

What do we believe about Holy Communion?

The roots of the meal

The Lord's Supper, also known as Holy Communion, is one of the two 'sacraments', along with baptism, that the United Reformed Church believes to have been instituted by Christ. Holy Communion is a symbol meal during which we meet the risen Lord through the activity of the Holy Spirit.

The meal finds its roots in Scripture. In the Old Testament, bread and wine are signs of God's blessing. Bread or Manna was sent

marked their doorposts with the blood of a sacrificed lamb. In so doing, their 'firstborn' were saved (Exodus 12). That sacrificial meal was given new significance by Jesus in his last meal with his disciples when he used bread and wine to refer to his body and blood. Eating these symbols came to be seen as participating in his offering of his life to bring salvation for the world. Sharing the bread and wine in Holy Communion is a recollection of the past event of Christ's death on the cross in a way that enables the past to become real and present for us today. Through the Holy Spirit what Christ accomplished through his death is made available to us today: the forgiveness of sin, the overcoming of evil and death, and God's grace and mercy.

The meal and the future

Holy Communion is also a means of prayerfully waiting for God's future. In identifying bread and wine as means of conveying to us the benefits which result from his sacrifice (salvation), Jesus promises not to drink wine again until he drinks it in his Father's kingdom (Matthew 26:29). Paul's account of the Lord's Supper identifies it as 'proclaiming the Lord's death until he comes' (1 Corinthians 11:26). In this way, Holy Communion also anticipates the fulfillment of salvation in the future kingdom of God.

When we share in the meal, we remember what Christ did in a particular place and a particular time. But this leads us to focus not on the past but on how new life in Christ affects the present and points us to God's future when all things shall be made new (Revelation 21:5) and God is all in all (1 Corinthians 15:28).

One feature of modern practice of Communion in the United Reformed Church is to welcome all who wish to share in the meal. No one is refused access to the Supper, regardless of what church they belong to or their personal piety. Yet there is no obligation to partake and, for whatever reason, those present can exempt

This is one in a series of booklets about the United Reformed Church. The booklets can be read and downloaded at www.urc.org.uk/believe