Using a Traditional Form, Holy Communion in a Time of Fear

The Constitution of the United Church of Christ affirms the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion according to “practice prevailing among evangelical Christians.” This tradition and ecumenical commitment is visible in the orders for “Word and Sacrament” found in Book of Worship and The New Century Hymnal.

In a worship service, this traditional form of Holy Communion usually follows a time in which the Word of God is heard through scripture readings, sermon, perhaps a creed, and a time of prayer and passing of God’s peace. The form may include:

An Offering and Gathering of Gifts

(An offering and elements of bread and wine are brought forward to the table.)

An Invitation to the Table

A Prayer of Great Thanksgiving (that includes):

• A call to give God thanks (a dialogue between pastor and people that often begins “We lift up our hearts”)
• A giving thanks to God for all God has done
• A song or words celebrating God’s creation (that often begins with “Holy, holy, holy”)
• A time of remembering Jesus at the table (that is often called “Words of Institution”)
• An affirmation of the fullness of Christ’s mission and work (that often takes the form of “Christ has died. Christ has risen. Christ will come again.”)
• A prayer that invokes the Holy Spirit to come and bless the elements and the community (that often begins with “Send your Holy Spirit upon us and upon these gifts,” and may be called the “Prayer of Consecration”)
• An Amen and the Prayer of Jesus/Lord’s Prayer

Communion (that includes):

• The breaking of bread and pouring of wine
• A Communion song (that often begins with “Lamb of God”)
• A call to the meal
• The sharing of the bread and wine
• A Communion hymn

A Prayer of Thanksgiving after Receiving

The words used for Holy Communion are sometimes adapted to reflect the church year, in light of the lectionary Bible reading, around a theological theme, or for a particular occasion in the life of a congregation. Such occasions might include a funeral, an anniversary, or a time of national crisis. Any such adaptation seems to emphasize a particular meaning of Holy Communion.
The following liturgy was designed following the tragic events of September 11, 2001, and in light of the despair that followed. Such times are ones of fear regarding war, politics, and economics. It was first used at the United Church of Christ Partners in Education event, in Scottsdale, Arizona in February 2004. Following a more traditional and ecumenical form, it connects the power of Christ present at Holy Communion with the fears brought to the table. Printed here is the invitation to the table through the breaking of bread and sharing of the cup.

**The Invitation to the Table**

One:  
O God of power,  
O God of peace,  
who feeds the hungry,  
calms the storm,  
and comforts the trembling,  
call your children into your arms.  
Call your children to this table.

**The Great Thanksgiving**

Pastor:  
The Holy One is here.  

People:  
God’s Spirit is with us.

Pastor:  
Let us open our hearts to God.  

People:  
We open them to God and to one another.

Pastor:  
Give thanks to God.  

People:  
All our thanks, all our praise!

Pastor:  
O God, who changed chaos into creation,  
you know the trembling hearts of your children:  
Adam hiding, naked,  
Eve exiled, no way to return  
Sarah childless and jealous,  
Hagar abandoned to die,  
Moses stuttering before Pharaoh,  
Daniel thrown to lions,  
David facing the giant Goliath,  
Esther petitioning the king,  
To all, you comforted, delivered, and inspired.

God, you still small voice,  
God, you tranquil waters,  
you, mother’s embrace,  
you, father’s strong arm,  
you, prophet’s voice,
you, nurse’s touch,
you, child’s faith,
God, peace beyond all understanding,
you, perfect love in whom there is no fear,
no terror, no despair, no death,
You are hope.
Holy One, we bless you.
Holy God, Holy Three, we thank you!

(Words such as the following may be sung or spoken, the congregation might sing “Holy, Holy, Holy!” found in the Sing Prayer, Sing Praise! songbook.)

People: Holy! Holy! God of majesty and love,
Creation sings your glory, O God Most High.
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of our God.
Hosanna in the highest! Hosanna!

Pastor (continuing):
To a fearful world, you sent your child Jesus.
You announced his coming to Mary and shepherds
with angels singing: “Be not afraid.”
Jesus came among us, taught,
healed, saved, and confronted.
And troubled minds eased, turbulent seas quieted,
children rested, followers transformed,
while rulers were thrown into turmoil.

When Jesus ate with his friends,
He took bread, and after blessing it,
He broke it and gave it to them saying:
“Take, eat; this is my body given for you.
Each time you do this, remember me.”

Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks,
Passed it to his friends, saying:
“Drink. This cup poured out for you
is the promise of God, made in my blood.
Whenever you drink it, remember me.”

We remember Jesus’ death and resurrection, our hope.
We recall all these mighty acts.
We break bread and share one cup.
We pray for a fearful world.

People: Christ, come and comfort!
Christ, come and redeem!
Christ, come and create a new world!
Pastor (continuing with hands, palms down, over the bread and cup):

Powerful and Peaceful God, 
breathe your Spirit upon us 
and on these gifts, 
that all who eat and drink at this table 
may be one body, one holy people, 
a bold and faithful people, 
a living sacrifice in Jesus Christ.

Through Christ, with Christ, and in Christ, 
One with the Holy Spirit, 
All glory is yours everywhere, now and forever.

At this time, in the silence, we also remember 
all those who suffer and are in pain 
those who are without work 
those who are ravaged by war 
those who are weary and unsure of life 
those who live with fear, oppression, or hunger, 
those who long for your peace, love, and justice.

(silence)

**Prayer of Our Savior**

One: In the peace and presence of the Holy Spirit, we pray the prayer of Jesus, our 
brother, savior, and friend . . .

**The Breaking Bread and Pouring Wine**

Pastor (breaking the loaf):

Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body. 
The bread we break is a sharing in the body of Christ and the brokenness of our sisters and brothers through the world.

(pouring or lifting the cup)

The cup over which we give thanks is our sharing in the life of Christ. 
Christ is present.

(The elements are shared with words such as “the Bread of Life” or “the Cup of Blessing.” The congregation may sing a song, such as “Bread is Broken” found in the Sing Prayer, Sing Praise songbook. Following the sharing of the elements, a closing prayer of thanksgiving is offered and hymn sung.)