



Worship Formation & Liturgical Resources: Frequently Asked Questions

What kinds of wine 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. While there is diversity in our practices, many Congregations 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).

A related question answers, [“What kinds of bread are used for Holy Communion?”](#)

While the question of what wine to use is more straightforward, there are some matters to consider.

Color

Wine used for communion can be either white or red. It may be a surprise to some that in early Lutheran churches, white wine was used. Lutherans wanted to make clear that they believed that the wine was not a symbol of Christ's blood, but that Christ was truly present in this wine (*The Sunday Assembly*, p. 190-191). Lutherans in North America, however, were influenced by wider protestant practice and came to more commonly use red wine.

For sheer practical concerns, white wine has advantages. Those who regularly clean the linens and cloths from communion will have an easier time with white wine.

Cost

Wine used for communion does not need to be the most expensive on the market, yet assemblies will want it to taste good. One way to connect your local congregation to the surrounding culture is to use wine from a local winery. Ask members of the congregation if they know of local vineyards. Have the worship committee visit the local winery for tasting. Much like baking bread for communion, in some congregations there are members who produce wine and they may be able to supply some or all of the wine for weekly communion in their local congregation.

Container

“Do not one cup, one loaf, declare our oneness in the Lord?” (*You Satisfy the Hungry Heart*, ELW #484) We often sing communion hymns that refer to the cup of wine. This one cup signifies our unity in Christ as stated in *The Use of the Means of Grace*:

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

Many kinds of cups/chalices may be used to hold the wine. Clay pottery, pewter, or glass cups are all possible. In all situations, it is wise that the container be a vessel that is well-made, inviting to look at and most importantly provides ease of use for participants during the distribution.

What about health and addiction concerns?

In every congregation, worship leaders need to consider how to be hospitable to those who cannot have wine for health or addiction concerns. There are many ways to approach this. One option is to commune by receiving only the bread. 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).

In some settings, it may be wise to simply use dealcoholized wine or grape juice for the whole assembly. By so doing, all of the assembly expresses solidarity with those who cannot safely drink alcoholic beverages in any amount. This may be preferable to the use of many different chalices, a practice that if not used thoughtfully, can regard communion more as a matter of consumer choice than a common feast. For more thought on this practice, (*The Christian Assembly*, p. 191-92).

RESOURCES

[Frequently Asked Questions:](#)

- ↪ How do we distribute Holy Communion?
- ↪ What kinds of bread are used for 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.

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.
- 📖 VanLoon, Ralph R. and S. Anita Stauffer. *Worship Wordbook: A Practical Guide for Parish Worship*. 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. 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.

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