



Worship Formation & Liturgical Resources: Frequently Asked Questions

What kinds of bread are used for Holy Communion?

The worship staff receives a number of similar inquiries on worship-related topics from across the church.

These responses should not be considered the final word on the topic, but useful guides that are to be considered in respect to local context with pastoral sensitivity.

The response herein may be reproduced for congregational use as long as the web address is cited on each copy.

Congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America express unity but not uniformity in their communion practices. Congregations do use bread and wine, as set forth in the ELCA's set of priorities for the practices of word and sacraments, *The Use of the Means of Grace*:

In accordance with the words of institution, this church uses bread and wine in the celebration of the Lord's Supper (Principle 44).

What kinds of bread are used and in what form? Options and their rationale are listed below.

Leavened Bread

Some assemblies use leavened bread, bread made to rise with yeast. This is what most of us think of when we hear the word "bread:" a loaf that is broken and passed at table. Such communion bread can be baked by members of the congregation or provided by a local bakery.



The Use of the Means of Grace supplies more information concerning bread in background 44B, which mentions the use of leavened versus unleavened bread.

The use of leavened bread is the most ancient attested practice of the Church and gives witness to the connection between the Eucharist and ordinary life (44 B).

Unleavened Bread

Some assemblies use unleavened bread, bread made without a rising agent. This kind of bread can be made more quickly. It is also called flatbread.



Using unleavened bread for Holy Communion has its roots in the Jewish Passover. Again, guidance from *The Use of the Means of Grace*:

Unleavened bread underscores the Passover themes which are present in the biblical accounts of the Last Supper (Application 44B).

We do not know what kind of bread was used at the last supper. There are two schools of thought. One says that because Jesus and the disciples probably gathered for a Passover Seder meal, the traditional unleavened bread was used. The other suggests that this was a meal before Passover for which typical food, staple bread and wine, were used. The Gospels of Matthew (chapter 26), Mark (chapter 14), and Luke (chapter 22) refer to the last meal that Jesus ate with the disciples as a Passover meal. The Gospel of John (chapter 19) says this meal took place before Passover.



In the early centuries of the Christian church, leavened bread was used. This practice is verified through paintings, mosaics, texts, and sculptures from that time period. In the Middle Ages in the West, Christians began to use unleavened precut wafers.

This form of unleavened bread began to be used in the ninth century in the Western church. Clergy baked the bread, as lay persons were not allowed to prepare it. Because Lutheran tradition grows out of the Western tradition, Lutherans continued to use this form of bread, often making connections between this form of bread and Passover bread. It was also convenient in that it did not spoil and made few crumbs. Unfortunately, this form bears little resemblance to the bread we eat today and the connection to the Passover is seldom made. (*The Sunday Assembly*, pp. 188-189).

If individual wafers (hosts) are used, consider choosing wafers that have the texture of grain and using a large wafer that can be visibly broken by the presiding minister. This gesture expresses the symbolic value of one loaf (see below).

“One Bread, One Body”¹

Whether a congregation uses leavened or unleavened bread, it is encouraged that it be a whole loaf of bread. *The Use of the Means of Grace* suggests:

A loaf of bread and a chalice are encouraged since they signify the unity which the sacrament bestows (Application 44a).

Eating from one loaf suggests our unity in Christ (1 Cor. 10:17). We, who are individuals, are also one body. So declares the words of the Didache, a 2nd century text still sung today: “As the grains of wheat, once scattered on the hill were gathered into one to become our bread; so may all your people from all the ends of earth be gathered into one in you.”² In communion we are gathered.

In communion we are also sent. Sharing the one loaf communicates this also, for to eat a loaf of bread, it must first be broken. So it is with us. In a communion hymn by Susan Briehl, we sing: “Send us now with faith and courage to the hungry, lost, bereaved. In our living and our dying, we become what we receive.”³ Just as Jesus was recognized in the

¹ ELW #496

² “As the Grains of Wheat” ELW #465

³ “By Your Hand You Feed Your People” ELW #469. This text also has roots in the early church, as it is based on a sermon by the early church father Augustine: “Be what you can see, and receive what you are.” (Augustine Sermon 272 “On The Holy Eucharist”).

breaking of the bread (Luke 24:35), our faith in Christ can be revealed in giving our time, talents, and our very selves away for a world in need.⁴

What about health concerns?

Wheat flour has traditionally been the staple ingredient in leavened/unleavened bread and in wafers. For those with Celiac disease, allergies or wheat/gluten intolerance, congregations will need to discern what bread/breads to use. The *Use of the Means of Grace* says in this regard:

For pressing reasons of health, individuals may commune under one element. In certain circumstances, congregations might decide to place small amounts of non-wheat bread or nonalcoholic wine or grape juice on the altar. Such pastoral and congregational decisions are delicate, and must honor both the tradition of the Church and the people of each local assembly (Application 44 C).

Other Practical Considerations

- When choosing a leavened loaf that is firm and crisp on the outside, it may be advisable to score the bread in advance so that the presider may break it without difficulty.
- When using a new bread recipe, taste test it first and make sure it is easy to handle by the presider.
- Strive for locally produced bread and ingredients, nourishing connections among members, the community and the earth.
- Involve children and youth in making bread as part of Sunday school, confirmation other fellowship events.

Whether one uses a whole loaf, leavened or unleavened bread, or individual wafers, we receive the gift of bread in gratitude, trusting Christ's real presence in this sacrament (UMG, Principle 33).

RESOURCES

[Frequently Asked Questions:](#)

- 🔗 [How do we distribute Holy Communion?](#)

[Resources Available for Download on the ELCA Website:](#)

- 📄 *The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997. (Available in English and Spanish)
- 📄 *Principles for Worship*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002. (Available in English and Spanish)
- 🎥 *These Things Matter: Word, Baptism, Communion*. Division for Congregational Ministries, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. 1999. Video on sacramental practices.

⁴ For more on the connections between Holy Communion and daily life, see Samuel Torvend's *Daily Bread, Holy Meal* in the list of Resources.

Resources Available from Augsburg Fortress:

- 📖 Brugh, Lorraine S. and Gordon W. Lathrop. *Using Evangelical Lutheran Worship: The Sunday Assembly*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2008.
- 📖 Stauffer, S. Anita. *Altar Guild and Sacristy Handbook*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000.
- 📖 Stauffer, S. Anita, and Ralph Van Loon. *Worship Word Book*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995
- 📖 Torvend, Samuel. *Daily Bread, Holy Meal: Opening the Gifts of Holy Communion*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004.
- 🌀 *Fed and Forgiven*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2009. *Fed and Forgiven* is a complete set of resources for leading children, youth, and adults into the sacrament of holy communion. Resources include a comprehensive leader guide, DVD, and age-appropriate learner resources.

Other Resources

Many gluten-free bread recipes may be found on-line. You may also want to check with a local bakery that might be able to prepare fresh gluten-free bread. A couple examples (gluten-free and regular) to make-at-home are listed below.

- 📖 [Luther Seminary communion bread recipe](#)
- 📖 [Come and Have Breakfast](#)
- 📖 [Paleo Spirit](#)
- 📖 [Grace Lutheran Church, Winnipeg CANADA](#)

Revised January 2013

Copyright © 2013 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. www.elca.org/worshipfaq.

This document may be reproduced for use in your congregation as long as the copyright notice appears on each copy.