

# THE TAKE HOME

St. Paul UMC | 2000 Douglas Blvd., Louisville, KY 40250 | [www.stpaulchurchky.org](http://www.stpaulchurchky.org)

## An Open Table

Today's Gospel Lesson happens around a table with Jesus and tax collectors.  
See Luke 5:27-32

.....  
"Come to all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give your rest."  
(Matthew 11:28)

.....  
"The only thing that counts is faith working through love"  
(Galatians 5:6)



An Open Table is a unique emphasis in the United Methodist Church. When we speak of the Open Table, we are referring to Communion. While a complete consideration of Communion warrants an extended discussion, I offer these starting points for your reflection.

**The Open Table is God's Table, not ours.**

Each time we gather for Communion, we believe that the meal of bread and cup in Holy Communion points us toward God. We believe that Jesus is the host. The table is not a United Methodist Table, a St. Paul table; it is God's table, so everyone is invited.

**The Invitation invites us to come and examine ourselves.**

Our communion liturgy begins with words on Jesus' behalf inviting "all who love him, who earnestly repent of their sin, and seek to live in peace with one another." Notice that everyone has a place at the table. United Methodists have no tradition of refusing any who present themselves desiring to receive Communion. Also included in this Invitation is the hope that this meal helps us examine our lives and relationships. Holy Communion is a place of conversion and change.

**The Open Table is a place of possibility where we are guided, comforted, and transformed.** When we come to the table, so much about life is still a mystery. No matter how long we have traveled with Jesus, some part of our lives is untouched by the gospel. We still have something that we have yet to learn. God uses the meal to bring clarity.

John Wesley taught that God's grace is unearned and encouraged others to engage in the means of grace. The means of grace are ways God works in the lives of disciples. Means of grace include works of piety and works of mercy. There are individual works of piety like studying the scriptures, praying, and attending worship. Communal works of piety include Communion, gathering for small groups, and fellowship. Works of mercy can be individual acts, like visiting a neighbor, doing good works, or giving generously. As a church, we also engage in works of mercy when we support ministries together.

### **I am not a United Methodist Church Member. Can I still receive Holy Communion?**

Yes. The table of Holy Communion is Christ's table, not the table of The United Methodist Church or of the local congregation. The table is open to anyone who seeks to respond to Christ's love and to lead a new life of peace and love, as the invitation to the table says.

Our Book of Worship says, "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" (page 29). This statement means that in practice there are few, if any, circumstances in which a United Methodist pastor would refuse to serve the elements of Holy Communion to a person who comes forward to receive.

By Water and the Spirit affirms: "Because the table at which we gather belongs to the Lord, it should be open to all who respond to Christ's love, regardless of age or church membership. The Wesleyan tradition has always recognized that Holy Communion may be an occasion for the reception of converting, justifying, and sanctifying grace."

### **Can Children receive Communion?**

In The United Methodist Church, children are welcome to receive communion. Our Book of Worship explains, "All who intend to lead a Christian life, together with their children, are invited to receive the bread and cup."

By Water and the Spirit: A United Methodist Understanding of Baptism, our statement on baptism, says, "Because the table at which we gather belongs to the Lord, it should be open to all who respond to Christ's love, regardless of age or church membership."

Parents/caregivers are the ones who decide when their child can begin receiving communion. It is helpful to consider that Jesus welcomed children to participate in his ministry. Participating in the life of the church, including Communion, helps children grow spiritually. The experience affirms that they belong and are valued as part of the church. When children participate in the meal, like us, they don't understand everything but they experience God's unconditional love and belonging at God's table.