Holy Communion

In the United Methodist Church, we observe 2 Sacraments (rather than the Catholic Church, which observes 7). We observe Holy Communion and Baptism because they are both rites that scripture is clear that Jesus partakes in (for example, we don’t observe Confirmation to be a sacrament, because Jesus didn’t go through a Confirmation class. We still see it as an important rite of the church, but it is not considered a Sacrament of the Church).

Holy Communion goes by a few different names, including the Last Supper, the Lord’s Table, Eucharist, and This Holy Mystery. All are acceptable names which can be used for communion.

In the UMC, we celebrate an Open Communion table, which means that anyone and everyone is invited to participate in the sacrament. You do not have to be a certain age, or take a test. You cannot be refused communion because you committed a certain sin. Everyone is welcome at the table of God.

In celebrating communion, we typically use bread and grape juice (rather than wine). This is because we recognize that having alcohol at God’s table can cause temptation to someone who has an addiction to alcohol, and we believe that Holy Communion should be an act of grace and mercy, where the broken can go to seek healing, and we don’t want someone to be broken by the elements of communion. In fact, Dr. Thomas Welch specifically created a juice made from the grape vine that was unfermented for the purpose of being able to have a non-alcoholic element of communion, that still held its integrity and connection to what Jesus served on the night of the Last Supper by being the fruit of the vine. Dr. Welch was a Methodist, and he created Welch’s grape juice.

In the Catholic faith, they believe that when taking Eucharist, they are partaking the actual (literal) body and blood of Jesus Christ. The proper word for this is transubstantiation. In the UMC, we do NOT believe that it is the actual body and blood of Christ. We do believe that God is present in the bread and the cup, but we do not believe we are partaking in the actual body and blood of Christ, which is why we call it a Holy Mystery, because even though we do not fully understand the way in which God’s grace and mercy is acting through us during communion, we trust that God is present, and it is a deeply holy and moving Sacrament. Communion is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace, which we cannot always understand, but can certainly feel it at work.

Baptism

Baptism is one of 2 Sacraments observed by the UMC, the other of which being Holy Communion. Baptism uses water as an outward and visible sign of God’s grace in our lives.

We believe that all believers should be baptized, to be able to officially become members of the church. So if someone would like to join the church, and they have not yet been baptized by any previous church, we will baptize them as a part of their joining.

We recognize baptisms done by other churches and denominations. If someone was baptized as a child in the Catholic church, or as an adult in the Baptist Church, and want to become Methodist, we recognize their baptism as an act of grace by God, and therefore, we do not need to “rebaptize.”

In fact, we do not “rebaptize” anyone, even if they ask us to. This is because we believe the act of Baptism is an act of grace by God, and in that moment, a covenant was established between God and the one being baptized. So to “rebaptize” would be like saying that God’s first promise wasn’t good enough, and we believe that God keeps God’s promises with us. We therefore believe that only one baptism is necessary. We do, however, have a rite in which we remember our baptisms, and recall the promise and the claim that God made upon our lives.

We believe that in Baptism, it is God who makes a promise to us, and we are recipients of God’s grace. And God’s grace is often extended to us before we ever knew God or had the capability to respond. Therefore-**we believe in baptizing infants**, and raising them up to be able to one day (perhaps even at the day of their Confirmation) take on that faith for themselves, and to claim God). We believe that no age is too young, and no age is too old to accept God’s grace in our lives.

In the Methodist Church, Baptism can be done in 3 different ways: by Sprinkling, Pouring, or Immersion. Sprinkling is most common for infants, as it is a gentle sprinkling of water over the head. Pouring is done from a cup or pitcher, as the one to be baptized may lean over a bowl as the water is poured over their head. Immersion is done when the entire body is placed beneath the water and brought back up. We believe that the amount of water used in Baptism is not important, so long as water is used. And all baptisms are done in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.