

Greenwood Weekly Communion

Frequently Asked Questions

Why has the Session made the decision to move to weekly communion?

For the past few years, staff, elders, and people in our congregation have been expressing their desire for weekly communion. In the recent congregational Church Health Survey, this desire and request were noticeably expressed. Based on these requests, the Session began its study of the issue in January 2024 culminating in its decision on the Session retreat in May 2024.

What does Greenwood believe about communion?

As a congregation of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, we stand in the stream of Reformed, sacramental Christianity by observing both communion and baptism as sacraments. In the classical language of Augustine, a sacrament is “an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.” There is a spiritual or sacramental relationship between the bread and cup and the spiritual presence of the risen Christ mediating his grace to us.

As a sacrament, we see communion as more than a mere reverential remembrance of Jesus’ costly sacrificial death for the forgiveness of our sins (the memorial view). However, we do not accept the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, which believes the bread and wine literally transform into the actual body and blood of Christ offering another sacrifice for sins.

We believe the Bible teaches the classic, Reformed view of the sacrament, which has been described as “real spiritual presence.” In this view, *there is a real spiritual communion between us and the risen Jesus when we receive the elements by faith.* Theologian John Jefferson Davis expresses this mystery as follows - “To participate in the body and blood of Christ involves, then, a real-time, person-to-person, spirit-to-Spirit contact with Christ (Worship and the Reality of God).” Our Reformed, sacramental view sees the table as an extra means of grace to us, which strengthens our union with Christ through the Spirit.

This theology is expressed in our guiding documents. The EPC Book of Worship states – “In the Lord’s Supper, Christ is *uniquely and spiritually present* and is discerned by the faith of the believer. ... Those who receive the Lord’s Supper spiritually feed upon Christ as the true bread, remembering and, by God’s grace, renewing the covenantal benefits of Christ’s death on their behalf.”

The Westminster Larger Catechism expresses our Reformed, sacramental theology as follows:

The Lord’s Supper is a sacrament of the New Testament in which bread and wine are given and received as Christ directed to proclaim his death. Those who receive the Lord’s Supper in the right way feed on his body and blood and thereby are spiritually nourished and grown in grace. They have *their union and communion with Christ confirmed*, and they publicly witness to and repeat anew their thankfulness and commitment to God and their mutual love and fellowship with each other, as members of the same mystical body.

Why are we doing this since we are not Roman Catholic?

There are numerous reasons we believe this is a wise decision for us currently.

First, given our theology of the sacrament, we desire to recover a central reality of the early church, which is the real personal presence of the risen Christ, who meets his people in joyful fellowship around the table.

Second, Jesus commanded that his life and ministry be remembered and taught not merely in sermons, but specifically by observing this ritual practice. The table is an important way of remembering and embodying the gospel of our crucified and risen King. It focuses our attention on the core realities of our faith: the incarnation, the cross, the resurrection, and the return of King Jesus.

Third, for approximately 1500 years, the table was the central and culminating feature of Sunday worship. In our cultural moment of novelty and expediency, we believe it is important to embody and communicate our rootedness in the historic Church.

Finally, in our divisive culture of transactional relationships, the table is a weekly call to us to pursue the bonds of peace we have with one another in Jesus as well as a source of grace to resiliently pursue devoted love with one another as part of our witness.

Will weekly communion cheapen the sacredness of it?

While we understand this is a legitimate fear, we do not believe so. Because something is practiced regularly does not inherently cheapen it or dilute its power. In fact, the formational power of liturgical rhythms is in their habitual practice over time. We will be conscious of this from week to week as we approach the table and connect it to the sermon. With the frequency of some worship attendees, weekly communion gives them a greater opportunity to receive communion.

Who may receive communion?

We will invite all people, who have professed Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. We plan to have 5th-8th graders return into our worship services to receive the sacrament with their families based on the discernment of their parents. We plan to offer sacrament classes to equip parents and children to discern readiness. Also, the bread will be gluten free and prepared by our Deacons in a sanitary manner.

How will weekly communion affect our worship services?

The biggest challenge this presents is the flow of inviting people forward to receive the sacrament. We believe we have an appropriate plan to make this more efficient and less chaotic. We do not believe this will extend the length of our worship service although it will require sermons to be limited to 25 minutes. While we believe strongly in the preached Word of God, we also believe this is a worthwhile concession for a more balanced worship service.