



How to Serve Communion to Elders with Dementia

Chaplain Elisa Bosley

Welcome, and thank you for your desire to offer communion to the elders in your care. In this document, I provide the background, procedures, and script you'll need for this important ritual. (If you prefer, you can use my [11-minute communion video](#) instead.)

Background

Communion is also called The Lord's Table, The Lord's Supper, and the Eucharist (which means "thanksgiving"). It is a deeply sacred ritual for Christians from all denominations. It is taken from the story of the Last Supper, the Passover meal during which Jesus used bread and wine to illustrate his coming sacrifice for the sins of all people. The story is recorded by the gospel writers in Matthew 26:17-29, Mark 14:22-25, and Luke 22:14-20, and by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

Some faith traditions believe that only ordained ministers can administer communion, while others don't. In any case, with elders with dementia, it's important to respect each person's stance. As a chaplain, I have elders from all denominations who happily receive communion from me, and others who choose not to, and that is completely okay.

As you'll see in the script below, I always start communion by telling the group that participating in communion is not required and if anyone would prefer not to receive for any reason, they can simply pass. You can use the same approach if you're offering communion to a single person.

I encourage you not to get too wrapped up in whether an elder understands communion or what's happening spiritually when they receive it or not. I am certain that God's Spirit is fully able – and earnestly desires – to reach beyond cognition to bless and comfort an elder during the communion ritual. I have seen this countless times.

The Elements

Before you start, you'll need to gather what are called the elements: bread or crackers and juice (such as cranberry) or wine. You can also celebrate communion with bread or crackers alone if no juice or wine is available. (Have water available if people need it to help them swallow.)

Breaking bread is an important part of Communion. I use small round loaves (hamburger buns also work), but you may use any form of bread or cracker: pita, tortillas, sliced bread, rice

crackers, etc. With any bread, make a small slice in the side, which makes it easier to tear during the Words of Institution (see below). Tear another into very small pieces. Put the whole one and the pieces on a nice plate.

If you're serving a group, have a nice-looking cup or chalice (empty) to lift up during the ceremony. To distribute juice for communion, use any type of little cups on a tray. Fill and assemble them before the service and cover with a cloth.

If you're distributing both bread and juice, you'll need another person to carry the juice tray. Simply have that person follow you; they don't have to say anything.

Distribution

After the Words of Institution (see script below), follow these steps:

1. **Music:** As you begin distributing the elements, play the hymn, "[Let Us Break Bread Together](#)." Have a few more songs queued up to play while you continue distributing the elements.
2. **Move through the room** with the bread and juice. Ask each person: "Would you like to receive communion today?" People usually say yes, but just go with the flow. If a person says, "What is it?", say again, "This is communion; it represents Jesus. Would you like it?"
3. **Bread:** If the person says they would like to receive, take a piece of bread, show it to them, and say, "The Body of Christ" or "The Body of Christ, broken for you" or "The Body of Christ, given for you."

Depending on their denominational tradition, some people will extend cupped hands to receive the bread; others will open their mouths and extend their tongues for you to place the bread on it. Do whatever works for that person.

4. **Cup:** After they take the bread, hold out a little cup and say "The Blood of Christ" or "The Blood of Christ, shed for you." If they can hold the little cup, great; if they need help, gently lift it to their lips.

Take your time. Do whatever is needed to help the person eat and drink the elements if they choose.

After Distribution

When everyone has received communion, put any remaining elements back on the table and cover them with a cloth. Then you can simply close with a hymn or a prayer, or both.

Communion Script

Welcome to the Lord's table. Communion is a beautiful ritual that's celebrated by believers all around the world. It's a sacred reminder of the sacrifice of Jesus for our sins.

Anyone and everyone who would like to express their unity with Christ and the church is welcome to receive communion, but *it is not required*. If you would prefer not to receive communion today for any reason, that is completely fine, and you can pass on the elements when they come to you.

Words of Institution

On the night he was betrayed, Jesus took the bread [*pick up the whole bread or cracker*]. And when he had given thanks, Jesus broke the bread [*break the bread in half*], gave it to his disciples, and said, "Take and eat, all of you. This is my body, broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me." [*put the bread pieces back on the plate*]

In the same manner, after supper Jesus took the cup. [*Lift up the cup or chalice.*] Again he gave thanks and praise. Then Jesus gave the cup to his disciples and said, "Take and drink, all of you. This cup is the new covenant in my blood. It is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this is remembrance of me."

[*pick up the bread plate so that you're holding the plate in one hand and the cup in the other*] For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death, until he comes.

Let us pray. [*put plate and cup down*]

Lord God, as we celebrate communion we thank you for the reminder that you give us all we need to live in you, now and eternally. Bless these elements as we receive them in your name. Amen.

I will now distribute the elements. Please feel free to eat the bread and drink the juice whenever you're ready.

[*start song: [Let Us Break Bread Together](#)*]