

January 10, 2024

Dear People of St. Stephen's,

Happy Epiphany! As you may recall, prior to the pandemic, we enjoyed home baked communion bread instead of the hosts we are currently using. At that time, it was also the custom of the vast majority of the congregation to consume the bread and then sip directly from the chalice. A few folks always chose to intinct (dip) but the majority sipped.

One of the things the pandemic made the most difficult in terms of our worship- aside from our inability to gather together in person- was our celebration of Holy Communion. We did not receive communion from mid-March until mid-September when we began to send blessed communion home in bags. We did not begin to worship in-person in our Outdoor Sacred Space until May of 2021 and at first only celebrated communion occasionally as we figured out how to do so safely. For many months we received bread alone and no wine.

When we finally began to receive from the cup again, our bishop instructed that the clergy person dispensing the bread should intinct the bread so that many hands were not going in the chalice. One of the most common things to see historically with intinction is folks dipping too deep and getting their fingers into the wine. Later we were allowed to start sipping from the chalice again.

From here, churches have diverged in how they now handle communion. At St. Stephen's, the majority of folks are still choosing intinction. Other church communities have chosen to no longer allow intinction but instead encourage folks to receive directly from the cup or choose to receive in only one kind (meaning bread and no wine).

These past few years I have really wrestled with our practice of the majority of us intincting and me dipping for you. I feel strongly that we do not want fingers in the wine, but I also feel that the process necessary for me to ascertain if you would like your host dipped or not tends to shatter a very holy moment. We've tried stickers on the name tags and many of you have perfected mime. Thank you! But I still find myself often having to ask, especially folks new to our community if they would like the host dipped or not. To be frank, it just feels bumpy.

When I was in seminary, I learned that in distributing the communion, we want to read the body language of the person receiving. Some people tend to look me in the eyes. Some folks hold their focus more internally. Either way, there is a sense that I disappear and the focus is on the action of receiving this holy sacrament. I worry that you having to gesture or my having to ask takes away from this drawing near to the divine.

I have also heard from some of you, that you very much miss celebrating communion with real bread, as do I. In an ideal world, we want the signs of our sacraments to be as robust as possible. We do not so much want a trickle of water in baptism as full immersion, or the running water of our Outdoor Sacred Space baptismal fountain, or the toddler splashing in the

font. The robustness of the symbol of water better demonstrates the abundance of God's love in adopting us as God's children.

The catechism at the end of our Book of Common Prayer instructs us that, "The sacraments are outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace" (pg. 857) that cannot be touched or tasted. In communion, the bread and the wine are the outward and visible signs of the sacrament that point to an inward and spiritual grace of receiving Christ's body and blood, the forgiveness of our sins, the strengthening of our union with Christ and one another, and the foretaste of the heavenly banquet which is our nourishment in eternal life.

There is a power to breaking real bread- showing that each of us are part of a whole, not whole on our own. Homemade bread with its toothsome chew connects us more deeply to the grain from which it came and, therefore, to God's created world which we offer back to God in the Holy Eucharist.

For all of these reasons, **during Lent, we will be experimenting with returning to home baked bread and moving away from intinction to receiving bread and sipping from the chalice.** The other truth is that intincting baked bread leads to messy floaters as it tends to crumble! The two do not go together well.

What does this mean?

- Over the coming weeks, I ask you to pay attention to your experience of receiving communion as we have been doing it.
- Lent begins with Ash Wednesday on February 14th.
- From Ash Wednesday through at least Palm Sunday (March 24) we will celebrate Eucharist with home baked bread.
- You will be invited to consume the bread and sip from the chalice.
- Our church believes that receiving in one kind (either bread or wine) is receiving in full. If you choose not to receive wine, that does not mean you have not fully feasted at the Lord's table.
- If you do not wish to receive from the chalice, you may cross your arms after receiving the bread and our Eucharistic Minister will still declare that this is the blood of Christ, the cup of salvation given for you. They will hold it toward their chest, indicating they do not expect you to sip.
- I invite you to reflect on your experience of communion with home baked bread and sipping from the chalice (and less gesturing and mime!)
- Please email me if you would like to be one of our bread bakers. I am hoping to try gluten free recipes this time around so we might all receive the same bread.

Thank you for your willingness to try something new... or perhaps return to something old! I look forward to gathering at the table with you.

Your's in Christ,  
Christy+

January 17, 2024

Dear People of St. Stephen's,

In an effort to prepare us for our experimental time of using home baked bread and not intincting during Lent (read more about this in last week's letter below), I plan to write about various aspects connected to receiving communion. If you have questions or ideas about what would be helpful to address, please let me know!

A few important things to know about receiving the wine:

- We use port which is fortified wine and has a higher alcohol content. This helps kill bacteria.
- Our chalice is silver which also fights bacterial growth.
- Our Eucharistic Ministers wipe both the outside lip and the inside lip of the chalice with the linen purificator after each person sips. The purificator is the white napkin like cloth seen in the picture to the right and that each Eucharistic Minister carries.
- After wiping, the Eucharistic Minister turns the chalice so that the next person sipping sips from a different section on the chalice.

I am not a scientist of any sort, so I dare not get into the science but my readings indicate that sipping from the chalice is less likely to spread germs than is gathering together in large groups.

Please read below about choosing to receive in one kind (bread only) during Lent if you feel uncomfortable sipping from the chalice, but I encourage you to consider giving it a try.

Let me know what else you'd like discussed during this time of preparation!

Blessings,  
Christy+