

Belong

What is a physical item/place/activity that reminds you of something important and abstract?

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Become

What is the Church?

The book of Acts comes after the 4 Gospels in the Bible, and it tells the story of the early church after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. Read Acts 2:42-47 and underline words that tell us what life was like in the early church. What did the earliest Christians do?

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone because many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. - Acts 2:42-47

After reading Acts 2:42-47, what do you think is the purpose of the church?

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After Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, the earliest Christians continued to meet together for prayer, fellowship, teaching, preaching, sharing, and growing. These first believers established the Church, which we still participate in today!

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him, but they doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” -Matthew 28:16-19

What are the Sacraments?

Sacraments are outward and visible signs of an inward and invisible grace. The early church established Sacraments that point us toward God’s presence in our lives and in the world. The two sacraments that we practice as Methodists are Baptism and Communion.

Baptism

Baptism marks the moment we become a part of God’s family, the Church. The water represents God’s saving grace that cleanses us from our sins. As Methodists, we believe you can be baptized as a baby, as a kid or teenager, or as an adult. Even if you don’t remember your baptism, God remembers the moment you were born into new life in Jesus.

The person being baptized, or their sponsors if they are too young to profess for themselves, renounce sin, “the spiritual forces of wickedness,” and “the evil powers of this world.” Together, the people of the church profess our faith in Jesus and our hope in resurrection promise. We are baptized “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” just like Jesus told the disciples to do on that mountain in Galilee!

Baptism is not merely an important day in the life of the newly welcomed Christian but in the life of the whole church! We joyfully celebrate baptism as part of a worship service, whenever possible, allowing people other than immediate family to promise to surround the child or adult baptized “with a community of love and forgiveness, that they may grow in service to others.” Discipleship is not a solo endeavor, and baptism reminds us all that we are in this together.

Even if you were baptized at a different church—or haven’t been baptized yet—you are part of this church family.

How do you see our church keeping its promises to help you grow and mature in your faith?

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Communion

Holy Communion (also called the Lord's Supper or the Eucharist) is a way for us to remember Christ's death and resurrection. When we participate in communion by eating the bread (which represents Jesus' body) and drinking the juice (which represents Jesus' blood), we are sharing in a feast with other believers all over the world. As Methodists, we believe that anybody who wants to be united with Christ can share in the Communion table.

John Wesley taught that Holy Communion is a primary means of grace and one of the key ways we experience God's unconditional love and forgiveness. It is more than a symbol to help us remember what God did—it is an activity set apart by God through which God is at work in our lives. Jesus was a real person, God in human flesh. He could be touched, smelled, seen, and heard. In the same way, the bread and the juice are physical elements that we can touch, taste, smell, and see. The tangible experience of receiving the bread and the juice or wine connects us to the real presence of Jesus.

Communion is also a celebration of God's abundant love and goodness. It's a reminder of Christ's sacrifice and the promise of resurrection. That's something to be thankful for! We can be serious about Holy Communion without having to be somber. As our communion liturgy says, "It is a good and joyful thing always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Almighty God, creator of heaven and earth."

Confession and forgiveness are part of the communion celebration. That's why the communion liturgy includes both personal and corporate confessions and proclamations of forgiveness. That doesn't mean we have to run through a list of everything we've done wrong before we head to the table. But we do need to come to communion seeking God's grace.

United Methodists practice an open table, which means that **everyone is welcome** to join in and receive the gifts God gives us through this sacrament! While we are only baptized once, Communion is a sacrament that all are invited to participate in as often as we are able to experience God's grace in this special way.

Portions of this week's lesson adapted from Sparkhouse Collaborate, COR "Confirmation: The Story of God"

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. *1 Corinthians 11:23-26*

What are some ways eating a meal with other people strengthens our relationships with them?

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What parts of communion might seem strange to someone who has never been to church or heard much about Jesus? What seems strange to you?

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Jesus gave us the Church so we could be in community with other believers as we grow deeper in our faith and serve the world.

The Church

The Church is more than a building or a denomination. The Church is the people of God, made up of anyone who chooses to be in relationship with Jesus. We as the Church are now the ones who act as Jesus’ hands and feet in the world today.

What do you think it means for you to be the hands and feet of Jesus?

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Bless

What is one way you could be the hands and feet of Jesus to bless others this week?

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How were you blessed?

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