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## Churches consider 'virtual' Lord's Supper

by Grace Thornton/The Alabama Baptist, posted Tuesday, April 07, 2020 (20 days ago)

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP) -- Bryan Gill said there was something "strangely special" about sharing the Lord's Supper in his home, but in community with thousands of other believers from Birmingham's Shades Mountain Baptist Church at the same time.

At the beginning of their service, which was streamed online April 5, church staff asked members of Shades Mountain Baptist -- and any other Christ-followers who might be watching -- to go to their kitchen and get what they needed. That meant a drink -- juice, Gatorade or water if need be -- and crackers or bread. Then at the end of the service, Pastor Danny Wood led them in taking the meal together.

It's not an uncommon scene right now. As churches are figuring out what it looks like to be the body of Christ during COVID-19 isolation, they're considering what that means for the Lord's Supper. They're asking what it might mean to celebrate communion with "the bread and the cup Zoomed for you" -- as a recent Christianity Today article put it -- or whether to do it at all. It's an especially relevant question as some prepare to observe Good Friday, the day the first Lord's Supper was instituted.

An article published last month by Christianity Today "Online Communion Can Still Be Sacramental" suggests one issue is the question of presence.

Does physical presence have to mean sitting next to each other in person or can it mean "together" by way of a virtual connection or in an online room, like a Zoom video meeting? As most churches adhere to guidelines on social distancing and recommendations against gathering in person during the COVID-19 pandemic, communion is yet more uncharted territory.

### Virtual communion

Churches who have decided that sharing the meal "together" can mean together virtually are coming up with creative ways to accomplish it:

-- Some churches like Shades Mountain Baptist are asking church members to partake with whatever they have on hand at their house. A staff member then guides them through communion.

-- The Baptist Church at McAdory in McCalla, Ala., offered packets of pre-filled communion cups with wafers attached that church members could pick up at the church and have on hand through the weeks of self-isolation. They would then partake when instructed to during the livestreamed service. Pre-filled communion cups are available from retailers like B&H Publishing or local Christian bookstores.

-- Some churches are asking members to prepare ahead by buying grape juice and unleavened bread (bread without a rising agent) if possible when they're shopping for groceries.

Jay Wolf, pastor of First Baptist Church, Montgomery, Ala., said he's certain the Lord will use his church's first virtual Lord's Supper -- set for Wednesday (April 8) at 6 p.m. via Facebook Live or Zoom -- to "draw us closer to Him and to each other."

"Part of our Holy Week tradition includes sharing communion on Wednesday evening," he said. "After our time of intensive intercession for our world in crisis, we will shift to sharing the Lord's Supper."

### Into the presence of Jesus

At that time, Wolf will invite online participants to go get some form of bread and a cup of juice or soda to symbolize the elements of the communion.

"I will preface the partaking of the bread and cup by inviting everyone to step into the Upper Room and relive the Last Supper," he said. "We do not 'take' the Lord's Supper, but the Lord's Supper should take us into the presence of Jesus."



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As they walk through the experience together, they will focus on the steps Jesus took on His way to the cross, starting in Jerusalem, where they will focus on the "bread of blessing" at the cross, and passing through the Garden of Gethsemane, where Wolf will direct their focus to the "cup of commitment."

"Jesus received the cup of doing God's will by sacrificing Himself on the cross for each of us," he said. "After receiving the bread of blessing, it's imperative that we hear and heed Christ's calling to be completely committed to serve the Savior's purpose. So as we take the cup we are committing ourselves to doing God's will."

At the end, they will all sing a hymn of benediction together.

"During this season of social distancing, we need experiences that will draw us closer to Christ and to His Church," Wolf said. "Creatively using the tools of technology for the Lord's work honors the Savior and builds His family."

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Many websites include recipes for unleavened bread, also known as matzo, matzah or matza. Examples can be found [here](#).*

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