



At Grace Church, we observe communion through three elements: Foot washing, the love feast, and the bread and the cup. The aim of this document is to help you better understand and equip you to lead a Grace Church communion service.

What is Communion?

Communion is a word meaning “fellowship, sharing, or holding something in common.” For Christians, it's a special time of worship where we remember Jesus' great love. Anyone who shares our faith in Christ is welcome to attend. We also welcome people who would like to observe the symbolism without participating.

Communion is a symbolic practice Christians do to remember and celebrate key aspects of the Christian Faith. Communion consists of symbols that point beyond themselves to something deeper.

Communion was instituted by Jesus to help us remember to love he has for us. The meaning behind communion is deeper than simple elements (washing feet, eating the meal, and breaking the bread and drinking the cup)—it symbolizes Jesus saying, “I love you,” to His bride, the church.

It's meant to cause us to worship and to love Him more in return. It reminds us of the price He paid so we could have eternal life, His continual, daily cleansing in our lives, and the celebration awaiting us in heaven.

Washing Feet

Explanation

This first part of communion is foot washing, which is intended to remind us of **our need for daily cleansing from sin**. It's a time of introspection and self-examination to remember that even though believers have been forgiven of all sin (past, present, and future), we must still appropriate His cleansing power and forgiveness on a daily basis.

Theologians call it "present, progressive sanctification." Present: it's happening now; progressive: it will continue throughout our lives on earth; sanctification: it is the process by which Christ sets us apart for the special treatment of being transformed into His likeness (Romans 8:29).

Washing feet as a symbol of this isn't something thought of by the Church or the Apostles. It's something Jesus asked us to do:

"Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet" (John 13:14)

When Jesus washed His disciples' feet, He gave an example. It was an example to be followed in practice, not merely known (John 13:12-17).

There's more to foot washing than at first appears:

- **It is more than an ancient custom.** Jesus said, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand" (John 13:7). The custom they did understand; the new meaning they did not.
- **It is more than an example of humility.** In John 13, Peter refused to have Jesus wash his feet. In turn, Jesus gave a curious answer: "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me... a person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet, his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you" (John 13:8, 10). So we see there are two cleansings: there is a cleansing of feet and there is a bath. The disciples had the bath, but needed their feet washed. "Saved" they were, to use our terminology, but not clean from the contamination of daily sin.
- **It is more than an outward cleansing.** Scripture presents water and cleansing as word pictures of true cleansing by the Word of God (Ephesians 5:26). Foot washing is a symbol—a symbol of love. It's a statement a church makes together, as they have communion, that Jesus is the one who does the real cleansing on the inside. He does this constantly, as we appropriate His forgiveness. At a church communion service, we picture this in a very meaningful, Christ-like way.

How to Lead Your Group in Foot Washing

In leading your group in foot washing, there are some key things you will want to think through:

- **Setting up:** Before your group arrives, you'll want to make sure that you have everything that is needed to perform the foot washing. There are a variety of methods you can implement: some groups opt to use basins of water (available upon request), however, other groups choose to use wet wipes, hot towels, or other such elements to represent foot cleansing. You'll also want to provide some means of drying (towels, paper towels, etc).
- **Explaining the purpose:** Foot washing can seem a very odd practice to someone who does not understand the Biblical significance of this act. It is crucial that you take some time to introduce and explain the significance of foot washing to your group, as well as read John 13:1-17, the passage about foot washing. Some people will feel insecure about others washing their feet, so it is usually beneficial to encourage your people to participate. If someone feels uneasy about participating, they are welcome to observe.
- **Setting the tone:** When Jesus washed the disciples feet, the atmosphere was one of humility and sobriety. We encourage our groups to wash one another's feet in silence, with singing, or with words of encouragement. We also encourage each person to pray for one another after washing their feet, specifically for their spiritual well being.
- **Men and Women:** We encourage co-ed groups to separate into groups of men and women, based on gender, for the sake of purity and the intimacy of the act; however if your group consists of all married couples, you are free to have them participate with their spouses.
- **Ending the foot washing portion:** To end the foot washing portion of communion, it is often appropriate to have one person pray or transition to the next element observed.

The Bread and Cup

Explanation

The second element of the communion service is the bread and the cup. Sometimes called the *eucharist*, which is the Greek word for "thanks," the bread and cup



isn't complete without remembering the price Jesus paid to secure eternal life for us.

The bread and cup are important because they symbolize Jesus' broken body and shed blood, through which God the Father declares us 'righteous.' Theologians use the word *justification* to describe this declaration of God.

The broken body. The shed blood. The grotesque death they represent was endured by God's perfect Son. Because of that, when people become Christians a great exchange takes place: God considers our sins paid for by Jesus' death; and considers the righteousness of Jesus to be ours (2 Corinthians 5:21).

It's a nice gift, but very costly.

The bread and cup, symbols of His broken body and shed blood, also picture a unique way of relating to God. No more animal sacrifices. No more priests to intercede. Instead, direct communication with the Creator because of the body and blood of His Son (1 Timothy 2:5-6).

He asks us to keep on observing this symbol of love until He returns (1 Corinthians 11:25-26). It's so we won't forget the price He paid.

The symbols of communion are solemn and holy, yet joyful and peaceful. So serious are they that we are warned to examine our own lives and thoughts before participating in communion, making sure we are in fellowship with God and properly remembering these symbols (1 Corinthians 11:27-30).

"For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." (1 Corinthians 11:26)

Other key passages:

- 1 Corinthians 11:23-32. (cf. 10:16-17)
- Matthew 26:26-29
- Luke 22:14-20
- Mark 14:22-25

How to Lead Your Group in the Bread and Cup

When leading your group, there are a few things to consider:

- **Setting up:** Because the bread and cup serve as a symbol for the body and blood of Christ, there are many different food and drink options you can use for this part of communion. Most often, crackers and grape juice are used. It is probably best if you do not use wine in the event where a person under 21 years of age might be present.
- **Introduction:** Similar to the other portions of Communion, it is important for your group to understand the biblical significance residing behind the bread and cup. Group leaders should read through passages pertaining to the bread and cup (see verses above) as a way of preparing the participants.
- **Setting the tone:** The overall tone of the bread and cup is somber and contemplative.
- **Self Examination:** 1 Corinthians 11:27-32 talk about the importance of examining oneself before taking communion as to not do so in an "unworthy manner." This is to be taken seriously.
- **Closing:** To end, it is normal to have one person close in prayer.

The Love Feast

Explanation

The Love Feast, the third part of communion, reminds us that Jesus will welcome us to His celebration in heaven without sin, and that we are now, as a group of His believers, His loved ones—His future bride.

Theologians call this "glorification," referring to seeing and sharing the glory of Christ at his return (1 John 3:2). This aspect of communion focuses on the future (Romans 8:29-30).

It's appropriate that a meal, shared in Christian community, be one of the symbols Jesus commits to His believers. Scripture promises a special future occasion, the ultimate Love Feast, which Jesus Himself will host:

"Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" And he added, "These are the true words of God." (Revelation 19:6-9)

We practice the Love Feast because Jesus included it in the "communion service" He had with His disciples (John 13) and because the early church perpetuated its inclusion (1 Corinthians 11:17-34; Jude 12). The meal is a fellowship time characterized by His love. Eating together reminds us of our special bond to Christ, but also to each other.

We do this looking forward to the amazing day when we get to see Jesus face to face and celebrate His victory over Satan, sin and death. This is also a time where the community of God celebrates its unity in salvation and the hope of heaven that waits us.

He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." (Revelation 21:5)

How to Lead Your Group in the Love Feast

When leading your group in the Love Feast, there are a few things to consider:

- **Setting up:** The Love Feast can be as extravagant or as minimal as group desires/requires. Some smaller groups prefer to do full meals together while larger groups sometimes observe the Love Feast using cheese and crackers. Whatever your group decides, anything from a potluck, to a catered meal, to snacks is acceptable. (Some groups have individuals with food allergies. This is something to put into consideration.)
- **Introduction:** Similar to the foot washing, it is important that you group understands the biblical significance behind the Love Feast. Group leaders should read through passages pertaining to the Love Feast (see verses above) as a way of preparing the participants.
- **Setting the tone:** The overall tone of a Love Feast is one of excitement and celebration. At Grace Church we often ask participants to engage in spiritually meaningful conversation during this time. Specifically, we encourage our people to discuss the things we anticipate about heaven and the hope we have in our salvation.
- **Closing:** It is typical to instruct people that they are free to leave at any point after the Love Feast.