

September 2024

Holy Communion at Circuit Hybrid Services



In 2021 the Methodist Conference agreed to introduce a period of discernment regarding the celebration of Holy Communion online. This period of discernment was extended at the 2023 Conference to 2026.

There are specific requirements laid down in the Methodist Worship Book, the Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church and the decisions of the Conference that guide how Holy Communion is conducted online.

There are a variety of views among Methodists about online communion. Some Methodists both lay and ordained feel it is clear that celebrating Holy Communion online is right and appropriate, while others cannot see it as Holy Communion in its proper sense.

All celebrations of Holy Communion online require the permission of the Circuit Superintendent. Currently within the Circuit, The Stream: Church Online, participate in online communion as part of their gathering together as a community. These services of Holy Communion satisfy the requirements that participation is limited to a common time as all participants can interact with one another. The use of Zoom in this context also allows the presiding minister to clearly lead this particular gathered community in giving thanks for and sharing bread and wine. Participants in The Stream: Church Online services of Holy Communion prepare their own elements, taking note of the stipulations regarding wine at Holy Communion, that the juice of the grape shall be used and it shall be non-alcoholic and that what remains of the elements should be reverently consumed, or otherwise reverently disposed of, at the end of the service.

In the context of Circuit Services which are live streamed, the context is very different to The Stream: Church Online gathering and it poses challenges within the current requirements to conduct a service of Holy Communion in which both those onsite and online can participate in. Firstly, there will be members participating in churches such as Overseal where there are different requirements set out by the Anglican church for example which need to be satisfied. Secondly, in the context of a Circuit service using Zoom there is limited ability for participants to interact equally with one another.

Currently it does not feel appropriate within the guidelines of the Methodist Church to conduct a hybrid service of Holy Communion. Our current polity and practice is that we gather together to share in the feast. Currently to share in Communion under the discipline of the Methodist Church we either all need to be present online to one another or all present in a particular building, at a particular time.

As such at the forthcoming September Circuit Service, Communion will only be offered to those who are physically present at The Well and those who are joining the service online will not be able to participate in this part of the service. We appreciate this is not an ideal scenario and is the opposite of what Communion is about. We also acknowledge that there are genuine pastoral reasons why some members may only be able to participate in the Circuit service online. However, within the current guidelines this is where we are. Rev. Rachel Moss would be interested to hear your views about Online Communion as she prepares a response to the Conference's request for feedback about Online Church and Online Communion.