



**Council of Theological Students  
Global Ministries  
United Church of Christ  
and  
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)**

*The purpose of the Global Ministries Council of Theological Students (CTS) is to equip diverse groups of ministerial students with the knowledge and skills necessary to be effective ministers in a global community*

**February/March 2007**

**Class of 2006-2007 Edition 2**

**Communion**

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**Communion Defined**

*By Kim Gaston*

If I asked you what communion was, would you define it as the time that crackers and grape juice are passed through the pews? Is it a component of worship, or a something much larger?

I remember being at a Christian Music event several years ago and experiencing for the first time what I call “condiment communion.” As we walked into the concert area everyone was handed a little plastic container that had grape juice on the bottom and a little wafer sealed over the top. It seemed so odd to me to walk into worship with this little container that felt more like a miniature snack pack than my portion of the Body of Christ for the week. In fact, I got so caught up in the absurdity of the elements that I missed something much more important: I was sitting in an open-air worship with 30,000 people. We all were praying the same prayers, singing the same songs, experiencing the same God, and even those that were responding to worship in their own way were still worshipping with a much larger community. And when the time came, we all opened our “condiment communion” together and shared in the same table.

Do you ever get caught up in the elements? Find yourself so offended by what is being offered to you for communion that it doesn’t feel like it should count? Youth Sundays are famous for doing that to people: goldfish crackers and grape gushers, saltines and grape drink-mix, or anything else that seemed really symbolic in the planning sessions but failed in transferring the symbolism to the people worshipping with them. Granted, sometimes the unique elements are a nothing more than a challenge to tradition and a demand for individuality, but I don’t think that is normally the case. It has been my experience that the real message they are trying to convey is that the

elements don’t matter, and that whatever you put in your mouth means a lot less than the idea behind it: gathering as a family around one table, unity in one belief and one ritual, feeling connected not just to God but to all Christians who have ever gathered at the Table.



Connectedness to each other is always going to be so much more important than trivial issues like “condiment communion.” In fact I’ll take a risk and say you could never put anything in your mouth at all and still have a powerful communion experience. Communion isn’t just a ritual of worship, it is a practice of connection: connection to God, connection to your personal faith, connection to the earth and its needs, and connection to humanity with all it’s wounds and blessings. It is our hope that this newsletter offers you some traditional and some new ways to think about Communion. The idea of communion is a wonderful connection to Global Ministries because it ties us all together and places all around the Table.

**Kim is a student at Brite Divinity School on the campus of Texas Christian University**



# **Communion: What Inhibits Us From Living a Communion Life?**

*By Robyn Fickes*

“For Christians, the offer of God’s grace calls those who receive that grace to the fulfillment of responsibilities, not because they are threatened, or because they hope to gain God’s favor, but because God’s grace has enabled a faithful human response born of love and gratitude, God’s divine initiative empower Christians to be ‘responsible,’ and thus gives them the ability to address the demands of God pertained to the establishment of justice and the embodying of mercy in a broken and divided world.” (Toulouse, 91)

“Since salvation is constituted by a communion that encompasses our relations with God, with other persons, and with the rest of creation, it follows that disruption in our capacity for communion with others (God, persons, or nature) blocks realization of salvation” (Heim 205).

God calls us to communion. Whether weekly, or monthly, the invitation is extended in our home communities of faith to join with one another, creation, and our Creator to join in feasting on a memorialized and living relationship of mutuality. In this meal we are called to remember the scriptural account of Jesus sharing a meal with his beloved disciples, our own baptismal or confirmation vows, our recommitment to one another, to God’s creation, but most of, our recommitment to our relationship with God. We engage in this practice within our community and celebrate the communal nature of not only our Creator, but that we are called to be communal people. We are relational people, both in social, but also spiritual practice. As Mark Toulouse describes, this recommitment to faith is a bestowing of God’s grace throughout our lives. And it is from this gracious presence that we are then called response to God and the community from which we dwell. This practice of communing with one begins within our particular community; yet it moves us into the ever widening concentric circles of our communities until we recognize our citizenship within the larger global community.

Yet, if we truly were to respond to this call to communion, we would not be within a world of tremendous destruction, oppression, violence, and fear. What is keeping us from living a communion life? As

evidenced throughout this newsletter, communion is the vehicle in which we engage in relationship with others – God, creation, other cultures, and our neighbors on the other side of town. While communion is the vehicle, we need to be reminded why it is we are called to enjoin in being communion people. The desecration of our planet impedes the realization of communion relationship. The rating, ranking, and trafficking of people, land, and resources inhibits our full realization of living a communion of mutual love. Fostering a false sense of scarcity and consumption prohibits the fullness of communion to feed the world. And the miscalculation that unity at the table precludes diversity inhibits us to creatively dwell within the unifying presence of the multiplicity and diversity of our God. As we are called to the communion table, recall what you individually and communally bring to this relationship. As the invitation is extended, extend your imagination to discern the ways in which this call to communion is also a call to cherish and preserve the planet, the fullness of humanity within women and men, and the multiplicity of ways in which God is manifest and present within our world. As Mark Heim declares, to be communion people means to bring about salvation through the transforming relationship amongst ourselves with God, one another, and creation. As evidenced throughout this newsletter, there is a multiplicity of ways in which to practice communion, all the while, the list is exhaustive for the reasons why we engage in communion. To be a communion people is to dwell within the community of our maker – the community of God, humanity, and creation.

Resources:

- 1) Toulouse, Mark G.. *Joined in Discipleship*. Second Ed. Danvers, MA: ChalicePress,1997
- 2) Heim, S. Mark. *The Depth of Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2001.

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## Living Communion

By Beth (Greenwood) Boisvert

Communion. Eucharist. The Lord's Supper. The Bread and Cup. There are a variety of words and phrases used to describe this vital sacrament, but I tend to prefer the first, communion. This is not simply because that's what I grew up with and feels familiar to me, but because there is such a multiplicity of meaning associated with the word. So much, in fact, that it becomes more than a sacrament—it becomes a way of living and being in the world. We can think about this in two ways: of living “in communion” with others, and of living a “communion life.”

The first two definitions that the Oxford English dictionary gives for the entry “communion” are: “1. Sharing or holding in common with others; participation; the condition of things so held, community, combination, union,” and “2. Fellowship, association in action or relations.” It is interesting to note that the word “share” appears in each of the five guiding principles of the Common Global Ministries Board (CGMB). If we look at the sacrament of communion, the World Council of Churches notes that

The Eucharistic celebration demands reconciliation and sharing among all those regarded as brothers and sisters in the one family of God and is a constant challenge in the search for appropriate relationships in social, economic, and political life. (*Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, 1982)

This is the main focus of living in communion with others, and indeed with the world. Other ways to think about it might be “partnership,” “right relation,” “connectedness,” or the Greek term, *koinonia*. As people of faith we have been instructed to “love your neighbor as yourself.” Or as one Orthodox priest phrased it, “Your neighbor is your true self. You have no self in yourself.” We are called to foster relationships with others, offering our support and presence. Living in communion with others means living as equals, and should circumstances and outside forces cause an inequality, we must work to eradicate it. This communion can manifest itself in serving a mission program, in giving financially to programs which support these goals, and establishing relationships with individuals, congregations, or communities, among many others.

A communion life, then, should emphasize similar attributes. Living a communion life means incorporating the concept of communion into our daily lives. It means treating all of creation with respect and lessening our impact on the environment. It means saying grace before a meal and remembering all those who have worked to get the food to the table. It means being intentional about being a part of the global community, and working to make sure that all our brothers and sisters are cared for in times of need. It means, most of all, the

fellowship of community throughout the year and all over the world—celebration and sadness shared. (Lay Community of St. Benedict).

So, the next time we share the communion meal with our communities, let us remember the many meanings, and let us each day try to live a communion life in communion with each other.

Resources:

1. *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*. World Council of Churches. Geneva, Switzerland. 1982.
2. “Guiding Principles.” Global Ministries. [http://www.globalministries.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=140&Itemid=351](http://www.globalministries.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=140&Itemid=351). Accessed 14 March 2007.
3. “Living Holy Communion.” Lay Community of St. Benedict. <http://www.laybenedictines.org/index.asp?id=1628>. Accessed 15 March 2007.
4. Father Thomas Hopko. “Living in Communion.” *In Communion*. Issue 1, February 1995. Orthodox Peace Fellowship. [http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/jim\\_forest/Hopko.htm](http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/jim_forest/Hopko.htm). Accessed 16 March 2007.
5. “Communion.” Oxford English Dictionary. [http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50045222?single=1&query\\_type=word&queryword=communion&first=1&max\\_to\\_show=10](http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50045222?single=1&query_type=word&queryword=communion&first=1&max_to_show=10). Accessed 16 March 2007.

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## A Personal Experience that says it All...

### **COMMUNION IN CHINA**

By Rev. (F. Patrick) Pat Russell

Good Shepherd United Church of Christ, Cary, NC - October 27, 2006

It was approaching 10:00 p.m. on a warm May night in Chengdu, China, just a few months ago. I was searching for a place to eat a late dinner. All of the regular restaurants seemed to be closed. On some of the back streets, though, there are often little makeshift restaurants. Some of those informal eating places operate out of a tiny storefront, but usually there is simply a small push cart set up in the street as a kitchen, and scattered around the sidewalk are a few small tables, each surrounded by five or six very short blue plastic stools for sitting.

I passed a cooking cart where the food smelled pretty good, but I couldn't figure out the process for ordering a meal. There was no menu – only a large basin filled with hot oil. And then there were dozens and dozens of very thin skewers displayed like a large bouquet of flowers. At the tip of each skewer was a small bit of meat, mushroom, tofu, pepper, or any one of a number of things that I failed to recognize. The cook saw that I seemed interested and motioned with his hands toward the food. But I had no idea of what should happen next. So I shrugged my shoulders, indicating my puzzlement, and started to walk away.

That's when a lovely young lady standing beside me touched me gently on the arm and said, "May I help you?" She apologized, saying that her English was not very good, but I assured her that she spoke English a lot better than I spoke Chinese. She explained to me that I could pick out whatever skewers I wanted, hand them to the chef, and he would cook them in the basin of oil and then bring them to my table. Then she tried to tell me what the different kinds of food were – some of them will always remain a mystery to me.

I chose fifteen or twenty skewers, and then she pointed to a table at one corner of the sidewalk. "Will you join my friends and me?" There were three young men at the table, probably in their early twenties like the young lady, and they waved as she pointed out the table to me. I told her that I would be honored to join them – then asked what drinks I could order. She told me that I would have to go to one of the little storefront shops that lined the street to buy a drink – the man at the cart did not them. I told her I'd be right back, then found a tiny store that sold cold beer – thirty-six cents for a twenty ounce bottle of some of the best beer you can buy. The beer in China is excellent. When I returned to the cart for my dinner, the cook pointed over to the table with my four friends – my food was already there waiting for me.

The four of us did not always succeed in communicating clearly with each other, but for half an hour or forty-five minutes we sat there and laughed and visited like life-long friends. They each told me their name, and I gave them my business card – good manners in China, especially if you present it using both hands. The young lady told me that she worked as a dispatcher at a local company, where one of the young men worked, as well. Another young man was a student, and the other a musician. They shared some of their food with me, and when I asked how much I owed the cook, they informed me that they had already paid for it – it was to be their treat. I was humbled. I probably make twenty times as much as the four of them put together – wages in China are extremely low. But I accepted their kind hospitality with deep gratitude – it was just the right thing to do.

Not one of the four of them on that warm spring evening in Chengdu was a Christian. And the "elements" we shared were assorted meats and vegetables, including lotus pod, and a bottle of Chinese beer. But when I left the table that night, I thanked them for their gracious

friendship and kindness. And as I started back to my hotel room, I knew that I had just experienced a genuinely holy moment. I knew that I had been blest by being in Communion with four young Chinese people – strangers who showered God's love on me as we sat together on little blue plastic stools on a dimly lit side street in Chengdu one warm night in May.



## World Communion Sunday Resources....

*World Communion Sunday has created a lot of resources over the years that can be used in more than October. The links below offer worship resources that you can apply to any Sunday and connect Communion to Global Ministries.*

From the National Council of Churches – a brief history of World Communion Sunday and a collection of articles and web resources

<http://www.ncccusa.org/unity/worldcommunionsunday.html>

From Text This Week (a lectionary resource site) – a list of links for multi-cultural hymns, articles, sermons by other ministers on the topic, liturgies, and various other resources

<http://www.textweek.com/festivals/worldcommunion.htm>

From the Presbyterian Church – worship resources compiled in 2002 including litanies, a hymn written for World Communion Sunday, scripture suggestions, prayers, and many other worship components

<http://www.firstpresby.org/worldcommunion.htm>

From Sermon and Sermon-Lectionary Resources – background information, ideas to get the congregation involved, a children's story, and links to other resources

<http://www.rockies.net/~spirit/sermons/abc-worldwidecommunionsunday.php>

From the United Methodist Church – a devotion about giving to outreach and a link to worship resources for World Communion Sunday that has prayers, litanies, and worship ideas

<http://www.umcgiving.org/content/sundays/communion.asp>

## How to make Communion a Global Connection in Worship

*\*\* On the website FaithStreams.com is an article by Jan Aerie full of ideas for World Communion Sunday, but the ideas hold the same potential for connecting communion to Global Ministries any week of the year. We include her article here so that you have several ideas for how to take the ideas about communion discussed in this newsletter and take into the congregation. \*\**

## Around the World: Sharing the Bread of Life, Cup of Blessing

*The following are bite-sized morsels to stimulate creative thinking. Each one offers a starting point from which to create a meaningful worship experience for World Communion Sunday. The Neighbors in Need offering designated for this Sunday fits with World Communion by focusing on basic needs for food and shelter in this country and abroad. (9/26/2005)*

World Communion Sunday offers congregations a distinctive opportunity to experience Holy Communion in the context of the global community of faith. The first Sunday of October has become a time when Christians in every culture break bread and pour the cup to remember and affirm Christ as the Head of the Church. On that day, they remember that they are part of the whole body of believers. Whether shared in a grand cathedral, a mud hut, outside on a hilltop, in a meetinghouse, or in a storefront, Christians celebrate the communion liturgy in as many ways as there are congregations. World Communion Sunday can be both a profound worship experience and a time for learning more about our wider community of faith.

The following are bite-sized morsels to stimulate creative thinking. Each one offers a starting point from which to create a meaningful worship experience for World Communion Sunday. The Neighbors in Need offering designated for this Sunday fits with World Communion by focusing on basic needs for food and shelter in this country and abroad. Take time for adequate planning. Assemble a worship-planning team to discuss these ideas, develop your own, and then fashion a service that will speak to your particular liturgical environment. Use these ideas to build on services of Word and Sacrament found in *The New Century Hymnal* (pages 1–20) or in *Book of Worship: United Church of Christ* (pages 31–89). Be creative and let your worship resound with praise and thanksgiving.

### Communion Bread from Different Countries

As part of the communion liturgy, use multiple loaves baked by members of the congregation using international recipes. Four loaves could



represent the four corners of the world; five: the inhabited continents; six: all the continents; seven: the days of creation; ten: the Hebrew Ten Commandments; twelve: the disciples. "Breads around the World," a resource focusing on bread-baking recipes and worship services for breaking bread from six regions of the world, is available from Wider Church Ministries at 216.736.3200 or .

### Children's Bread Baking

Have children bake the bread for your communion service as part of their church school class. If they bake ethnic breads, the children, wearing costumes from the appropriate countries, may process into the sanctuary with the bread. During a children's message, focus on the different types of bread as a metaphor for the diversity of the human family.

### Bread Sermon

Mix, knead, and prepare a bread recipe as part of the sermon, using each ingredient to symbolize membership in the body of Christ and what it means for all of us to be ingredients in a global vil-lage-loaf. Later, bake the loaf and serve it during a time of fellowship.

### Traveling Communion

Using different types of bread and chalices, have worshipers move to different areas in the sanctuary to receive the elements by intinction. This journey to receive communion is symbolic of the journey of faith we all take as we seek to share the bread of life with others. As worshipers move, have the choir or soloists offer international music selections.

### Visual Communion

If your church uses a video or slide projection system, plan to show images of Christians around the world engaged in ministry and worship. This can be done to musical accompaniment during communion or as part of an audio-visual meditation. Using new technologies can bring the adage "a picture is worth a thousand words," to life.

### Communion Drama

Commission a member of the congregation or a person from the community to write a short dramatic scenario to be shared in worship. Have the playwright meet with the pastor to develop an appropriate theme that will

complement the sermon. Or, check an Internet search engine for Christian drama resources that can be used with permission.

### Creative Litanies

Translate the words "bread," "cup," "peace," "community," and other theological phrases into other languages. Create responsive litanies using these words. Have a litany read by persons scattered around the sanctuary to remind worshipers that they are surrounded by the global body of Christ. Choose a source such as *Gifts of Many Cultures* by Maren Tirabassi and Kathy Wonson Eddy from United Church Press.

### Hymns from a Variety of Cultures

*The New Century Hymnal* has a variety of communion hymns from different racial and ethnic traditions. Sing these hymns throughout the service or during the communion liturgy as a way of making a "joyful noise" in solidarity with the global community. For example, hymns number 333, 338, 793, 341, and 347.

### Prayers from Different Cultures

Prayers from different cultures can be shared in the liturgy by worshipers, or have liturgists read them in the original language with a translator sharing them in English.

### Mission Story Sermon

Use the *UCC Calendar of Prayer* as a source for stories about the church's participation in the needs of the world. After each story is highlighted in the sermon, a prayer could be offered for that particular work and witness. Copies of the *Calendar of Prayer* are available in book or CD-ROM by contacting the United Church of Christ Resources, toll-free at 800.537.3394.



### Pulpit Exchange

Use World Communion Sunday as an opportunity for churches in your community to exchange preachers. Learning more about each other's congregations, even though only across town, helps give perspective to global partnership. Have each congregation bake a loaf of bread for their neighboring church.

### **Invite a Guest Speaker**

Have your preaching moment center on the personal reflections of someone in your community who is from a different cultural background. Or, perhaps have three members of your congregation, who have different ethnic backgrounds, offer reflections on their cultural and religious heritage.

### **Blended Worship**

Make the service an ecumenical affair by inviting other churches to join with you in a special service. Work together beforehand to create a “blended” liturgy from the various traditions. Try to incorporate elements from each communion liturgy into your worship. In addition to the lectionary readings, you may choose to focus on these passages: Romans 12:3–21 and 1 Corinthians 12: 12–26.

### **Global Banners**

Plan an educational event for the congregation to learn more about our global mission partners. Design and construct colorful banners for hanging in the sanctuary using ethnic cloths and symbols of communion. The banners could be brought into the worship space during the opening hymn, dedicated with a prayer, and even become a focal point for a communion meditation.

### **Agape Love Feast**

Using elements of 1 Corinthians as background for the earliest Christian community’s communal supper, incorporate the communion liturgy into an Agape Feast. Process to fellowship hall at the end of worship to enjoy a potluck meal, just as the early Christians did. At an appropriate time, break the bread and pass the cup in an act of joyous celebration.



### **Hold a Mission Fair**

Turn fellowship hall into a mission fair with booths and information showing global partnerships and mission efforts throughout the world. Invite everyone to an ethnic meal and take up an offering for a specific mission project. Contact the Global Ministries office for materials or display ideas at or 216.736.3209.

### **Foreign Partnership**

Develop a partnership with a congregation in a different country. Share information, traditions, and mission priorities with your new partner. On World Communion Sunday, use the liturgy of your partner church as you hold each other in prayer and remember the global fellowship of faith.

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### **This We Believe ...**

*By Kim Gaston (On behalf of the CTS Group)*

*We believe*

- ... all people are connected through the thread called Humanity*
- ... that when one suffers we all suffer*
- ... that when anyone goes without food there is sadness in the hearts of many*
- ... that the God who loves us all individually also loves all of Creation*

*And we believe*

- ... that when anyone acts with love and/or compassion that God is present*
- ... that anytime justice triumphs over oppression that Humanity rejoices*
- ... being there for one person in their time of need is a victory for all who struggle.*

*We believe*

- ... the most powerful changes happen within the hearts of people, not in our policies and treaties*
- ... it is not necessary to travel around the world in order to touch the Global Community*
- ... connectedness to God creates a connection to Humanity*

*And we believe*

- ... that a love for God demands a love for others*
- ... that bread and wine are only a representation of a much more sacred idea*
- ... that Communion happens every time a person takes a moment out of their life journey to share in the journey of another person.*
- ... This we believe.*

## What's on your Heart?



At the close of the Global Ministries Event in October the CTS students invited you to share your prayer requests on slips of paper that had been placed on the table. Because it is our goal for all Believers to be in communion with each other, we intentionally collected those requests as we were partaking in the elements of the table. In order to expand our table, here is a list of the general prayer requests that were on the hearts of the people at that worship. We are listing them here so that we can connect to each other and to the larger community...

- The Miners in Columbia – grant them the dignity of keeping the mine and dignity of word
- Orphans around the world
- Refugees
- Children everywhere
- Bringers of food
- Bringers of water
- Henan Province of China
- Global Ministry in Columbia and Venezuela
- The refugees of Tanzania
- Therapists at Rey in the West Bank and those that they treat
- The one who is without hope
- The Indigenous people of Chiapas, Mexico
- The people of: Sri Lanka, Columbia, Middle East, Darfur, Philippines, Zimbabwe, India, Angola, China, Myannar, Palestine, Iraq, Pinalejo in Honduras, Butan, Timor, Bosnia i Herzigovina
- Saravena, Columbia
- Peace in Iraq
- Global Ministries
- Walterboro, SC
- Timor Leste Protestant Church
- For all the people who care for and grapple with hard issues/genocide around the world
- Missionaries in the field
- Immigrants who come undocumented
- Children of refugee camps
- Sinikithemba Clinic, Durban, South Africa
- Women and children of Darfur
- Efforts of youth and volunteers
- Angola
- The churches in Iwate Prefecture, Japan
- Those struggling for life in order to get into the US
- Ethnic minorities in China
- Children without parents and parents without children
- Women in Dorchester
- Iglesia Mision Christiano
- El Salvador
- Lebanon
- Children in war and abuse
- The Israel/Palestine peace process
- Soweto
- The faithful and beautiful people of the world dedicated to pursuing peace, regardless of religion
- Ecuador – We see you and stand with you
- The children of China and Mexico
- Native Americans
- Children without hope
- Rubate Teachers College students in Kenya
- Evangelical Congregational Church in Angola

Dear Mighty Counselor,

We lift up all these things to you, both those that break our hearts, and those that fill us with hope and promise for a better future. Everything that touches all these people and places touches us as well, because we are in communion together. Where we gather, You are there, where we offer aid and support, You are there, where those suffer and cry out, You are there, and where we go in Your name, You are there.

Hear us in our common search for a better world full of peace, lacking in violence and suffering, and the desire to unite around the vision.

Amen



*A*

*Word of Thanks:*

*To all those who are fighting the pains of the world with time, donations, and prayer; for everyone living the Communion life, and to Global Ministries and its supporters,*

*Thank You*

*(As pictured: Robyn, Summer, Beth, and Kim)*