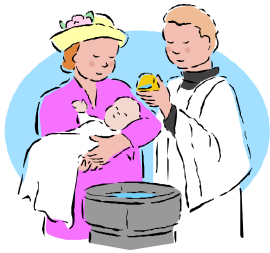
BAPTISM

From “By Water and the Spirit – A United Methodist Understanding of Baptism”:

Baptism & the Life of Faith: The New Testament records that Jesus was baptized by John (Matthew 3:13-17), and he commanded his disciples to teach and baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). Baptism is grounded in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ; the grace which baptism makes available is that of the atonement of Christ which makes possible our reconciliation with God. Baptism involves dying to sin, newness of life, union with Christ, receiving the Holy Spirit, and incorporation into Christ's Church. United Methodists affirm this understanding in their official documents of faith. Article XVII of the Articles of Religion (Methodist) calls baptism “a sign of regeneration or the new birth”; the Confession of Faith (EUB) states that baptism is “a representation of the new birth in Christ Jesus and a mark of Christian discipleship.”



The Baptismal Covenant: In both the Old and New Testament, God enters into covenant relationship with God's people. A covenant involves promises and responsibilities of both parties; it is instituted through a special ceremony and expressed by a distinguishing sign. By covenant God constituted a servant community of the people of Israel, promising to be their God and giving them the Law to make clear how they were to live. The circumcision of male infants is the sign of this covenant (Genesis 17:1-14, Exodus 24:1-12). In the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God fulfilled the prophecy of a new covenant and called forth the Church as a servant community (Jeremiah 31:31-34, 1 Corinthians 11:23-26). The baptism of infants and adults, both male and female, is the sign of this covenant.



Therefore, United Methodists identify our ritual for baptism as “The Services of the Baptismal Covenant” (*The United Methodist Hymnal*, pages 32-54). In baptism the Church declares that it is bound in covenant to God; through baptism new persons are initiated into that covenant. The covenant connects God, the community of faith, and the person being baptized; all three are essential to the fulfillment of the baptismal covenant. The faithful grace of God initiates the covenant relationship and enables the community and the person to respond with faith.

Baptism by Water and the Holy Spirit: Through the work of the Holy Spirit -- the continuing presence of Christ on earth -- the Church is instituted to be the community of the new covenant. Within this community, baptism is by water and the Spirit (John 3:5, Acts 2:38). In God's work of salvation, the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection is inseparably linked with the gift of the Holy Spirit given on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Likewise, participation in Christ's death and resurrection is inseparably linked with receiving the Spirit (Romans 6:1-11, 8:9-14). The Holy Spirit who is the power of creation (Genesis 1:2) is also the giver of new life. Working in the lives of people before, during, and after their baptisms, the Spirit is the effective agent of salvation. God bestows upon baptized persons the presence of the Holy Spirit, marks them with an identifying seal as God's own, and implants in their hearts the first installment of their inheritance as sons and daughters of God (2 Corinthians 1:21-22). It is through the Spirit that the life of faith is nourished until the final deliverance when they will enter into the fullness of salvation (Ephesians 1:13-14).

Since the Apostolic Age, baptism by water and baptism of the Holy Spirit have been connected (Acts 19:17). Christians are baptized with both, sometimes by different sign-actions. Water is administered in the name of the triune God (specified in the ritual as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) by an authorized person and the Holy Spirit is invoked with the laying on of hands, in the presence of the congregation. Water provides the central symbolism for baptism. The richness of its meaning for the Christian community is suggested in the baptismal liturgy which speaks of the waters of creation and the flood, the liberation of God's people by passage through the sea, the gift of water in the wilderness, and the passage through the Jordan River to the promised land. In baptism we identify ourselves with this people of God and join the community's journey toward God. The use of water in baptism also symbolizes cleansing from sin, death to old life, and rising to begin new life in Christ. In United Methodist tradition, the water of baptism may be administered by sprinkling, pouring, or immersion. However it is administered, water should be utilized with enough generosity to enhance our appreciation of its symbolic meanings.

The baptismal liturgy includes the biblical symbol of the anointing with the Holy Spirit -- the laying on of hands with the optional use of oil. This anointing promises to the baptized person the power to live faithfully the kind of life that water baptism signifies. In the early centuries of the Church, the laying on of hands usually followed immediately upon administration of the water and completed the ritual of membership. Because the laying on of hands was, in the Western Church, an act to be performed only by a bishop, it was later separated from water baptism and came to be called confirmation. In confirmation the Holy Spirit marked the baptized person as God's own and strengthened him or her for discipleship. In the worship life of the early Church, the

water and the anointing led directly to the celebration of the Lord's Supper as part of the service of initiation, regardless of the age of the baptized. The current rituals of the Baptismal Covenant rejoin these three elements into a unified service. Together these symbols point to, anticipate, and offer participation in the life of the community of faith as it embodies God's presence in the world.

Baptism as Incorporation into the Body of Christ: Christ constitutes the Church as his Body by the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13, 27). The Church draws new persons into itself as it seeks to remain faithful to its commission to proclaim and exemplify the Gospel. Baptism is the sacrament of initiation and incorporation into the Body of Christ. An infant, child, or adult who is baptized becomes a member of the catholic (universal) Church, of the denomination and of the local congregation. Therefore, baptism is a rite of the whole Church, which ordinarily requires the participation of the gathered, worshiping congregation. In a series of promises within the liturgy of baptism, the community affirms its own faith and pledges to act as spiritual mentor and support for the one who is baptized. Baptism is not merely an individualistic, private, or domestic occasion. When unusual but legitimate circumstances prevent a baptism from taking place in the midst of the gathered community during its regular worship, every effort should be made to assemble representatives of the congregation to participate in the celebration. Later, the baptism should be recognized in the public assembly of worship in order that the congregation may make its appropriate affirmations of commitment and responsibility.

Baptism brings us into union with Christ, with each other, and with the Church in every time and place. Through this sign and seal of our common discipleship, our equality in Christ is made manifest (Galatians 3:27-28). We affirm that there is one baptism into Christ, celebrated as our basic bond of unity in the many communions that make up the Body of Christ (Ephesians 4:4-6). The power of the Spirit in baptism does not depend upon the mode by which water is administered, the age or psychological disposition of the baptized person, or the character of the minister. It is God's grace that makes the sacrament whole. One baptism calls the various churches to overcome their divisions and visibly manifest their unity. Our oneness in Christ calls for mutual recognition of baptism in these communions as a means of expressing the unity that Christ intends (1 Corinthians 12:12-13).

Baptism as Forgiveness of Sin: In baptism God offers and we accept the forgiveness of our sin (Acts 2:38). With the pardoning of sin which has separated us from God, we are justified -- freed from the guilt and penalty of sin and restored to right relationship with God. This reconciliation is made possible through the atonement of Christ and made real in our lives by the work of the Holy Spirit. We respond by confessing and repenting of our sin, and affirming our faith that Jesus Christ has accomplished all that is necessary for our salvation. Faith is the necessary condition for justification; in baptism, that faith is professed. God's forgiveness makes possible the renewal of our spiritual lives and our becoming new beings in Christ.

Baptism as New Life: Baptism is the sacramental sign of new life through and in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Various identified as regeneration, new birth, and being born again, this work of grace makes us into new spiritual creatures (2 Corinthians 5:17). We die to our old nature which was dominated by sin and enter into the very life of Christ who transforms us. Baptism is the means of entry into new life in Christ (John 3:5; Titus 3:5), but new birth may not always coincide with the moment of the administration of water or the laying on of hands. Our awareness and acceptance of our redemption by Christ and new life in him may vary throughout our lives. But, in whatever way the reality of the new birth is experienced, it carries out the promises God made to us in our baptism.

Baptism as God's Gift to Persons of Any Age: There is one baptism as there is one source of salvation -- the gracious love of God. The baptizing of a person, whether as an infant or an adult, is a sign of God's saving grace. That grace -- experienced by us as initiating, enabling, and empowering -- is the same for all persons. All

stand in need of it and none can be saved without it. The difference between the baptism of adults and that of infants is that the Christian faith is consciously being professed by an adult who is baptized. A baptized infant comes to profess her or his faith later in life, after having been nurtured and taught by parent(s) or other responsible adults and the community of faith. Infant baptism is the prevailing practice in situations where children are born to believing parents and brought up in Christian homes and communities of faith. Adult baptism is the norm when the Church is in a missionary situation, reaching out to persons in a culture which is indifferent or hostile to the faith. While the baptism of infants is appropriate for Christian families, the increasingly minority status of the Church in contemporary society demands more attention to evangelizing, nurturing, and baptizing adult converts.

Infant baptism has been the historic practice of the overwhelming majority of the Church throughout the Christian centuries. While the New Testament contains no explicit mandate, there is ample evidence for the baptism of infants in Scripture (Acts 2:38-41, 16:15,33) and in early Christian doctrine and practice. Infant baptism rests firmly on the understanding that God prepares the way of faith before we request or even know that we need help (prevenient grace). The sacrament is a powerful expression of the reality that all persons come before God as no more than helpless infants, unable to do anything to save ourselves, dependent upon the grace of our loving God. The faithful covenant community of the Church serves as a means of grace for those whose lives are impacted by its ministry. Through the Church, God claims infants as well as adults to be participants in the gracious covenant of which baptism is the sign. This understanding of the workings of divine grace also applies to persons who for reasons of handicapping conditions or other limitations are unable to answer for themselves the questions of the baptismal ritual. While we may not be able to comprehend how God works in their lives, our faith teaches us that God's grace is sufficient for their needs and, thus, they are appropriate recipients of baptism.

The Church affirms that children being born into the brokenness of the world should receive the cleansing and renewing forgiveness of God no less than adults. The saving grace made available through Christ's atonement is the only hope of salvation for persons of any age. In baptism infants enter into a new life in Christ as children of God and members of the Body of Christ. The baptism of an infant incorporates him or her into the community of faith and nurture, including membership in the local church.

The baptism of infants is properly understood and valued if the child is loved and nurtured by the faithful worshiping church and by the child's own family. If a parent or sponsor (godparent) cannot or will not nurture the child in the faith, then baptism is to be postponed until Christian nurture is available. A child who dies without being baptized is received into the love and presence of God because the Spirit has worked in that child to bestow saving grace. If a child has been baptized but her or his family or sponsors do not faithfully nurture the child in the faith, the congregation has a particular responsibility for incorporating the child into its life.

Understanding the practice as an authentic expression of how God works in our lives, The United Methodist Church strongly advocates the baptism of infants within the faith community: "Because the redeeming love of God, revealed in Jesus Christ, extends to all persons and because Jesus explicitly included the children in his kingdom, the pastor of each charge shall earnestly exhort all Christian parents or guardians to present their children to the Lord in Baptism at an early age" (1992 *Book of Discipline*, par. 221). We affirm that while thanksgiving to God and dedication of parents to the task of Christian child-raising are aspects of infant baptism, the sacrament is primarily a gift of divine grace. Neither parents nor infants are the chief actors; baptism is an act of God in and through the Church.

We respect the sincerity of parents who choose not to have their infants baptized, but we acknowledge that these views do not coincide with the Wesleyan understanding of the nature of the sacrament. The United

Methodist Church does not accept either the idea that only believer's baptism is valid or the notion that the baptism of infants magically imparts salvation apart from active personal faith. Pastors are instructed by the **Book of Discipline** to explain our teaching clearly on these matters, so that parent(s) or sponsors might be free of misunderstandings.

The Sacrament of Holy Communion (The Eucharist) (Taken from "This Holy Mystery")

Grace and the Means of Grace: Today Holy Communion must be viewed within the larger context of United Methodist theology. In accord with biblical and Christian teaching, we believe that we are sinners, constantly in need of divine grace. We believe that God is gracious and loving, always making available the grace we need. Grace is God's love toward us, God's free and undeserved gift. Several words describe how grace works in our lives. Prevenient grace is that which "comes before" anything we can do to help ourselves. Although we are all bound by our sinful nature, grace gives us enough freedom of will to be able to respond to God. In truth, all grace is prevenient — we cannot move toward God unless God has first moved toward us. God seeks us out, pursues us, calls us to come into the loving relationship that we were created to enjoy. Convicting grace makes us conscious of our sinfulness and urges us to repentance. Justifying grace forgives and puts us into right relationship with God. Sanctifying grace enables us to grow in holiness of life. Perfecting grace molds us into the image of Christ. The grace of God is made available to us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and works in our lives through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

While divine grace reaches us any time and in any way that God chooses, God has designated certain means or channels through which grace is most surely and immediately available. John Wesley expressed it this way: "By 'means of grace' I understand outward signs, words, or actions, ordained of God, and appointed for this end, to be the ordinary channels whereby he might convey to men [and women], preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace" ("The Means of Grace," II.1). In the General Rules, Wesley listed these means of grace as, "The public worship of God. The ministry of the Word, either read or expounded. The Supper of the Lord. Family and private prayer. Searching the Scriptures. Fasting or abstinence" (*Book of Discipline*, ¶ 103; page 74). Elsewhere Wesley added Christian conferencing, by which he meant edifying conversation and meeting together in groups for nurture and accountability. These means are not to be understood as ways of earning salvation, for that is an unmerited gift. They are, rather, ways to receive, live in, and grow in divine grace. The Wesleyan tradition has continued to emphasize the practice of these means of grace throughout our salvation process.

The Meaning of Holy Communion

In the New Testament, at least six major ideas about Holy Communion are present: thanksgiving, fellowship, remembrance, sacrifice, action of the Holy Spirit, and eschatology. A brief look at each of these will help us better comprehend the meaning of the sacrament.

Holy Communion is Eucharist, an act of thanksgiving. The early Christians "broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people" (Acts 2:46-47a, *NIV*). As we commune, we express joyful thanks for God's mighty acts throughout history — for creation, covenant, redemption, sanctification. The Great Thanksgiving ("A Service of Word and Table I," *UMH*, pages 9-10) is a recitation of this salvation history, culminating in the work of Jesus Christ and the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. It conveys our gratitude for the goodness of God and God's unconditional love for us.



gathered community of the faithful, both local and universal. While deeply meaningful to the individuals participating, the sacrament is much more than a personal event. The first person pronouns throughout the ritual are consistently plural — *we, us, our*. First Corinthians 10:17 explains that "because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." "A Service of Word and Table I" uses this text as an explicit statement of Christian unity in the body of Christ (*UMH*, page 11). The sharing and bonding experienced at the Table exemplify the nature of the church and model the world as God would have it be.

Holy Communion is remembrance, commemoration, and memorial, but this remembrance is much more than simply intellectual recalling. "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24-25) is *anamnesis* (the biblical Greek word). This dynamic action becomes re-presentation of past gracious acts of God in the present, so powerfully as to make them truly present now. Christ is risen and is alive here and now, not just remembered for what was done in the past.

Holy Communion is a type of sacrifice. It is a re-presentation, not a repetition, of the sacrifice of Christ. Hebrews 9:26 makes clear that "he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself." Christ's atoning life, death, and resurrection make divine grace available to us. We also present ourselves as sacrifice in union with Christ (Romans 12:1; 1 Peter 2:5) to be used by God in the work of redemption, reconciliation, and justice. In the Great Thanksgiving, the church prays: "We offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ's offering for us . . ." (*UMH*; page 10).

Holy Communion is a vehicle of God's grace through the action of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8), whose work is described in John 14:26: "But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you." The *epiclesis* (biblical Greek meaning calling upon) is the part of the Great Thanksgiving that calls the Spirit: "Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, and on these gifts of bread and wine." The church asks God to "make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood. By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world . . ." (*UMH*; page 10).

Holy Communion is eschatological, meaning that it has to do with the end of history, the outcome of God's purpose for the world — "Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again" (*UMH*; page 10). We commune not only with the faithful who are physically present but with the saints of the past who join us in the sacrament. To participate is to receive a foretaste of the future, a pledge of heaven "until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at his heavenly banquet" (*UMH*; page 10). Christ himself looked forward to this occasion and promised the disciples, "I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Matthew 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18). When we eat and drink at the Table, we become partakers of the divine nature in this life and for life eternal (John 6:47-58; Revelation 3:20). We are anticipating the heavenly banquet celebrating God's victory over sin, evil, and death (Matthew 22:1-14; Revelation 19:9; 21:1-7). In the midst of the personal and systemic brokenness in which we live, we yearn for everlasting fellowship with Christ and ultimate fulfillment of the divine plan. Nourished by sacramental grace, we strive to be formed into the image of Christ and to be made instruments for transformation in the world.

Toward a Richer Sacramental Life

Like the little girl who was disappointed with what she received, United Methodist people are looking and hoping for something more in their Eucharistic experience. As we move toward a richer sacramental life, including weekly celebration of Holy Communion, we ask what spiritual benefits we receive from it. What do

divine love and power do in and for us through our participation in the sacrament? The answers to this question involve forgiveness, nourishment, healing, transformation, ministry and mission, and eternal life.

We respond to the invitation to the Table by immediately confessing our personal and corporate sin, trusting that, "If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Our expression of repentance is answered by the absolution in which forgiveness is proclaimed: "In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!" (UMH; page 8). This assurance is God's gift to sinners, enabling us to continue striving to live faithfully. Wesley wrote, "The grace of God given herein confirms to us the pardon of our sins by enabling us to leave them" ("The Duty of Constant Communion," 1.3).

We receive spiritual nourishment through Holy Communion. The Christian life is a journey, one that is challenging and arduous. To continue living faithfully and growing in holiness requires constant sustenance. Wesley wrote that, "This is the food of our souls: This gives strength to perform our duty, and leads us on to perfection" ("The Duty of Constant Communion, 1.3). God makes such sustenance available through the sacrament of Eucharist. In John 6:35, Jesus tells the crowd: "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." As we return to the Table again and again, we are strengthened repeatedly. We go out empowered to live as disciples, reconcilers, and witnesses. In the words of the prayer after Communion, "Grant that we may go into the world in the strength of your Spirit, to give ourselves for others . . ." (UMH; page 11).

As we encounter Christ in Holy Communion and are repeatedly touched by divine grace, we are progressively shaped into Christ's image. All of this work is not done in a moment, no matter how dramatic an experience we may enjoy. It is, instead, a lifelong process through which God intends to shape us into people motivated by love, empowered and impassioned to do Christ's work in the world. The identity and ministry that God bestows on us in our baptism are fulfilled as we continue to be transformed into disciples who can respond to God's love by loving God and others (Romans 12:1-2).

Through Eucharist, we receive healing and are enabled to aid in the healing of others. *Sozo*, the root of the Greek word used in the New Testament for healing, is also translated as salvation and wholeness. Much of this healing is spiritual, but it also includes the healing of our thoughts and emotions, of our minds and bodies, of our attitudes and relationships. The grace received at the Table of the Lord can make us whole. As those who are being saved, we seek to bring healing to a broken world. The United Methodist Book of Worship describes this well: "Spiritual healing is God's work of offering persons balance, harmony, and wholeness of body, mind, spirit, and relationships through confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Through such healing, God works to bring about reconciliation between God and humanity, among individuals and communities, within each person, and between humanity and the rest of creation" (page 613). Holy Communion can be a powerful aspect of the services of healing provided in the Book of Worship (pages 615-623).

The grace we receive at the Lord's Table enables us to perform our ministry and mission, to continue his work in the world — the work of redemption, reconciliation, peace, and justice (2 Corinthians 5:17-21). As we commune, we become aware of the worth and the needs of other people and are reminded of our responsibility. We express the compassion of Christ through acts of caring and kindness toward those we encounter in our daily lives. In our baptism, we have vowed to "accept the freedom and power God gives [us]

to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves" (UMH; page 34). But, in the words of the prayer of confession, we acknowledge our failures: "We have rebelled against your love, we have not loved our neighbors, and we have not heard the cry of the needy" (UMH; page 8). Remembering the revolutionary Jesus, we are impelled to challenge unjust practices and systems that perpetuate political, economic, and social inequity and discrimination (Matthew 23; Luke 4:16-21; 14:7-11).

The loving God who meets us at the Table gives us the gift of eternal life. Jesus' presentation of himself as the spiritual bread of life in John's Eucharistic account (6:25-58) makes clear the connection: "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day" (6:54). This life in union with Christ is life eternal. It is not only the promise of our being with Christ after physical death. It is also our being in dynamic loving relationship with Christ here and now. It is life that never ends because it is grounded in the everlasting love of God who comes to us in the sacraments.

O Thou who this mysterious bread
didst in Emmaus break,
return, herewith our souls to feed,
and to thy followers speak.

Charles Wesley

The United Methodist Hymnal, 613

The Presence of Christ

Principle: Jesus Christ, who "is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being" (Hebrews 1:3), is truly present in Holy Communion. Through Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, God meets us at the Table. God, who has given the sacraments to the church, acts in and through Holy Communion. Christ is present through the community gathered in Jesus' name (Matthew 18:20), through the Word proclaimed and enacted, and through the elements of bread and wine shared (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). The divine presence is a living reality and can be experienced by participants; it is not a remembrance of the Last Supper and the Crucifixion only.



Background: Christ's presence in the sacrament is a promise to the church and is not dependent upon recognition of this presence by individual members of the congregation. Holy Communion always offers grace. We are reminded of what God has done for us in the past, experience what God is doing now as we partake, and anticipate what God will do in the future work of salvation. "We await the final moment of grace, when Christ comes in victory at the end of the age to bring all who are in Christ into the glory of that victory" (By Water and the Spirit: A United Methodist Understanding of Baptism, in Book of Resolutions; page 816), and we join in feasting at the heavenly banquet table (Luke 22:14-18; Revelation 19:9).

The Christian church has struggled through the centuries to understand just how Christ is present in the Eucharist. Arguments and divisions have occurred over the matter. The Wesleyan tradition affirms the reality of Christ's presence, although it does not claim to be able to explain it fully. John and Charles Wesley's 166 Hymns on the Lord's Supper are our richest resource for study in order to appreciate the Wesleyan

understanding of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. One of these hymns expresses well both the reality and the mystery: "O the Depth of Love Divine," stanzas 1 and 4 (The United Methodist Hymnal, 627):

O the depth of love divine,
the unfathomable grace!
Who shall say how bread and wine
God into us conveys!
How the bread his flesh imparts,
how the wine transmits his blood,
fills his faithful people's hearts
with all the life of God!
Sure and real is the grace,
the manner be unknown;
only meet us in thy ways
and perfect us in one.
Let us taste the heavenly powers,
Lord, we ask for nothing more.
Thine to bless, 'tis only ours
to wonder and adore.

Article XVI of The Articles of Religion of The Methodist Church describes the sacraments as "certain signs of grace, and God's good will toward us, by which he doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm, our faith in him" (Book of Discipline, page 63).

Article XVIII describes the Lord's Supper as "a sacrament of our redemption by Christ's death; insomuch that, to such as rightly, worthily, and with faith receive the same, the bread which we break is a partaking of the body of Christ; and likewise the cup of blessing is a partaking of the blood of Christ" (Book of Discipline, page 64). (See section "[The Communion Elements](#)" in this paper for related material.)

Article VI of The Confession of Faith of The Evangelical United Brethren Church speaks similarly of the sacraments: "They are means of grace by which God works invisibly in us, quickening, strengthening and confirming our faith in him. . . . Those who rightly, worthily and in faith eat the broken bread and drink the blessed cup partake of the body and blood of Christ in a spiritual manner until he comes" (Book of Discipline, page 68).

United Methodists, along with other Christian traditions, have tried to provide clear and faithful interpretations of Christ's presence in the Holy Meal. Our tradition asserts the real, personal, living presence of Jesus Christ. For United Methodists, the Lord's Supper is anchored in the life of the historical Jesus of Nazareth, but is not primarily a remembrance or memorial. We do not embrace the medieval doctrine of transubstantiation, although we do believe that the elements are essential tangible means through which God works. We understand the divine presence in temporal and relational terms. In the Holy Meal of the church the past, present, and future of the living Christ come together by the power of the Holy Spirit so that we may receive and embody Jesus Christ as God's saving gift for the whole world.

Practice: Because Jesus Christ has promised to meet us there (1 Corinthians 11:23-26), Christians approach the Communion Table with desire and expectation, with awe and humility, and with celebration and gratitude. Pastors need to be trained and formed (in seminary, course of study, licensing school, and continuing education) in the theology, spirituality, history, and tradition of the sacraments and in how to most effectively utilize proclamation, ritual, gestures, postures, and material signs in order to convey their full meaning.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE GO TO:

<http://www.gbod.org/worship/thisholymystery/callingyou.html>