

## Understanding Episcopal Liturgy

*#4 What is the reason the entire congregation shares wine from just one or two chalices during communion? Wouldn't it be better to pour it into tiny little cups the way they do at the church down the street?*

Our use of a single chalice for distribution of the wine at communion is based in the story of the Last Supper, in scripture and in our theology of communion. Communion is an encounter between the individual and God, but it is also sacrament of unity, where the entire community is bound together as a united Body of Christ. This understanding of communion as a communal sacrament comes from the story of the Last Supper where Jesus took a cup of wine, said the blessing over the cup of wine, then passed the cup among his disciples to share. St. Paul gives the strongest articulation of this idea in 1 Corinthians 10, where he writes: "Because there is one loaf of bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread."

Drinking from tiny, individual cups sometimes goes hand in hand with a theology that views Christian faith and practice in individualistic terms. Repeated scientific studies have refuted our modern, instinct to not drink from the same cup as other people for fear of contracting illness. The alcohol in the communion wine effectively eliminates the risk of transmission of germs, though people who have reduced natural immunity might be advised to not drink from the communion chalice.