



Communion

Introduction to Communion

Emmanuel Baptist Church began its ministry in Eastleigh in 1933. Then as now it existed to present the 'faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints' (Jude 1:3). It is a member of the Old Baptist Union, a group of evangelical Baptist churches founded in 1880.

Communion is a vital part of church life, being practised in different forms by most Christian denominations, who may call it Holy Communion, Mass, Eucharist or The Lord's Supper. It was conceived by Jesus to enable the disciples to remember the significance of his sacrifice and to give the church a focal point for fellowship. Please read this booklet prayerfully and carefully, and keep it in a safe place for future reference.

Anyone who has an ongoing faith in and relationship with Jesus is welcome to join us in Communion. But it is important that participants understand the basis of Communion as we see it, as outlined in this booklet. If you are in any doubt about your eligibility to participate, please speak to me or one of the church's officers.



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About Communion

Communion can be seen as the second sacrament of the Christian era, and the only one initiated by Jesus Himself. The first, water baptism, was introduced by John the Baptist. Jesus was baptised by John at the start of His public ministry, thus establishing the principle that all Christians should be baptised. He held the Last Supper at the end of His ministry, saying it was to be celebrated in remembrance of Him, thus establishing the principle that all Christians should take Communion.

There are also some important contrasts between the two sacraments. Water Baptism is *inaugural*, done only once in a person's Christian life, indicating that they have identified with Jesus' death and resurrection. Communion is *continual*, occurring frequently to remind the believer that while Jesus' sacrifice was once and for all, it has an on-going effect on our lives. We have been forgiven for our past sins and the ones we still fall into. Because it is continual, even if a Christian feels it inappropriate to take Communion for a while, they can resume at any time.

Water Baptism is centred on the believer, their new life in Christ and their spiritual cleansing. Communion is centred on Jesus instead, and on how His sacrifice paved the way for believers to have salvation. At Passover, the feast from which Communion came, Jews would recite the story of their escape from slavery in Egypt. Similarly Christians use Communion as a regular reminder that Jesus' sacrifice brought them out of their own slavery to sin.

What The Bible Says

Most biblical teaching on Communion comes from 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. It shows us that 'whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.' (verse 26). It is part of our Christian witness to the world, a declaration of our faith in Christ and proof that we identify with Him 'in his sufferings' (Romans 8:17).

It teaches that Communion must be taken seriously (verses 27-34). While the Bible does not prevent anyone from taking Communion (Jesus even gave it to Judas Iscariot knowing that he was about to betray Him (Matthew 26:20-30, John 13:26)) those who take it must understand it's importance. It is not just food and drink. If someone does not have faith in Christ, they should not participate; a decision they must make for themselves (1 Corinthians 11:28).

Communion is not celebrated in heaven. Once there, we will not need a reminder of Jesus' sacrifice, we will see Him face to face (Revelation 5). When Jesus told the disciples that He would drink with them in the Father's Kingdom (Matthew 26:29) He was speaking of the Messianic banquet referred to in Matthew 22:1-14, 25:1-13, not Communion. 1 Corinthians 11:26 is clear that Communion proclaims the Lord's death 'until He comes'.

After the resurrection, those on the Road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35) recognised Jesus when He broke bread with them. Christians long to 'see' Jesus. And what better place to do that than while sharing and celebrating Communion?

The Need for Communion

See Matthew 26:26-30, Mark 14:22-26, Luke 22:14-20.

- 1 Jesus started it.** At or near the most emotional hour of His life he left a symbol of what his death and resurrection would mean to Christians. Jesus did not say the bread and wine would become his body and blood. He used symbolic language which the disciples would have understood from the Passover feast where the sacrificial lamb did not become, but represented, those for whom it was sacrificed.
- 2 Jesus commanded it.** It was made clear to the disciples that this was not a one-off. 'Do this in remembrance of me' (Luke 22:19) indicates that it was to be done after he had gone, on a continuing basis, to be 'passed on' to future generations of Christians, which is exactly what the Apostle Paul taught and practised (1 Corinthians 11:23) .
- 3 The Apostles perpetuated it** - Acts 2:42 and 46. Celebrating Communion was one of the spontaneous characteristics of the fledgling church in its first days. New converts 'devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer... They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts'. It was done in the Christian environment of their homes, not in the Jewish temples that they also attended, because breaking of bread is centred around Christ whom they uniquely worshipped. So even before the church became independent of Judaism, Communion was a defining feature of daily Christian living (Acts 2:46).

That said, nothing is mentioned later in the New Testament about how often Communion was celebrated. We know the Apostle Paul broke bread at one meeting on the first day of the week (Acts 20:6-7), which may have helped establish Sunday as the Christian Sabbath and the day Communion is most often celebrated. His use of the word 'whenever' in 1 Corinthians 11:26 suggests it was celebrated frequently.

It is a chain of continuity linking past, present and future:

- The past, because it is an act of remembrance: 'Do this in remembrance of me' (Luke 22:19). It calls to mind not just the physical act of His sacrifice but the motivation behind it: His unstinting love for us.
- The present, because the biblical injunction is continual, 'do this' (1 Corinthians 11:24, 25). It keeps our vision on the cross. It demonstrates to others that salvation through His death and resurrection is still available.
- The future, because it points to Jesus' eventual return (1 Corinthians 11:26). We do not know when that will be, but in faith we look forward to that day. Of course we may die before that happens. Either way Communion helps us focus on eternity.

It is a chain of community because Jesus gave it to the Apostles, who passed it on to the New Testament churches. Over the centuries it has been handed down to us, and we will pass it on to the next generation.

It is a chain of consistency. Over the centuries it has been celebrated in different ways, in different cultures and no doubt it will continue to do so. But the core purpose will remain the same: to point people to Jesus' sacrifice.

Who Can Take Communion?

As stated previously in this booklet, Communion in Emmanuel is open to all who profess faith in Jesus and understand what it symbolises. It is not practical for the church to vet would-be participants, so they must decide for themselves if it is appropriate for them to participate. There is no embarrassment in letting the bread and wine pass by if anyone does not feel it appropriate to join in.

Children

Given that Jesus encouraged adults to believe as children do (Matthew 18:3) rather than the other way round, and that He famously said 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.' (Matthew 19:14) children may participate in Communion at Emmanuel. Those that do must have faith in Christ and understand what Communion is about.

Where a child expresses an interest in taking Communion, a church or Sunday School leader will speak to them and their parent(s) or guardian(s) and a joint decision made. While an adult can make the decision to participate for themselves, a child may not have the maturity to do so.

There is no fixed age limit as each child is different, but with the need for the child to be able to understand and express their faith, we would not expect a child under the age of 8 to participate. By the age of 13, however, they should be able to make that decision for themselves.

Our Communion Service

Current practice in Emmanuel is for Communion to be celebrated on alternate Sunday mornings. We do not have a set liturgy or structure for Communion. In light of that this section should be considered as nothing more than a guide. Specific instructions will be given by the Pastor or leader on each occasion.

Our understanding of the New Testament church is that Communion was a organic part of their fellowship, part of their sharing Christian life together. The Bible does not mention any format for the breaking of bread that the early church might have adopted, or if they had one at all.

Visitors and guests are welcome to join in Communion with us, regardless of church background. The only caution that we urge is that those who take it must have faith in Christ and understand what Communion symbolises. Ultimately they must decide for themselves if it is appropriate for them on the basis of what has already been written in this booklet.

Thanks-giving. Time is usually given for the congregation to voluntarily give brief public thanks to God for Jesus' sacrifice and the effect it has had on their lives. People may use impromptu or pre-written prayers, and may include words of a spiritual song or Scripture. There is no age limit, and it is not dependent on whether or not the person actually takes Communion.

Reflection. Time may be included for the congregation to

inwardly reflect on their walk with God and perhaps set themselves right with Him. If someone has a serious issue with another Christian, it should be put right privately before Communion is received.

Scripture will be read by the Pastor or leader focussing on the biblical basis of Communion. This may include readings from 1 Corinthians 11, Isaiah 53, or from The Gospels.

Participants may be served the bread and wine in their seats, or the congregation may be asked to stand around the communion table.

The bread will be handed round first as practised in the Scriptures. It may already be broken into pieces, or participants may break a small piece from the bread. This will usually be eaten immediately.

The wine, which is non-alcoholic fruit juice, will be served in individual glasses from a tray which will be passed around. These are usually held until everyone has been served, allowing all to drink in communion. If the tray is not in reach please keep empty glasses until the end of the service.

Non-participating children may be prayed for together at some point, that God will bless them.

If you have any questions or issues with Communion, please contact the Pastor or any church officer, who will be only too pleased to help and advise.

1 Corinthians 11:23-34

(New International Version)

- 23 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you:
The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread,
24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is
my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me."
25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This
cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you
drink it, in remembrance of me."
26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you
proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.
27 Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the
Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against
the body and blood of the Lord.
28 A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread
and drinks of the cup.
29 For anyone who eats and drinks without recognising the
body of the Lord eats and drinks judgement on himself.
30 That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a
number of you have fallen asleep.
31 But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under
judgement.
32 When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined
so that we will not be condemned with the world.
33 So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait
for each other.
34 If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when
you meet together it may not result in judgement. And when
I come I will give further directions.