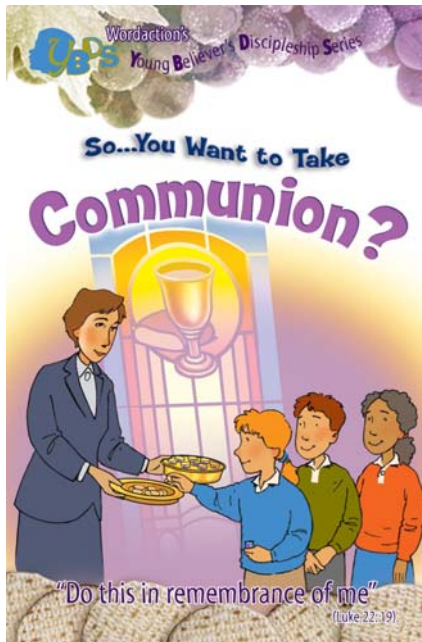


## So...You Want to Take Communion? Leader's Guide



Young Believer's Discipleship Series



## So...You Want to Take Communion? Leaders' Guide

**Scripture:** "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19).

**Purpose:** The purpose of this *Leader's Guide* is to provide you with the basic resources to conduct a class in preparation for communion.

## Resource List

*So...You Want to Take Communion? Student Booklet*

*So...You Want to Take Communion? Leader's Guide*

*The Bible*

*Church of the Nazarene Manual.* Be sure it is current.

Staples, Rob. *Outward Sign and Inward Grace.* Beacon Hill Press: Kansas City, 1991.

## What is a Sacrament?

Sacraments are very important to the life of the Church. They are a means of grace. John Wesley said, "By 'means of grace' I understand outward signs, words, or actions, ordained of God, and appointed for this end, to be the ordinary channels whereby he might convey to men, preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace" (*The Means of Grace*. [http://wesley.nnu.edu/john\\_wesley/sermons/016.htm](http://wesley.nnu.edu/john_wesley/sermons/016.htm)).

This means a sacrament is an outward action that represents God's giving His grace on the inside. They are God's channels for supplying His grace to human beings.

## How to use this guide:

Prepare by reading the suggested materials and the introductory information. This will help prepare you for questions that may arise during the class session.

Create an open environment. Allow the children to ask any questions they may have.

If the pastor is not teaching the class, invite him or her to participate. Have the pastor explain his or her role during Communion and some of the logistics of taking Communion.

Look over the liturgy (order of worship) for Communion that your pastor uses. This will help you understand the words used and their significance.

Have fun. You are part of an important spiritual event in the lives of the children in your class.

## The Role of the Sacraments

The historical Church has recognized many different means of grace through the centuries. Of the means of grace, the church defines some as sacraments. The Catholic Church recognizes seven sacraments (Baptism, Confirmation, Communion, Confession, Last Rites, Ordination, and Marriage). The Protestant Church typically recognizes two sacraments (Baptism and Communion). Some churches do not acknowledge any official means of grace, and some churches and theologians say the number is infinite.

Though the sacraments acknowledged and the number of sacraments differ, most Christian denominations recognize that God works through ordinary, physical means to give His grace to His followers. Though not considered sacraments, Christians recognize the grace-giving quality of prayer, Scripture reading, fasting, service, worship, and other disciplines of the Christian life in addition to those listed previously. The Protestant Church may not recognize marriage, ordination, and others as sacraments, but they certainly recognize the grace-filled nature of these actions.

The question for many, focuses on the role of the sacraments in the Christian's life. With an emphasis on the freedom of the Holy Spirit and an inward transformation, many consider the sacraments of little or no value. Protestantism shifted the focus of the worship service from the sacramental to the preaching of the Word. This shift caused the sacraments to become of peripheral importance. This is unfortunate because an added emphasis on preaching does not mean the sacraments have any less value to the Christian life. (For a more in depth discussion of this dilemma and the theological concerns involved read Dr. Rob L. Staples book *Outward Sign and Inward Grace*. Available at

## Ideas for Communion:

- Send invitations to friends and family inviting them to the child's first Communion.
- Distribute the names of those taking Communion to your prayer teams or congregation in preparation for the child's first Communion.
- Meet with the children prior to the Sunday worship service. Remind them of God's presence when they take Communion. Remind them that God loves them, and through their taking part in Communion, He will give them help to follow Him.

[www.NPH.com](http://www.NPH.com).)

Proclaiming the Word of God can and should take two distinct forms of proclamation. First, proclamation should be verbal. "Verbal" means to use words. It is the responsibility of the Church to verbally proclaim the Word of God and His desire for our salvation and growth. We do this by preaching, teaching, and sharing our faith. Second, proclamation should be an action. Christians must use actions to proclaim the Word of God and His desire for people's salvation and growth. The sacraments are one means to fulfill the active proclamation of the gospel. They are visible and physical. They help us see that, "God may accomplish spiritual ends through material means" (Staples, *Outward Sign and Inward Grace*, p. 62).

### **Mystery**

The sacraments, in this regard, are mysterious. In some mysterious way God uses physical things to bring about spiritual changes and give His grace. These physical means are not the only ways God gives His grace, nor is God limited to only these means. However, God has chosen to give grace through our participation in them.

The sacraments are mysterious because no one knows how God gives grace through these physical means, or why He chose to use these particular means to give His grace. Why would God choose water as a grace-giving symbol of our participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ? Why would God choose unleavened bread and a sip from a cup to symbolize the new covenant and give His sustaining grace to His followers? No one knows how or why, but, through the centuries, they have confirmed its reality.

God gives His grace through ordinary, physical means. As you teach the children about communion, help

## Communion in the Bible

Here are some Scripture passages to help you as you study the sacrament of Communion:

Matthew 26:17-30

Mark 14:22-25

Luke 22:17-20, 30

John 13:1-4

Acts 2:42-47

Acts 20:7

1 Corinthians 10:16-17

1 Corinthians 10:21-22

1 Corinthians 11:20-34

them understand that it is more than just eating a bite of bread and a sip of juice. Communion is a sacrament where God gives grace in the midst of the action. Communion is God's means to give us His sustaining grace.

## What is Communion?

If baptism is an initiation sacrament, then Communion is a sustaining sacrament. In the sacrament of Communion, Christians find strength and grace to follow God as they should. John Wesley believed Communion to be one of three chief means of grace for a follower of Jesus Christ (*The Means of Grace*).

[http://wesley.nnu.edu/john\\_wesley/sermons/016.htm](http://wesley.nnu.edu/john_wesley/sermons/016.htm).

### The Imagery of Communion

The Church uses several words to define and describe the sacrament of Communion. The word "Communion" signifies the binding together or the unity desired as part of this sacrament. The root of this word is the Greek word *koinonia* meaning, "fellowship." Christ-followers live in community with God and others.

The word "Eucharist" signifies the celebratory and thanksgiving aspects of the sacrament. The root of this is the Greek word *eucharistein* meaning, "to be thankful." The time of Eucharist was not sober and somber, but rather joyous and celebratory.

In addition to these words, there are several additional aspects of Communion. First, Communion is a time of commemoration. We call it the "Lord's Supper," because Jesus started this meal shortly before His crucifixion. The focus here is on commemoration or remembering. The Greek word Jesus uses in Luke 22:19, *anamnesis*, means more than

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just bringing something from the past to mind. *Anamnesis* signifies that in some mysteriously spiritual way Jesus is as present with those who take Communion today as He was with His original disciples.

Second, Communion carries the image of sacrifice. Our commemoration of Christ is a commemoration of His death and resurrection. When taking Communion, we ask God to remember Christ's sacrifice on our behalf. But the sacrifice does not solely belong to Christ. We, too, sacrifice. Christ gives himself to us, and we, in turn, give ourselves to Christ. In this, Communion also becomes a time of repentance and confession with God giving His forgiving grace to those who truly repent and confess their sins.

Finally, Communion has eschatological/kingdom of God elements. "Eschatological" concerns the culmination of human history and the beginning of God's rule. There is no focus on a particular theory of the end times, only recognition that one day God will bring about true peace and justice on earth. Celebrating the Communion looks forward to the day when God will set everything right.

### **Real Presence**

Throughout the history of the Church several ways have been attempted to explain God's presence in Communion. The Roman Catholic doctrine of Transubstantiation means the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Martin Luther's doctrine of Consubstantiation means the bread and wine do not become the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ. Luther believed Christ is bodily present in the elements "like heat in a red-hot poker."

Ulrich Zwingli held to a Memorial view. This view shifts the focus from the elements to the attitudes and

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responses of the worshipper. The worshipper commemorates and memorializes Christ by taking part in Communion. John Calvin balanced Luther's doctrine of Consubstantiation and Zwingli's Memorial view without sacrificing Jesus' presence in Communion. Calvin's doctrine of Spiritual Presence taught that the Holy Spirit makes the bread and wine effective to give grace to the believer.

Though varying widely, these doctrinal perspectives focus on one thing—the presence of Jesus in the act of Communion. In some mysterious way, Jesus Christ is present with us, giving us grace, each time we take communion. This is called “Real Presence.”

John Wesley's view seems a blending of Luther and Calvin's doctrines, though Wesley is more indebted to his Anglican heritage. Though not bodily present with the elements of Communion, John Wesley believed Jesus Christ is really present when the believer takes part in Communion. This presence makes Communion a true means of grace to the believer.

As the children take part in Communion, remind them of the serious nature of Communion, but also the celebratory aspects as well. For too long, the sober and the solemn have ruled the Communion service. It is time to reclaim the celebratory, grace-giving nature of Communion. It is a serious time, but also one of great grace and love from God.

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## The Lesson

### Introduction

Say, **Taking Communion is an important part of following Jesus. It is a special time when God gives us strength to obey and reminds us of Jesus' sacrifice for us. God uses Communion to help us in our spiritual journey.**

### The Basics

#### **Pages 2-3 in *So... You Want to Take Communion?***

If you have not done so before the class, distribute copies of *So... You Want to Take Communion?* to each student.

Taking part in a communion service can be intimidating to children. There is difficult symbolism, and adults often describe communion with stern warnings and fear in their voices. Communion is a holy and reverential time. But, it is also one of celebration and excitement concerning what Christ has done for us and continues to do for us. You may want to invite the pastor to help with this section.

Say, **To begin with, we are going to discuss some of the practical things you will need to know about the communion service. We will talk about what is going to happen and some things you need to know.**

Place the following in your own words:

1. Communion is a serious time.

Taking part in the communion service is a serious experience. It is not something we do lightly. But, it is nothing to fear. When taking communion, focus on what God has done and wants to do in and through you.

2. Realize God is with you.

When you take communion, God is present with you. Taking communion is more than just an empty action. Jesus promised that when you take communion, He will be there with you.

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3. The word “elements” means the bread and the juice.  
The pastor will use the word “elements” to mean the bread and juice being used in communion. The elements (bread and juice) give us physical things; objects represent the spiritual activity God is doing.
4. The pastor may serve communion in several different ways. Sometimes, the pastor will have everyone come forward, and receive communion at the front. Other times, the pastor may pass the elements down each row. The bread may look like a loaf of bread you break a piece from, or it may be a wafer. The juice may be in small cups, or you may dip the bread in a single, large cup. There are several different ways of distributing communion.
5. The person giving you the elements may say something to you.  
When a person gives you the bread they may say, “This is the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was broken for you.” The person giving the juice may say, “This is the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was shed for you.” These words help us remember that Jesus sacrificed himself for us.
6. Eat the bread and drink the juice.  
Listen carefully to the pastor’s instructions. Your pastor will tell you when you should eat the bread and drink the juice. Sometimes he or she will have you eat the bread and drink the juice while you are still at the front. Sometimes, he or she will have you wait until everyone has the elements.
7. When finished, wait patiently and pray.  
Communion is a spiritual time between you and God. Use the time following Communion to continue focusing your thoughts on God and what He might be saying to you. God may ask you to confess a sin, give Him an area of your life, or begin doing something for Him.

Give them any additional information they may need to know and additional expectations. Then say, **These are some of the basic things you need to know about Communion. But Communion is about more than just these basic things. Let’s look at a few stories about Communion from the Bible and discuss what Communion means.**

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# The Lord's Last Supper

## Page 4 in *So... You Want to Take Communion?*

Have someone volunteer to read Matthew 26:26-29. Then ask, **According to verse 26, what did Jesus say about the bread?** Give your students a few moments to answer. Then have the children write their answers in the blank in their workbooks.

Answer: body. The bread represented the body of Jesus Christ that would be broken and abused during the crucifixion.

Ask, **What did Jesus say about His blood in verse 28?** Give your students a few moments to answer. Then have them write their answers in the blank in their workbooks.

Answer: forgiveness. Jesus shed His blood to provide our salvation. He did this so you and I could have a relationship with God. Because of Jesus death and resurrection, God forgives our sins.

Have a volunteer read Mark 14:22-25. Then ask, **According to verse 24, what did Jesus say when He passed the cup?** Give your students a few moments to answer. Then have them write their answers in the blank in their workbooks.

Answer: covenant. We will talk more about covenant in a moment. But a covenant is much like a contract or a promise. Jesus says His blood guarantees God's covenant with His followers.

Have a volunteer read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. Then ask, **Why did Jesus say the disciples should take Communion?** Give your students a few moments to answer. Then have them write their answers in the blank in their workbooks.

Answer: remembrance. When we take communion we remember Jesus' sacrifice for us, and we remember what God desires us to be as His followers. Taking Communion reminds us that we follow Jesus.

Ask, **According to verse 26, what happens when Jesus' followers take Communion?** Give your students a few moments to answer. Then have them write their answers in

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the blank in their workbooks.

Answer: Lord's death. When we take Communion, we remind everyone around us of the importance of Jesus' death and resurrection. The Bible tells us we should celebrate this way until Jesus returns.

Say, **Communion reminds of Jesus' death and resurrection, but also gives us God's grace to live as His disciples. Let's look at what Communion means and what it does for us.**

## Lessons from the Supper

### Page 5 in *So... You Want to Take Communion?*

This section focuses on the meaning of Communion, and emphasizes God's role in Communion. Communion is more than a memorial or remembering, in it God gives grace to His followers.

Say, **When you take Communion, God is doing something very special. He is right there with you.**

Have a volunteer read the first section on page 5 of the *So... You Want to Take Communion?* student booklet. Then say, **Communion reminds us of God's forgiveness. Jesus' death and resurrection provided forgiveness for our sins and restored our relationship with God. Communion helps us remember all Christ did for us, and continues to do inside us.**

Have a volunteer read the second section on page 5 of the *So... You Want to Take Communion?* student booklet. Then say, **A covenant is a lot like a contract or a promise. God made a covenant with His people that He would provide a way for their salvation. Jesus was that way. Jesus said His blood was a sign of the covenant God was providing as a way for people to be saved. When we take Communion, we remember God's promise to us. But, we also make a promise to God to love Him and love our neighbor.**

Have a volunteer read the third section on page 5 of the *So... You Want to Take Communion?* student booklet. Then say, **Taking Communion is an act of remembering. Ask, How many of you have ever heard a song or seen a**

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**picture that brought back a memory? It might be a picture of you and your family on vacation, and you remember something special that happened on that vacation.** Allow time for your students to share. Then say, **Communion is like that. It reminds us of what God has done. It also reminds us Jesus has promised to be with us and help us obey God. The Apostle Paul used a special word that we translate as “remember.” This word means more than just bringing something to mind as in a memory. It means that when we take Communion, Jesus is with us just like He was with His disciples.**

## What’s in a Name!

### **Page 6 in *So... You Want to Take Communion?***

Say, **Jesus told His disciples to take Communion. It became a very important part of the worship service. But people began calling this time by different names.**

Give your students time to complete the activity on page 6 of *So... You Want to Take Communion?* student book.

Then say, **Some people call this special service “Eucharist.” This words means “to give thanks.” When people called it Eucharist, they recognized that taking part in this meal was a time of rejoicing and celebration for what Jesus has done. Some people call this special service “Communion.” This word recognizes that we live in relationship with God and other people. We are a community. People also call it the “Lord’s Supper,” because Jesus first celebrated Communion with His disciples at the Last Supper.**

Have a volunteer read the second section on page 6 of the *So... You Want to Be Baptized?* student booklet. Have another volunteer read 2 Corinthians 5:15, 17.

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# Preparing for Communion

## Page 7 in *So... You Want to Take Communion?*

This section will help your students reflect on their decisions to take Communion and guide their reflections during Communion.

**Say, When we are taking Communion we should focus our thoughts on God. We should think about what Jesus has done, and what His Spirit may be saying to us during Communion. This page will help you as you prepare for Communion.**

Give your students time to work on page 7.

When they are finished, give them time to talk about Communion.

## Q & A

Open the session for questions the children may have. The back page of the *So... You Want to Take Communion?* student booklet has some common questions they may have. Review these questions, and see if anyone else has questions.

Close with prayer. Express thankfulness for the work God is doing in the children's lives and will continue to do. Invite His presence to be near them as they take Communion. You may also wish to pray for each child individually.

# Communion and Children

The Church of the Nazarene believes in open Communion. This means all Christians are invited to the table to share in the elements. The church teaches that Communion is a sacrament remembering Christ's body and blood shed, so everyone who asks may be forgiven. This implies that ALL Christians, regardless of age, are invited. We, also, believe Communion is a "means of grace" – God's grace is expressed to us as we partake of the elements. John Wesley taught Communion could lead a person, who desired to be in right relationship with God, to faith.

Within Evangelical churches, there are four main strands of thought regarding children's taking Communion. Children should be invited to take Communion:

1. After they accept Jesus as Savior and understand what Communion means.
2. After they accept Jesus as Savior.
3. On the basis of Prevenient Grace—they are part of the kingdom of God until they reject grace and God.
4. As they participate with adults in the rituals of their faith. In this way children can discover the deep meaning of Communion.<sup>1</sup>

Catherine Stonehouse encourages churches that "do not allow children to partake of the elements, to develop some ways of inviting children to come with their parents for a blessing, and communicate to the children anticipation for the special day when they, too, will be able to join in this special meal."<sup>2</sup>

"Connecting a New Generation" – the Decadal Emphasis on Children and Youth – points out "children are disciples in training not disciples in waiting." This emphasis encourages churches to make children full participants in the Body.

Ultimately, this is a decision parents and local churches must make. Whatever the decision, let us follow Jesus' words, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (Matthew 19:14).

-Lynda T. Boardman  
Director, Children's Ministries

1. Catherine Stonehouse, *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 191.
2. *Ibid.*, 229.