

MDPC Communion Training

Communion Details:

- Set-Up
- Traffic
- Serving
- Clean Up

Scriptures for Communion:

Matthew 26:26-28 - *While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body.' Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.*

Luke 22:19-20 - *Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'² And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.*

John 6:54-58 - *Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.'*

1 Corinthians 11:26 - *For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 26-27 - *For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body...and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.... If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.*

Presbyterian Understanding of The Lord's Supper: The Lord's Supper is the sign and seal of eating and drinking in communion with the crucified and risen Lord. In this last meal before his death, Jesus took and shared with the disciples the bread and wine, speaking of them as his body and blood, signs of the new covenant. He commended breaking bread and sharing a cup to remember and proclaim his death.

The Lord's Supper =

- "is an external sign, by which the Lord seals on our consciences his promises of good-will toward us" – John Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.14.1
- "...accept with a believing heart all the suffering and the death of Christ, and so receive forgiveness of sins and life eternal." – *Heidelberg Catechism*

- "...as surely as I see with my eyes the bread of the Lord broken for me and the cup given to me, so surely was his body offered for me and his blood poured out for me on the cross." – *Heidelberg Catechism*

ECO Essential Tenets:

3.C – “In the Lord’s Supper, we confess that as we eat the bread and share one cup the Spirit unites us to the ascended Christ, so that His resurrection life may nourish, strengthen, and transform us. Third, the community of the Church practices discipline in order to help one another along the path to new life, speaking the truth in love to one another, bearing one another’s burdens, and offering to one another the grace of Christ.”

2.0502 – Service within a congregation under the session and Pastor/Head of Staff

“The Church exists wherever two or more are gathered in the name of Jesus. Therefore, it is appropriate to celebrate sacraments in these smaller units. These smaller units include, but are not limited to: small groups, missional communities, retreats, leaders of satellite congregations, and house church gatherings. If an officer has been commissioned by the session to lead these groups in mission or ministry and has been appropriately trained, he or she shall be authorized to administer the sacraments in these communities. The pastor and the session shall oversee those who are commissioned to such service within a congregation. This commission shall be for a period of twelve months and may be renewed indefinitely.”

Therefore...

- (1) In the serving of Communion, care is given to ensure that the unity of Word and Sacrament is maintained, by the reading of Scripture and the offering of prayer.
- (2) Ordained Elders and Deacons, past and present, are considered to be commissioned by the session to serve Home Communion as a result of their calling to that office and service to MDPC. Other Covenant Partners may also be commissioned to serve.
- (3) Communion servers shall be instructed by Caring Ministries in the theological and pastoral foundations of this ministry and in the liturgical resources for it.
- (4) Caring Ministries has been given the authority to oversee the training and serving of Home Communion to members unable to attend worship services at MDPC.

In the Sacrament of Communion we...

- 1) Worship: acknowledge that Christ died for our sins; respond with confession and praise
- 2) Nurture: receive from Christ the feeding of our souls; experience Christ’s presence
- 3) Vertical Relationship: connect with God
- 4) Horizontal Relationship: connect with other believers with whom we partake

ECO-Presbyterian Theological Paper Excerpt: by Rev. Dr. Laura Smit (Originally published in James K. A. Smith & James Olthuis, eds. *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition: Creation, Covenant, and Participation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

1. Through the incarnation, the human body of Jesus Christ becomes a source of life for us.
2. Both the incarnation and the sacraments are examples of God’s accommodation of His self-revelation to our human finiteness.
3. Since Jesus Christ is fully human and truly embodied, His risen and ascended body is locally and spatially present in heaven, at the right hand of the Father.

4. The celebration of the sacrament must always be initiated by the proclamation of the Word.
 5. The movement of the supper is not a downward movement, of Christ being drawn to us, but an upward movement, as we are lifted to Him as participants in His nature.
 6. The body of Jesus Christ is present in the Lord's Supper through the power of the Holy Spirit
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"Meeting Jesus at His Table" – written by the ECO Team
October 28, 2013

What exactly is happening when we come to the Lord's table and celebrate the sacrament of Communion? This is one of those issues about which Christians disagree passionately. We can think of all the many understandings of the sacrament as falling into three groups.

First, there are a lot of Christians who think that the action of the Supper is only horizontal, involving the community's act of memorializing the death of Jesus. These people think that Jesus is present when they enact the Lord's Supper exactly the same way He's always present. The special thing about the Supper is that we're remembering how much Jesus loved us on Calvary. These people tend to be the most casual about how they handle the bread and wine or juice, not feeling that the elements require any particular reverence or care. They are likely to celebrate the Lord's Supper only a few times a year, but when they do they generally welcome everyone who is present at the service without distinction. Most non-denominational churches, most Pentecostals, and most Baptist churches belong in this group.

Second, there are even more Christians who think that the action of the Supper involves the presence of Jesus being dispersed into the world. The motion of the sacrament is vertical, coming down from heaven and being spread around into all parts of creation. These people think that Jesus is present in a special way when they celebrate the sacrament, and it's a way that validates the worth of the material world. Since Jesus is really present in the bread and the wine, these people tend to be the most reverent about how they handle the elements. They will celebrate the Lord's Supper (or, as they are more likely to call it, the Eucharist) every week, and some of them will even celebrate every day because they see the sacrament as so vital to their spiritual well-being. Catholics, Lutherans, and some Anglicans belong in this group.

Presbyterians and other Reformed Christians belong to a third group, along with Eastern Orthodox Christians. That may seem an odd grouping, since those in the Presbyterian/Reformed tradition and those who are Eastern Orthodox disagree about many other things, but it's the truth. These two traditions both teach that the action of the Supper is vertical, but not because Jesus comes down. Rather, **when we share the bread and the cup, we are all gathered up to be united with Jesus in heaven.** He doesn't move; we do. Those of us in this group believe that Jesus ascended as a fully human person, complete with His human body, which is now—mysteriously—in heaven, which is why His body cannot be passed around in the world. That's not how human bodies behave. It's very important that the incarnation of Jesus continues so that He can be our High Priest and mediator, and so it's important to say that his body is still a human body with a location. Even if the way His resurrected body is located in space is now different that it was before the resurrection, it's different in a way that's proper to an embodied, human creature. At the same time, people in this third group think that Jesus is really present in the celebration of communion in a way that is more direct than His everyday presence. **In Communion, the bread and the cup become for us a sort of door that the Holy Spirit opens in order to lead us into the presence of Jesus in heaven, so that our human nature gets joined to His in order to be made like Him.** For those of us who take this view, it will make sense to have communion

regularly, since it is such an important way to nurture our faith and our likeness to Jesus. This is why John Calvin wanted to have Communion every week.

One difference between Presbyterian/Reformed Christians and Eastern Orthodox Christians concerns how we understand the elements. Eastern Orthodox Christians think that the bread and the wine function much like icons do in Orthodox worship, as signs that give access to what is signified, and so the elements should be treated very respectfully. **Presbyterians think that the access isn't so much in the piece of bread or in the juice or the wine, but rather in the action of eating and drinking.** The elements are only holy while we are eating and drinking them. It still makes sense to show some respect for the elements, the way we do for lots of special items that we use in church.

The truth is that over the years many Presbyterians lost this understanding of the sacrament, even though it is part of our tradition. **There are a lot of Presbyterian and Reformed congregations that celebrate communion as if they are members of group one, the memorialist group. But our Book of Confessions is absolutely clear that we do not belong to group one.** We believe in the real presence of Jesus in the sacrament of communion, and we believe that the Holy Spirit uses communion to unite us to Jesus in a special way. When Jesus told us to eat of His body and drink of His blood, we believe He meant we should be deeply and truly united to Him through this sacrament. Our Essential Tenets describe Communion in this way.

Our ECO polity encourages us to find ways to celebrate the sacrament of the Supper more often, which I think is one of the most lovely aspects of our new life together. I hope that sessions and presbyteries will have many conversations about how best to use this new freedom in ways that honor our sacramental theology and increase our access to this gift that Jesus left with us.