



PASTORAL LETTER RELATING TO VIRTUAL HOLY COMMUNION

It is understandable that many of our members have missed the experience of sharing in the Lord's Supper during the Coronavirus pandemic. Allow me to share some thoughts relating to why we have not embraced celebrating Communion virtually.

The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AME Zion Church) both is a denomination and a part of the Methodist family. Methodist and congregational churches have very different sacramental understandings of Communion. Generally, congregational churches understand Communion to be an ordinance. An ordinance is a practice commanded to be performed by the Lord and in the case of Communion it is memorial (as in an act of remembrance) in nature. The Methodist view of Communion is that it is a sacrament, a sacred experience, practiced by Jesus, commanded by Jesus that we practice, and that it is a means of God's grace that involves the very real presence of Christ. As Methodists, we believe in the mystery of the very real presence of Christ in Communion, which is not a congregational church view of Communion. We do not believe that the elements become the body and blood of Christ, as Roman Catholics do, but that Christ is present in the elements. For these reasons, the congregational church/memorial view of Communion better lends itself to virtual Communion.

While we are in unusual times, our Bishops have taken the position that our times cannot change the AME Zion Church's sacramental practices without study. Our theology does not allow for distributing pre-consecrated Communion elements to members to take at home virtually nor distributing unconsecrated Communion elements to members to take from home once consecrated virtually. Yes, some Methodists have allowed for virtual Communion in this pandemic. Those Methodists have departed from established Methodist theology for expediency and some have regretted what they have done and have ended the practice.

We are a Methodist Church, not a congregational church. As such, there are differences. Moreover, as an AME Zion Church, we are a part of a denomination that holds certain worship practices in common. As a person who served on the AME Zion Faith and Order Task Force that looked at the issue of allowing virtual Communion in the midst of the pandemic, we concluded that a complete theological study of changing our theology and practices would be necessary to allow for virtual Communion and that we did not recommend amending our sacramental practices, for expediency, without doing the study needed.

I hope this answers some questions that many may have had. If not, please reach out to me.

In His service,

Rev. Dr. Adrian V. Nelson, II, Pastor