



New Faith Communities

North Carolina Conference

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

700 Waterfield Ridge Place
Garner, NC 27529
800.849.4433 | nccumc.org



NEW ROOM SOCIETY

Newsletter / March 2020

CONSTANT COMMUNION

by Rev. Greg Moore

GOD OFFERS YOU ONE OF THE GREATEST MERCIES ON THIS SIDE HEAVEN, AND COMMANDS YOU TO ACCEPT IT.

—THE DUTY OF CONSTANT COMMUNION, A SERMON BY THE REV'D JOHN WESLEY

As a child, Communion Sunday was the worst.

Showing up on the first Sunday of the month and seeing the communion table set with pristine white paraments and the shiny brass frisbee filled with shot glasses of juice made my brother and me instantly moan. Mostly because it meant that we were guaranteed to get out 15 minutes later than normal, which meant that there was no way that we would beat the Baptists to Shoney's.

We would sit there under our father's watchful eye (still and silent) observing as adults shuffled in slow motion up to the rail to... kneel... receive bread... drink juice... say a prayer...

To add to our torment, our pew had a perfect view of the Shoney's parking lot across the street. We could watch it filling up while our stomach's growled and the taste of stale bread and Welch's clung to the roofs of our mouths.

If Mr. Wesley had told 10-year-old me that communion was "one of the greatest mercies this side of heaven," I would have told him that he had clearly never had to pick through the leftovers of a breakfast buffet after the folks from First Baptist had made their way through.

While the 10-year-old me struggled to see how anything sacred was happening in this act, some 30 years later I am grateful that I was a part of a community that taught me that some things were more important than rushing to lunch. I still remember my mom kneeling and praying with Ms. Cathy when her husband left her, my father laying money on the altar rail in order to feed the hungry throughout the week, my soccer coach smiling at me as he walked past me and pointed to his watch (as if to say, "Can you believe we're still here?!").



I didn't know it at the time, but looking back, it seems that as time slowed down in that

sanctuary on Communion Sunday, my life was being paced by grace.

In part, that's what communion does. At least the ritual celebration of the sacrament of communion. It times our communities to the pace of grace.

And the hope is that our celebration of that shapes our lives to experience communion (oneness with God, each other and creation) throughout the week.

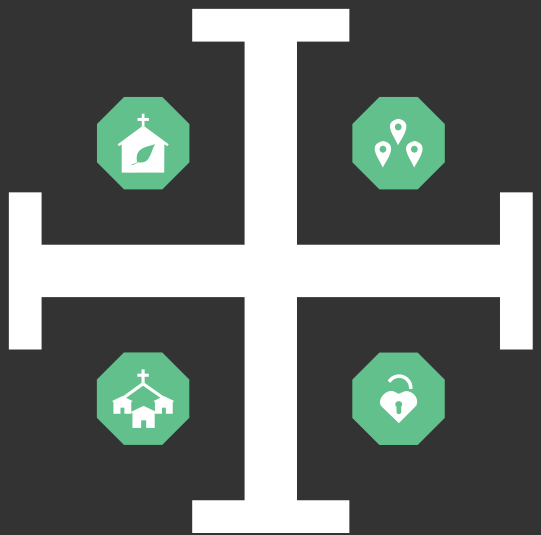
In this edition of the NRS newsletter, you will hear some stories of how children, families and communities are finding the pace of grace together. You will also find a table blessing to use in your home throughout the week as your table at home becomes an extension of our Communion Table.

May you slow down as you read these stories, and even though parking lots around us fill up, may the great mercy of communion pace your life to experience the best grace one can find this side of heaven. +

PLEASE SUPPORT OUR PLANTERS

with your prayers for communion to be celebrated in new ways in their lives and in their communities.

- | | |
|------------------|----------------------|
| Kyle Burrows | Brent Levy |
| Jason Butler | Arthur Manigault |
| Daniel Childs | Rafael Martinez |
| Paul Dunham | Cleve May |
| Annette Ethridge | Mary Frances McClure |
| Randy Evans | Wes Neal |
| Jason Gaskin | Nick Rich |
| Justin Jamis | Angelo Sanchez |
| Chris Jenkins | Jamie Thompson |
| Francis Kinyua | Edgar Vergara-Millan |
| Michael Larbi | Tyler Williams |



An order of laity and clergy dedicated to embodying apostolic hospitality for new people to be gathered into communion with Jesus Christ.

GIVE OR JOIN TODAY!
VISIT WWW.NEWROOMSOCIETY.COM

Messy LUNCH

By Rev. Chris Jenkins, Hope Restorations, Kinston

"WHEN THE TIME CAME, JESUS TOOK HIS PLACE AT THE TABLE AND THE APOSTLES JOINED HIM." LUKE 22:14 (CEB)

Perhaps my most favorite time of the month at Hope Restorations is the 1st Tuesday at lunch. It's messy. The lunchroom is full of a wide range of people; our staff, participants in our program, and anyone who has accepted our often-repeated invitation to join us. It's messy. There are people from very different backgrounds and perspectives. Some are well dressed, perhaps for office work. Others may be dusting off the sawdust from the morning's house renovation work. Some, usually those who are new to us and perhaps not yet sure they really want to be here for anything other than a sandwich lunch, sit on the outer edges of our space. Others gladly take a seat as close to the center of the room as they can, wanting to make sure they can hear the conversations that will soon ensue. It's messy. We arrive there from a wide array of Christian traditions and understandings, even from other faiths, and even from agnostic or atheistic viewpoints.

We always begin 1st Tuesdays reminding everyone that while all are invited, what we're about to do is optional. Their participation in our program doesn't require any religious practice or profession. We also try to briefly explain the meaning of what we're doing as well as contrasting how differently it may look were we in a church on a Sunday morning, all while most everyone continues gathering their plates, cups, and sandwich fixings so they'll be ready when the time comes. It's messy.

I begin with "Christ our Lord invites to his table..." and one by one, each person in the room gives their attention to the liturgy. Even those choosing not to participate seem to be paying attention for some reason. Maybe it's the strangeness of what they're witnessing. We sing a chosen hymn that would be familiar to most churchgoers. Sometimes it's



miraculously heavenly from where I sit. Volunteers read the scripture selections for the day, and if we encounter any difficult pronunciations, we laugh together as we struggle through it. Rather than a sermon, I try to offer some insights and contexts related to the text without telling them what they should believe. That can be a tough temptation to resist, but I'm trying to trust the Holy Spirit's power to do that. When we Pass the Peace, we do it by turning to the one on each side and say, "God loves you and so do I," which means everyone will hear those words from at least one person that day.

Then we pray for others and begin The Great Thanksgiving. Everyone is paying attention... reading along to make sure they don't miss their part. Then comes the best part... we pray together the Lord's prayer that asks for His Kingdom to come before we share the bread and the cup, but very unlike the way you see most Sunday mornings, we share it in a way that everyone gets a chance to receive the gifts and everyone gets a chance to share the gifts with another. It's messy.

Life is messy. The world, and figuring out how to survive in it is complex and messy, but for at least about 15 minutes on the 1st Tuesday of the month at lunchtime, we all get on the same page and dream the same dream, of Christ's heavenly banquet where with everyone's giftedness and brokenness are welcome, all are valued, and all are uniquely gifted



to both receive and to give, and all benefit from our togetherness, our communion.

We conclude with The Prayer After Receiving, acknowledging both the mystery and our commission to take the message and practice of the coming Kingdom wherever we go. Then it's "Peanut butter and jelly time!" And the remaining 40 minutes or so allow hungry people to be filled with what they most need; acceptance, belonging, and hope. The sandwiches, along with rich and candid conversations about life are usually quite nourishing too!

Gregory, who like many over time, has moved closer to the center of the room. He recently said, "I grew up in church and have an understanding of communion, but I view communion like this, and I mean no disrespect to anyone. Communion is the coming together of co-workers, friends, and whoever wants to join us for lunch. But before lunch we have communion. In the breaking of bread, I see peace, love, respect, and in the drinking of the juice, I see knowledge, understanding, and compassion going down. All with love for our brother."

I can't help but notice the power of an unconditional invitation. I've seen so many over the past 2 years who first sat on the fringes but gradually moved closer and closer. And I can't help but notice how much it nourishes my soul and faith to enjoy such a foretaste of the Heavenly Banquet, at least each first Tuesday at lunch. +

DURHAM HOME CHURCH NETWORK

by Alex Tilley, Lay Person

When my family and I joined the HomeChurch Network, it had been a long time since I had felt free to encounter Jesus without feeling the need to put on a face. I could not have understood how this new community would shape my life and become a salve. In the most beautiful way, my daughter, Harden, has exemplified what it means to come to Jesus open-handed and as we are. Harden's example is most apparent in the sacrament of communion.

Harden just turned 2, and while she doesn't completely understand what communion is, she does understand that there is an invitation for her to participate and to receive. Every Sunday when we enter our time of communion, there is Harden, receiving bread, dipping it in the cup, and eating. No one told her how to do it; she simply responded to an open invitation and the example of those around her. Some weeks Harden comes to church in her pajamas, and some weeks just in a diaper. But that girl is always celebrated and welcomed to the table to freely receive the gift Jesus offers to her... just as she is.

I love that when I ask Harden if she wants to go to church, her typical response is, "Dip it, Eat it?" Yes, Harden, that's what church is. Maybe it's not that simple, but I sure hope it is. +

