

The Lord's Supper A Primer for Church Officers

Theology: The sacrament is mandated in Scripture which Presbyterians and other Reformed churches believe is necessary for celebrating the sacraments. In Matthew 26:26-28, Christ himself commands the breaking of bread and sharing of the cup in remembrance of him. In 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, Paul repeats Christ's commandment. (There are only two sacraments in our tradition – baptism and the Lord's Supper. Christ commanded these two himself. Contrast with celebrations in other traditions, such as marriage or vocation, which are not mandated by Scripture.)

Nearly all traditions believe that Christ is present at the Supper; disagreements come arise over *how* Christ is present. Reformed theology takes seriously the biblical accounts of Christ's ascension into heaven (Mark 16:19, Luke 24:51, and the first chapter of Acts). If Christ is in heaven then he cannot be present with us on earth. Instead, by the power of the Holy Spirit we are lifted into the presence of Christ as we commune. Furthermore, we commune with all the saints of every time and place – again by the power of the Spirit.

We eat this meal, literally and spiritually, to **be nourished**. The bread and the cup (juice or wine) is supposed to provide us with calories for the body so that we might have fuel for our discipleship. Appropriately, the meal is served from a table, not an altar.

It is not necessary to be somber during communion – this is the *joyful* feast of the kingdom of heaven. It is supposed to be reverent – this is a meal that has real meaning for us, a visible sign of God's invisible grace.

The meal is not a re-enactment of the last supper. We memorialize Christ that is we remember him, and we pray that we may be as Christ for the world (the body of Christ, his church).

Yes the Supper is "special" – the objection many people raise when more frequent communion is suggested. In fact, the Supper is so special that none of us is worthy of partaking. This is where grace comes in. The celebration overflows with grace which makes this sacrament something we could celebrate everyday and still not have enough.

Presbyterian Polity

According to our tradition, a Minister of the Word and Sacrament *must* preside over the meal. That means giving the invitation to the table, offering the prayer of Great Thanksgiving on behalf of the people, and stating the words of Institution (the scriptural mandate). Officers of the church, both deacons and elders, are authorized to serve. (Anyone else must have Session approval to serve communion on a per-occasion basis.)

If the Supper is to be celebrated with people who cannot attend public worship, then the Session again must give authorization. We have done this through policy permitting crisis visitors to officiate. **Two officers** must always be present when communion is served –

Ministers, Elders, and/or Deacons. This is scriptural, too – Jesus sent his disciples out in pairs to minister.

Technically, if officers are to celebrate communion on communion Sunday, they really should leave the church *prior* to the benediction. However, this is not our practice. I think this is ok, provided the elders/deacons go quickly after church.

Structure for serving to people not able to commune during public worship

1. First, let's stop using the term "shut-in." It just doesn't sound kind. Let's use "home – or hospital-bound" instead.
2. Prior to communion Sunday, consult with the other crisis visitor and determine who you will serve the Supper to after checking who was served the previous month. It is important that all of our homebound members share this meal at least a couple of times a year. Then confirm with the people you plan to visit.
3. Pick up the communion "kits" from the Lord's table. These should already be packed and ready to go.
4. For the celebration of the sacrament, please:
 - a. Read the Scripture text of the day (either one), talk about the service if the person is able to comprehend
 - b. Pray the Great Prayer, followed by the Lord's Prayer (I'll change the prayer every few months and post it on the web page or email it out).
 - c. Serve the bread and the cup.
5. Report to the clerk, the pastor, and the church secretary who received communion so that we can keep track (see step 2!).

Thank you for your ministry.

Kerry

Great Prayer of Thanksgiving for Summer 2010

Honor and worship are indeed your due, our Lord and our God, through Jesus Christ, for you created all things; by your will they were created, and for your glory they have their being.

In your loving purpose you chose us before the foundation of the world to be your people;

Above all we give you thanks and praise for your grace in sending Jesus Christ, when we had turned away from you.

In your Son you suffered with us and for us, calling us to freedom and holiness.

Therefore with people of every nation, tribe and language, with the whole Church on earth and in heaven, joyfully we give you thanks.

All glory and honor to you, God of grace, for you gave your only Son Jesus Christ once for all on the cross to be the one perfect sacrifice for the sin of the world, that all who believe in him might have eternal life.

The night before he died, he took bread, and when he had given you thanks, he broke it, gave it to his disciples, and said: Take, eat, this is my body which is given for you; do this to remember me.

After supper he took the cup, and when he had given you thanks, he gave it to them and said: Drink this, all of you, for this is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins; do this as often as you drink it, to remember me.

Therefore heavenly Father, in this sacrament of the suffering and death of your Son, we now celebrate the wonder of your grace.

Redeemer God, rich in mercy, infinite in goodness, we were far off until you brought us near and our hands are empty until you fill them. As we eat this bread and drink this wine, through the power of your Holy Spirit feed us with your heavenly food, renew us in your service, unite us in Christ, as we offer you our songs of everlasting praise.

Amen.

Then say the Lord's Prayer together.