



基督教新加坡长老会

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN SINGAPORE

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Proposed Guidelines on Holy Communion during COVID-19

1. Christians Responding to COVID-19 under God's Time and Season

God's people have lived through trying times of war, persecutions and plagues under God's sovereign hand over 2,000 years. In these extraordinary seasons, we have persevered and overcome by God's Spirit empowering us to complete our Lord Jesus' mission of bringing the gospel yet working out our salvation with fear and trembling.

Singapore is taking unprecedented measures in response to this COVID-19 life-and-death pandemic. These include stringent border controls, workplace telecommuting, social distancing, closure of religious services to the limitation of social gatherings. Each of us can play a vital part in loving God and loving our neighbour by helping our government and nation to flatten the curve and tap the brakes to overcome COVID-19 together.

2. Guidelines for the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion through Time

Biblically, our Lord Jesus' Last Supper is recorded in three Gospel accounts (Matthew 26:22-29, Mark 14:22-26 & Luke 22:14-22). No one disputes the fact that our practice of The Lord's Supper is predicated on Jesus' Last Supper. Throughout the history of the Church, there has been a wide spectrum of beliefs and practices of the Lord's Supper arising from this, ranging from the "remembrance" (or memorialism) to "spiritual presence" doctrines.

Within the Presbyterian tradition, the Holy Communion is understood as a commemoration of the Lord's offering of himself for our redemption. He instituted the sacrament to be observed in his Church as a means of grace (though not the only means of grace) for the spiritual nourishment of believers and members of the Church, and as a sign and seal of our communion with him and with one another as members of his body.

In view of the above, the TRRC humbly recommends three options for our celebration of the Holy Communion during this extraordinary times which demands extenuating responses. We pray and hope we will return to the incomparable joy and delight of our physical church services, fellowship and Holy Communion when this COVID-19 crisis passes under God's hand and time.

Option A: Postpone Holy Communion until the COVID-19 crisis is over.

In view of the severe circumstances, churches may elect to postpone the administration of this sacrament. During times of widespread pandemics like the plague of 1347-1352, the cholera pandemic in Europe in the eighteenth century and the Spanish flu of 1918-20, public measures were taken to postpone church worship services, including the administration of the sacraments. During the Great Plague of London in 1665, Richard Baxter, the great Puritan pastor, said that if the civil authorities forbid church assemblies in

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a time of pestilence for the greater good, it is the duty of Christians to obey them. Baxter cited the teaching of Jesus (Mk 2:27): “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Practical Works 5:465).

Option B: Continue to administer Holy Communion (need not be monthly). There are two models under this option.

Option B1: Delegated Physical Communion

Authorise pastors, preachers, elders and deacons to go to homes to conduct Holy Communion, subject to the prevailing COVID-19 guidelines that are applicable (e.g. maximum of 10 persons for social gatherings at this time).

We can use a short liturgy like this:

1. Begin with a time of self-examination and confession (read 1 Cor 11:27-29), followed by an assurance of God's forgiveness of sin (read 1 John 1:9).
2. Read the words of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:23-26) and convey the promises of Christ to assure partakers of their salvation through union with Christ by grace and faith alone (John 6:52-58).
3. Give thanks for the bread and drink, while asking God to set them apart for his use through the Spirit.
4. Distribute the bread and partake together. Distribute the drink and partake together.
5. End with thanksgiving prayer to God for his provision and blessings.

Option B2: Virtual Communion

We follow the Minister's conduct of Holy Communion via internet live streaming.

Affirm that Christ dwells amongst us by his Spirit even when we gather virtually.

- Affirm that we are one in the body of Christ even when we gather virtually.
- We can teach and guide members on the preparation of suitable elements appropriately at home.

In both B1 and B2 options, reading key gospel passages such as Romans 5:6-11 and 1 Corinthians 11:23-34 which will invest the celebration of communion with the centrality of Jesus' death, resurrection, ascension and return is recommended. It is the word of God and gospel which invests the Holy Communion with true meaning.

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Conclusion

We pray that, as a church, we will remain united in our faith and love in the light of this crisis. As with all matters of Christian faith and conduct, we approach this issue with humility. The first thing to recognise is that we are not dealing with a 1st order essential salvation issue but a secondary ecclesiological issue.

As such, we recommend that Synod does not mandate these as compulsory and must be practised by our church members. Rather, these options should be presented as “Recommended Guidelines on Communion” to our church members who have the God-given liberty to adhere to or differ on this issue according to our differing church contexts.

The TRRC is especially excited by the potential for our church members to become more enlightened by God’s word and more sensitised to God’s will in our sacred task of being God’s church at home, at work and to the world in such troubled times.

Finally, we are to put on the full armour of God, resist the Devil and submit to God. The last thing we want is to see that the “things of God”—salvation expressed in our practice of communion which is about the love and unity of Christ’s body—become a divisive issue. We prayerfully see this as a God-given opportunity for God’s people in PCS to mature and glorify Him.

Humbly Submitted by TRRC

1 April 2020

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