

Sacraments

Introduction

In the United Methodist tradition, confirmation cannot be separated from baptism. Through the rite of confirmation, Christians confirm their baptism and renew their baptismal vows. This connection to baptism is essential because baptism is one of the two sacraments.

Sacraments are rites ordained by Jesus Christ, through which we experience God's grace. The Confession of Faith of the Evangelical United Brethren Church (one of the two denominations that merged to form The United Methodist Church), in our *Book of Discipline* says:

We believe the Sacraments, ordained by Christ, are symbols and pledges of the Christian's profession and of God's love toward us. They are means of grace by which God works invisibly in us, quickening, strengthening and confirming our faith in him. Two Sacraments are ordained by Christ our Lord, namely Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

■ HOLY MYSTERY

Sacraments are not the only ways in which we receive God's grace, but they are unique in that they were ordained by Jesus himself. Jesus was baptized by John (Mark 1:9) and told his followers to go and baptize people "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). And during his final meal with his disciples before his crucifixion, Jesus instituted the sacrament of Holy Communion, instructing his disciples to partake of his body and blood—the bread and cup—"in remembrance" of him (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

Following the celebration of Holy Communion in The United Methodist Church, we pray, "Eternal God, we give you thanks for this holy mystery in which you have given yourself to us." For many young people, "mystery" is an apt description of baptism and Holy Communion. What exactly happens when the pastor applies the waters of baptism to an infant or to an adult who is new to the faith? What is going on during the consecration of the Communion elements? Why do we approach these rites with such reverence?

To answer these questions, confirmands need to understand that we revere baptism and Communion—not because of what we do or what the pastor does but because of what God is doing. The breaking of the bread, the pouring of the water, the



laying on of hands, and the drinking from the cup are all outward, visible signs of the unseen work of God. When Christians are baptized or celebrate Communion, the Holy Spirit works within us, drawing us closer to God, strengthening our faith, and reminding us of God's promises.

CLEANSSED BY THE WATERS OF BAPTISM

Baptism is an initiation. It is the sacrament that draws us into the body of Christ as a member of the universal church, The United Methodist Church, and the local congregation. Baptism is an act of the Holy Spirit, and persons of any age can be baptized. Because we affirm God's prevenient grace—the grace by which God seeks us out and prepares us for faith—we often baptize infants and small children who are too young to take the baptismal vows for themselves. Their parents take the vows on their behalf. “By Water and the Spirit: A United Methodist Understanding of Baptism,” a document that the church adopted in 1996 and has since reaffirmed, says, “The church affirms that children being born into the brokenness of the world should receive the cleansing and renewing forgiveness of God no less than adults.”

Since baptism is an initiation into the church, the entire worshiping congregation participates in the sacrament. Members of the congregation reaffirm their faith and promise to support and nurture the person being baptized.

If they choose to be confirmed, some of your confirmands may be affirming the baptismal vows taken on their behalf when they were babies. Others may be receiving the sacrament of baptism during the confirmation service. In either case, they need to understand that baptism is a means of grace, and act of the Spirit, and an initiation into Christ's body, the church.

NOURISHED BY THE LORD'S SUPPER

While a person may be baptized only once, Christians may and should partake frequently in the sacrament of Holy Communion. Through Communion, we are nourished by God's saving grace and reminded of the sacrifice Jesus made for our redemption.

As with baptism, the Holy Spirit is at work in Holy Communion. And, as with baptism, Holy Communion requires the participation of a community of faith. (Notice that *Communion* and *community* share a root word.) Celebrating Communion not only draws us closer to God, but also draws us closer to one another.

The United Methodist Church upholds an open table. *The United Methodist Book of Worship* explains: “All who intend to lead a Christian life, together with their children, are invited to receive the bread and cup.” Confirmands may be nourished by Holy Communion even before they take their confirmation vows and should understand that this sacrament is an important part of the life of all Christian disciples.



Supplies and Preparation

Basic Supplies

<input type="checkbox"/> Bibles of various translations <input type="checkbox"/> markerboard or large sheets of paper <input type="checkbox"/> markers <input type="checkbox"/> pens or pencils	<input type="checkbox"/> clear tape and/or glue <input type="checkbox"/> masking tape <input type="checkbox"/> index cards or paper cut about the same size (3-by-5 or 4-by-6) <input type="checkbox"/> sheets of posterboard	<input type="checkbox"/> paper (Use paper that has already been used on one side as much as possible, depending on the activity.) <input type="checkbox"/> scissors
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Activity

preparation

Other Supplies

WHAT?

Opening Ritual	Write the opening meditation—which is adapted from Psalm 67—on a markerboard; or project the meditation, using the slide on the website.	<input type="checkbox"/> vine from previous sessions <input type="checkbox"/> vine leaves (1 for each student)
Question Ball	Inflate the ball or balloon, and write on it questions related to baptism and Holy Communion.	<input type="checkbox"/> beach ball or balloon <input type="checkbox"/> permanent marker

SO WHAT? PART 1

What Is Baptism?	Gather supplies.	<input type="checkbox"/> copies of <i>The United Methodist Hymnal</i>
Babies and Believers		
¡Agua Va!	Gather supplies.	<input type="checkbox"/> small cup <input type="checkbox"/> containers of water
Remember Your Baptism	Prepare an altar setting.	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>The United Methodist Hymnal</i> <input type="checkbox"/> pitcher filled with water <input type="checkbox"/> basin <input type="checkbox"/> small, smooth stones

SO WHAT? PART 2

What Is Holy Communion?	Gather supplies.	<input type="checkbox"/> copies of <i>The United Methodist Hymnal</i>
How It All Started	Gather supplies.	
Sacramental Vocabulary	Gather supplies.	
The Table Is Open		
But Why?	Invite an ordained elder to answer questions.	<input type="checkbox"/> several pads of sticky notes <input type="checkbox"/> ordained elder

NOW WHAT?

Celebration of Holy Communion	Gather supplies. Invite an ordained elder to administer Communion.	<input type="checkbox"/> Communion elements <input type="checkbox"/> ordained elder <input type="checkbox"/> copies of <i>The United Methodist Hymnal</i>
Closing Ritual	Write the benediction, "John Wesley's Rule," on a markerboard; or print out the poster on the website.	

What ?

supplies

- vine from previous sessions
- vine leaves (1 for each student)
- markers or pens

preparation: Write the opening meditation—which is adapted from Psalm 67—on a markerboard; or project the meditation, using the slide on the website.

NOTE: Take time before you get started to talk with the confirmands about what they read and wrote in the “Worship” section of their CREDO STUDENT JOURNALS.

supplies

- beach ball or balloon
- permanent marker

preparation: Inflate the ball or balloon, and write on it questions related to baptism and Holy Communion.



OPENING RITUAL

(10 minutes)

As confirmands arrive, point them to your confirmation vine; and give each person a leaf. Invite the confirmands to reflect on the previous session and to write on their leaf something they learned or experienced during that session. Ask the confirmands to affix their leaf to the vine. Remind them that these leaves represent ways that we, as Christians and United Methodists, grow in our faith and more fully experience God’s grace.

Then invite the youth to read aloud this opening meditation, adapted from Psalm 67:

O God, be gracious to us and bless us
and make your face to shine upon us,
that your way may be known upon earth,
your saving power among all nations.
Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you!
Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,
for you judge the people with equity
and guide the nations upon earth.

QUESTION BALL

(5 minutes)

Inflate a beach ball or balloon. Then use a permanent marker to write on the beach ball or balloon these questions (or others related to baptism and Holy Communion):

- ✦ How would you describe baptism to a friend who has never heard of baptism?
- ✦ How would you describe Communion to a friend who has never heard of it?
- ✦ How is baptism in our church different from baptism in some of the churches your friends attend?
- ✦ How is Communion in our church different from Communion in some of the churches your friends attend?
- ✦ Who may be baptized in our church?
- ✦ Who may take Holy Communion in our church?
- ✦ What is one question that you have about baptism?
- ✦ What is one question that you have about Holy Communion?

Throw the ball to a confirmand. Ask him or her to read aloud the question under his or her left thumb and to answer it or open the question to the rest of the group. As needed, add information about the sacraments (such as the information on pages 51–52). Then have the confirmand with the ball pass the ball to another person, and ask this person to read

aloud the question under his or her thumb. Continue until you've had a chance to discuss most of the questions. It is OK if some questions are repeated.

Then say: "Baptism and Holy Communion are the two sacraments, or ways that Jesus has given us to more fully experience God's grace."

So What? Part 1

WHAT IS BAPTISM?

(15 minutes)

Hand out copies of *The United Methodist Hymnal* and ask the confirmands to turn to page 33, "The Baptismal Covenant I." Read through the baptismal service together, making note of the instructions for the pastor, which are in red. After you've read through the service, ask:

- ✦ What vows are being taken (or what promises are being made) in this baptismal service?
- ✦ Who is taking these vows? (*the person being baptized or those taking the vows on his or her behalf; the congregation*)

Point out that the vows of baptism are identical to the vows of confirmation (which the confirmands will learn about in detail in the next unit, "Live Your Commitment"). Also talk about the role of the congregation in baptism, and how the congregation vows to nurture one another and the person being baptized.

babies and believers

(10 minutes)

Say: "In The United Methodist Church, we baptize people of all ages. For infants and small children, who are unable to answer for themselves, parents or sponsors take the baptismal vows on their behalf."

Invite the confirmands to talk about whether they were baptized as infants or small children (even if they were baptized in another congregation or denomination) or have not been baptized and are considering being baptized during the confirmation service. Also invite them to talk about how they were baptized. (Was water gently applied to their head? Were they fully immersed?) Assure them that all of these expressions of baptism are equally valid.

Ask:

- ✦ Why, do you think, do we baptize infants and small children in The United Methodist Church?

Use the information on page 52 to explain why our church baptizes people of all ages. Remind the confirmands of what

supplies

- copies of *The United Methodist Hymnal*



they learned about prevenient grace in the “Way of Salvation” session. Explain that baptism is a sign of God’s grace and that God’s grace is at work in a person’s life even before that person responds to God’s grace by professing his or her faith. Also point out that infants and children in the church experience God’s prevenient grace through the members of the congregation who have vowed to support, nurture, and teach them. Thus infant baptism involves the entire congregation.

Then say: “Not all Christian traditions baptize infants. Some practice what is called ‘believer’s baptism,’ meaning that a person can be baptized only when he or she is old enough to make a person faith commitment. They believe that baptism before a person comes to faith is invalid.”

Note that, along with The United Methodist Church, the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican (Episcopal in the U.S.), Lutheran, and Presbyterian churches and the United Church of Christ baptize infants. Baptists, Anabaptists (including Mennonites and the Amish), and Churches of Christ practice believer’s baptism.

PHIL AND MARTIN (OPTIONAL)

(10 minutes)

Say: “The debate between infant baptism and believer’s baptism was a matter of controversy among the founders of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, one of the denominations that would eventually join with others to form The United Methodist Church. One of the founders, Philip William Otterbein, was a Reformed German pastor who came to America in 1752 and worked closely with Methodist preachers. Otterbein believed in infant baptism. The other founder, Martin Boehm (pronounced “baym”), was a Mennonite preacher. Mennonites practice believer’s baptism. Although they had very different views on baptism, the two preachers put their differences aside to form the Church of the United Brethren in Christ. The church got its name because Otterbein was so moved by one of Boehm’s sermons that he approached him after the service and said, ‘Wir sind bruder,’ which means, ‘We are brethren.’ ”

Ask for two volunteers who are willing to play the role of Philip William Otterbein and Martin Boehm. Then have a panel discussion in which the other confirmands ask Philip and Martin questions about baptism and who can be baptized. Possible questions include:

- Philip, why do you believe in baptizing infants, who aren’t old enough to know what they believe?
- Martin, why do you think that people have to profess their faith before they can be baptized?
- How can two people with such different views of baptism come together in one church?

NOTE: This activity is most appropriate for older (eighth and ninth grade) confirmation groups.



Following the panel discussion, say: “While the United Brethren felt that baptism was important, the new church did not originally take sides in the infant baptism-versus-believer’s baptism debate. But over time, The United Brethren came to affirm the baptism of infants and small children.”

¡AGUA VA!

(15–20 minutes)

The title of this activity is Spanish and literally means “water goes.” Begin by having volunteers read aloud Mark 1:1-11; Acts 8:14-24; and Romans 6:1-14. Encourage the confirmands to pay close attention, because there will be a quiz.

Pour a *small amount* of water into a small cup and place the cup on a table. Have an additional container of water ready so that you can refill the cup, as needed.

Divide the confirmands into two teams and have each team form a single-file line facing the table. Ask one of the questions below of the two confirmands who are in the front of lines. If one of the players thinks that he or she knows the answer, he or she should run up to the table, grab the cup, and give an answer.

If the answer is correct, that player will splash the opposing player with the water in the cup. If the answer is incorrect, that player will hand the cup to the opposing player, who then has an opportunity to answer the question correctly and splash his or her opponent. If no one answers the question correctly, no one gets wet; and the cup returns to the table.

Then have those two players go to the back of the line, and ask a question of the next two players. If a question is not answered correctly, ask it again later in the game. Continue until all of the questions have been answered correctly.

These questions come from the Scriptures above and from “Baptismal Covenant I,” which you read earlier in this session.

- ✦ Complete the sentence the pastor says during a baptism: “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and _____.” (*of the Holy Spirit*)
- ✦ True or false—John the Baptist appeared in a city, proclaiming a baptism of mercy and justice. (*False. He appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*)
- ✦ Through the sacrament of baptism, we are initiated into _____. (*Christ’s holy church*)
- ✦ In what river did John baptize Jesus? (*The River Jordan*)
- ✦ Simon the magician tried to give the apostles _____ so that he could receive the power of the Holy Spirit and ability to baptize. (*money or silver*)

supplies

- Bibles
- small cup
- containers of water



- ✦ What tore apart as Jesus came up out of the water? (*the heavens*)
- ✦ John the Baptist proclaimed that he baptized with _____, but that Jesus would baptize you with the Holy Spirit. (*water*)
- ✦ According to Romans, if you are alive to God in Christ, you must consider yourself dead to what? (*sin*)
- ✦ True or false: When a small child is baptized, his or her parents are the only ones who take vows. (*False. The congregation also takes vows to help raise the child in the Christian faith.*)
- ✦ At Jesus' baptism, the Spirit descended on Jesus like a _____. (*dove*)

SUPPLIES

- copy of *The United Methodist Hymnal*
- pitcher filled with water
- basin
- small, smooth stones or large glass beads, marbles, or Lucite drops (available in arts and crafts stores, on the Internet, and in the craft or candle section of most large discount stores)

PREPARATION: Prepare an altar setting that includes a pitcher with water and a basin containing the stones.

NOTE: If you choose to divide this session into two one-hour classes, break here.



REMEMBER YOUR BAPTISM

(15 minutes)

Say a prayer of blessing over the water. For guidance, refer to “The Baptismal Covenant IV: Congregational Reaffirmation of the Baptismal Covenant” (pages 50–53, *The United Methodist Hymnal*).

Then remind those in the group who were baptized that, upon baptism, they received a new name—the name of Christ. Baptism is the formal entry into the body of Christ, the church. Then pour the water into the basin.

Invite participants who have been baptized to come to the water basin and touch the water. As each person touches the water, make the sign of the cross in water on his or her forehead (much like you would make the sign of the cross in ashes on Ash Wednesday); and say to him or her, “Remember your baptism and be thankful.”

Invite each person to take a small stone, marble, or bead from the basin as a reminder of their reaffirmation and remembrance of baptism.

Invite participants who have not yet been baptized to also come forward to receive a blessing in anticipation of their baptism. Say to these persons, “Anticipate your baptism and be thankful.”

Note: Be clear that this is not a service of baptism. It is a ritual and a blessing, but it is not a sacrament.

Option: If all of the participants have been baptized, and if they feel comfortable doing so, have them pair off and invite partners to make the sign of the cross on each other's foreheads, saying, “Remember your baptism and be thankful.”

So What? Part 2

WHAT IS HOLY COMMUNION?

(10–15 minutes)

Hand out copies of *The United Methodist Hymnal* and ask the confirmands to turn to page 6, “A Service of Word and Table I.” Read through the service of Holy Communion together, making note of the instructions for the pastor, which are in red. After you’ve read through the service, ask:

- ✦ What does this service tell us about Holy Communion and why we take it?
- ✦ In this service, what sorts of things do we do to prepare for Holy Communion? (*confess our sins, offer one another signs of peace and love, give thanks to God, and so on*)

Ask a volunteer to read aloud 1 Corinthians 11:23–26. Then say: “Like baptism, Holy Communion is a sacrament that Jesus ordained as a way for us to experience God’s grace.”

HOW IT ALL STARTED

(20 minutes)

Say: “The sacraments are more than just rituals. They are practices given to us by Jesus himself as ways for us to more fully experience God’s forgiving love and grace.”

To tell the story of Jesus instituting the sacrament of Holy Communion, have the confirmands do a reader’s theater of Matthew 26:17–30, in which Jesus celebrates the Passover with his disciples. One person will act as the narrator, another will read the words spoken by Jesus, and another will read the words spoken by Judas. The rest will read the words spoken by the other disciples.

Afterward, ask:

- ✦ What celebration brought Jesus’ disciples together?
- ✦ What, do you think, does Jesus want us to remember when we take Holy Communion? (*the sacrifice he made on our behalf, the forgiveness God gives us through Christ, the covenant that God has made with us through Christ*)

SACRAMENTAL VOCABULARY

(20 minutes)

Have the students play a word-defining, guessing game that is similar to the board game Balderdash®.) Hand out small pieces of scrap paper and a pen or pencil to each student. Write a word on a markerboard, and have the students attempt to define it. Have them write their definition and their name on the scrap paper. Encourage creativity. The expectation is that the students will not know the word.

SUPPLIES

- copies of *The United Methodist Hymnal*
- Bibles

SUPPLIES

- Bibles



supplies

- markerboard
- marker
- small pieces of scrap paper
- pens or pencils

While they are working, write on a scrap of paper the correct definition of the word, as written below. Have everyone hand in their definitions. Read aloud all of the definitions. Then as you read the definitions a second time, have the confirmands raise their hand to vote for the definition they think is correct.

Award a point to each student who guessed the correct definition. Award a point to any student for each vote he or she received for his or her definition.

Word	Definition
<i>Eucharist</i>	The sacrament of Holy Communion
<i>Immanent</i>	Existing with, close to
<i>Omnipresent</i>	God is everywhere.
<i>Intinction</i>	The act of dipping Communion bread into the cup

Following the game, say: “In The United Methodist Church, we believe that Christ is *immanent*—truly present with us—when we celebrate Holy Communion. During this celebration, also called *Eucharist*, the Holy Spirit is at work in our hearts, reminding us of the redemption we have in Christ and drawing us closer to God.”

THE TABLE IS OPEN

(10 minutes)

Ask:

- ✦ Who is allowed to take Holy Communion in The United Methodist Church?

Allow a minute or two for answers and discussion, then read aloud this statement from *The United Methodist Book of Worship*:

All who intend to lead a Christian life, together with their children, are invited to receive the bread and cup. We have no tradition of refusing any who present themselves desiring to receive.

Say: “United Methodists have an open table, meaning that ‘All who intend to lead a Christian life’ are welcome to participate in the sacrament. Not all Christian churches have an open table. Some, such as Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and certain Lutheran churches, have a closed table. These denominations serve Communion to only those persons who share their understanding of Holy Communion or who have been confirmed in their denomination.”

Ask the confirmands whether they have had experiences of attending church with a friend and not being allowed to take Communion.



To help the confirmands understand why Christians have different views about who may take Communion, ask a volunteer to read aloud 1 Corinthians 11:27-28.

Then explain that many churches that practice closed Communion believe that being worthy to take Holy Communion means being in a right relationship with the church and/or sharing the church's understanding of Holy Communion. United Methodists invite "all who love [God], who earnestly repent of their sin, and seek to live in peace with one another" to take Communion. It is up to the individual to determine whether he or she is worthy.

OUT WHY?

(15 minutes)

Allow the youth to brainstorm "why" questions, such as "Why do stores that are open 24 hours a day every day have locks on the door?" or "Why do we drive on the right side of the road?" You may choose to try to answer some of these questions, or just allow the youth to ask.

Invite an ordained elder—if you are not an ordained elder yourself—to help with the remainder of the class. Hand out sticky notes, at least 5 to each youth. Allow the youth to write down any question they would like to ask the pastor, especially about Communion and baptism. Give them 90 seconds to write and post questions. Each question should be on a separate sticky note. Each sticky note needs to be placed on a surrounding wall so that the room is decorated in questions.

Have the ordained elder answer the questions. If an ordained elder is unavailable, ask the students to send in questions during the week that you can forward to him or her. Or have the pastor answer the "common questions" below. Record the pastor answering the questions, and play a video of the pastor during class.

The following are common questions the youth might ask:

- ✦ What are the ways you can take Communion?
(*intinction, drink, disposable cups*)
- ✦ What do you do with the leftover elements?
- ✦ Why do we use grape juice, instead of wine?
- ✦ Why do some churches use wafers and some use bread?
- ✦ Who may take Communion?
- ✦ Why do we have Communion only once a month (or however frequently your congregation does it)?

As time permits, tell the youth this anecdote related to the question of why we use grape juice: "During the nineteenth century, Methodists became very concerned about the dangers of alcohol. (The United Methodist Church today continues to take a strong stand against alcohol abuse.) Some asked whether the church was contributing to the problem of

SUPPLIES

- several pads of sticky notes
- pens or pencils
- ordained elder (preferred but not required)

PREPARATION: Ask an ordained elder to attend so that he or she can answer the students' questions. If he or she cannot attend, ask him or her to answer the "common questions," listed in the activity.



alcohol addiction by serving fermented Communion wine. In response, Thomas Welch, a Methodist in New York, developed a method of pasteurization that would keep grapes from fermenting and that allowed him to make non-alcoholic wine. Welch called the drink, 'Methodist Unfermented Communion Wine.' It later would be known as Welch's Grape Juice."

Supplies

- Communion elements
- ordained elder
- copies of *The United Methodist Hymnal*

Preparation: Invite an ordained elder to administer Communion.

NOTE: Before you dismiss, instruct the confirmands to read, reflect on, and journal about the material in the "Sacraments" section of the CREDO STUDENT JOURNAL before your next session. Also encourage them to try to do the activities related to "Sacraments" on the confirmand website.

Supplies

- markerboard
- marker

Preparation: Write the benediction, "John Wesley's Rule," on a markerboard; or print out the poster from the website.

Now What ?

CELEBRATION OF HOLY COMMUNION

(5 minutes)

Have an ordained elder celebrate Holy Communion with the class. Use "A Service of Word and Table I" from page 13 of *The United Methodist Hymnal*.

CLOSING RITUAL

(10 minutes)

Gather the confirmands into a circle. Lead the youth in prayer, giving thanks to God for your time together and for all that the group has learned and experienced. Then go around the circle, inviting each person to pray aloud one word or phrase that describes something he or she learned during the past week of confirmation. After every person has had a chance to contribute a word or phrase, say a brief closing prayer, such as this one:

God who goes before us, we're grateful to you for your action in our lives. God who moves us to moments of decision, we invite you to act anew in us today. God who will guide us throughout all of our lives, we promise to do our part to grow in faith. We're grateful for the fact that our salvation is a process, and that your grace will never leave us. Amen.

Then invite the confirmands to say aloud and in unison the benediction, "John Wesley's Rule."

