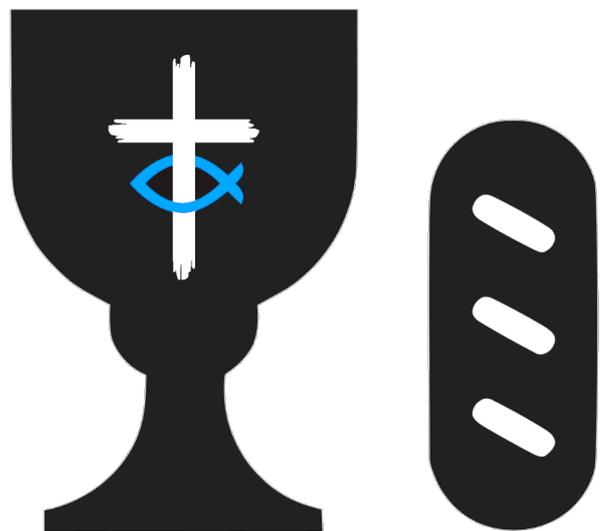


Communion for Missional Disciples

preparing to preside at a Communion service
in the United Reformed Church



Produced by the Mission & Discipleship Committee
of the North Western Synod of the United Reformed Church

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a **Missional Discipleship** resource, helping local churches in

**Walking
the Way**
Living the life of Jesus today

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Chapter ONE:

Thinking about the sacraments

Celebrating, remembering and proclaiming

In the earliest biblical text we have about Communion, Paul writes,

“For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”

(1 Corinthians 11: 23-26).

Communion is the meal of broken bread and poured out wine celebrated regularly by the Christian church in imitation of what Jesus did at the Last Supper. It is the means by which we remember Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross, and proclaim that death as the means by which God has saved the world (the “new covenant in his blood”). At the same time, we recognise the temporary absence of Jesus and the Kingdom he proclaimed: it is “an interim meal”. The meal is an occasion to look forward to the return of Jesus in fulfilment of his promise and the coming of the Kingdom that he proclaimed.



- ▶ *Have you been aware of these past, present and future aspects of Communion? In what ways do you find them helpful?*

Sacrament and ordinance

You will hear Communion (Holy Communion, The Lord's Supper, or the Eucharist, as it is variously called) described as both a "sacrament" and an "ordinance". In the United Reformed Church, it is both.

Ordinance emphasises *obedience*: Jesus commanded his disciples to remember him in this way, so Communion is the obedient response of both the church and individual disciples. For some Christian churches, it has no greater (or lesser) significance: Jesus commanded it, so we do it because we are his followers. That is an important reason for why we do it in the United Reformed Church

Sacrament says, "There's something more going on: when we celebrate Communion, Jesus is present and active, imparting grace". Communion is therefore a symbolic picture of something that God is doing through the act of eating the bread and drinking the wine. It says, first of all, that Jesus is somehow present in the elements, and secondly that he is feeding and nourishing us in ways that are best pictured by the action of the church gathering in worship to re-enact the Last Supper as a community of disciples. To call Communion a sacrament is to acknowledge, with St Augustine, that it is "an outward, visible sign of an inward, invisible grace". Put differently: it is the Word made visible - the gospel in action.



- ▶ *In what ways is it helpful to connect the picture portrayed by Communion with the actions of Jesus?*

Sacraments belong to the whole Christian church

Communion is one of the two sacraments celebrated within the United Reformed Church. The other one is baptism. Many people are uneasy with the notion of sacraments. The idea that God works specially through religious ceremonies and physical things (water, bread and wine) sounds uncomfortably like superstition and magic.



► *Has this been an issue of unease for you or your church?*

That concern is only emphasised by the fact that we restrict the performance of the sacraments to particular people - Ministers of Word and Sacraments, and authorised elders - and insist that they are trained before they can preside.

All of the sixteenth century Reformers wrestled with the question, "How do we recognise the true church?" They wanted the church to be constituted by the gospel, not by institutional organisation: if it was possible for the visible church (the Church of Rome) to be in error, how might we know when the visible church was truly the faithful, authentic expression of the church of Jesus Christ? Calvin's answer was this:

"Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists."

When we ordain ministers of Word and Sacraments, we ordain them to the ministry of the whole Christian church, not just our own denomination. Baptism and Communion are not only key services in the life of the local church, they are also the way in which each local United Reformed Church affirms that it is part of the whole Christian church across the world and throughout the ages, and participates in its life and faith. For this reason, it is important that the person presiding is recognised by our ecumenical partners as a fellow minister within the wider Christian church.

That is why it is our norm to have an ordained minister presiding at Communion and administering baptism: they do so on behalf of the whole Christian church. Our ordained ministers represent the United Reformed Church to the wider Christian family, and the whole Christian church to the United Reformed Church.

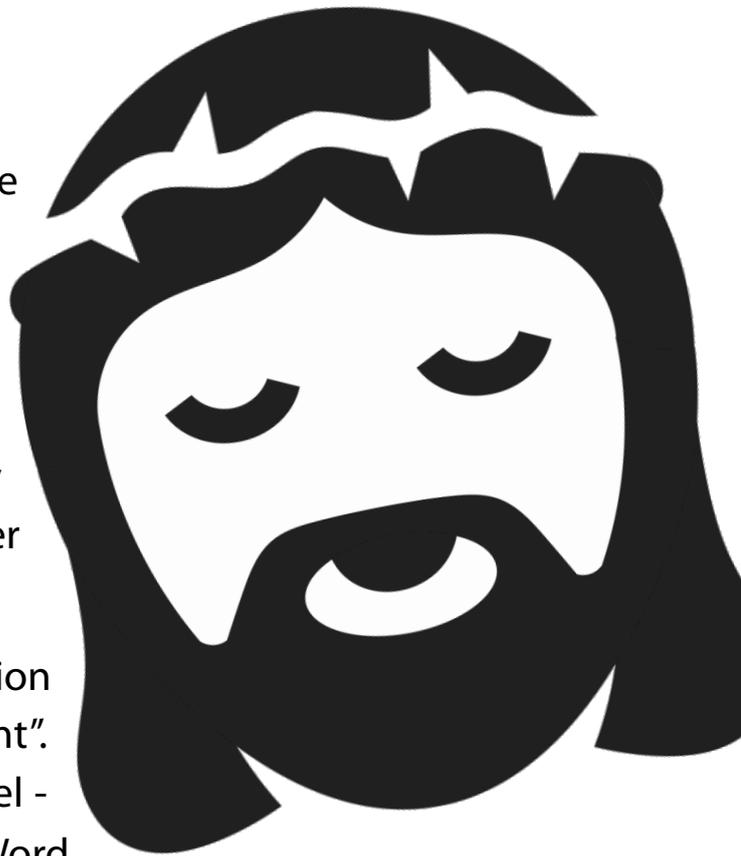
And it is why we lay such stress on the training and authorisation of ordained elders to preside when an ordained Minister of Word and Sacraments can't be present. When you celebrate Communion, you do so on behalf of the whole Christian church, not just the URC, and certainly not on behalf of your local church only.



Jesus, the original sacrament

Sacraments, as we have just seen, raise important questions of church order that are important for our role in the wider Christian church. But what of the notion of sacraments themselves? Why would God act particularly through water, bread and wine, rather than anything else?

The answer is because of their connection to Jesus as “the original sacrament”. Matthew tells us that Jesus is Emmanuel - “God with us”. John calls Jesus “the Word made flesh”. All the gospel writers make clear, in different ways, that Jesus was not simply a man of God, but God among us as a man. To encounter Jesus was to encounter God at work, and to discover that God is in the business of saving the world. When people met Jesus, saving things happened: people were healed, or set free, or restored to their communities, or forgiven.



- ▶ *In what ways do you find it helpful to think of Jesus as “the original sacrament”? In what ways does it shape your view of sacraments?*

That is the basis of sacraments: God doesn't keep at a distance, but comes to share our world in physical things in order to save us, just as God did in Jesus.

But why water, bread and wine (baptism and Communion) in particular? It is because these connect us to the key saving moments in God's mission through Jesus. Jesus' baptism is the point at which all of his life becomes focussed on his mission. From this moment on, he will live as a child of God to "do God's will on earth as it is in heaven". That is how baptised Christians commit themselves to live their lives.

Communion connects us again and again to Easter as the direct consequence of the life and mission of Jesus. The deep mystery is that God's salvation doesn't come through conquest, but through death and resurrection. The transformation of this world into the Kingdom of God is born out of the ashes of Jesus' death by crucifixion on Easter Sunday. We are promised healing for our brokenness (the bread) and forgiveness (the wine). We find the way to life, not by avoiding the consequences of living like Jesus, but through God, who is the one that raises the dead (see Mark 8:34-35).

The sacraments are the ways in which God continues to be present with us as we live the life of Jesus today, shapes our lives as individual and communal disciples of Jesus, and nourishes us for the journey.



Chapter TWO

Remembering, feeding, proclaiming: what is happening at Communion?

Jesus, the Bread of Life: a key text

The Feeding of the Five Thousand is the only miracle recorded in all four gospels. In John's gospel (chapter 6), it is followed almost immediately by Jesus' discourse on the Bread of Life.

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty ... for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me ... This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day." (vv35, 38, 40).

Jesus is using the image of the daily manna in the Exodus story of the Israelites in the wilderness. He goes on:

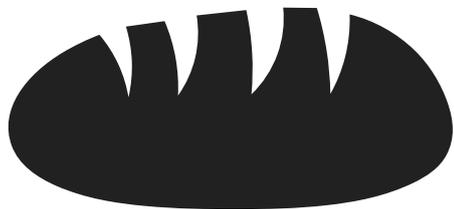
"I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that comes down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." (vv 49-51)

John's gospel is interestingly different from Matthew, Mark and Luke (the Synoptic Gospels): he uses Jesus' discourse after the Feeding of the Five Thousand (rather than the Last Supper) to explain how his church understands what is happening at Communion. Jesus goes on to say,

“Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 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 remain 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.” (vv 53-57)



It’s easy to see the connections with the Communion meal (the bread and wine/body and blood of Jesus), isn’t it?



What is less easy - shocking, even - is Jesus’ talk about eating his body and drinking his blood as the only way to experience salvation (New Life).

We need to look more closely at what that means. For now, it is worth noting that Christians in the early church were commonly accused of two outrageous crimes: incest (“They marry their brothers and their sisters!”) and cannibalism (“They eat the body and drink the blood of their saviour, Jesus!”). While this is clearly a misunderstanding of two key Christian church ceremonies (marriage and Communion), it nevertheless shows how the church community spoke about what was happening at Communion, and how they understood it.

From the two texts we have looked at (Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, and Jesus’ discourse on the Bread of Life in John’s gospel), it is clear that, from the beginning, the Christian church saw Communion as a meal that was directly connected to salvation, in which they *remembered Jesus and fed on his body and blood* (in whatever sense Jesus means this in John’s gospel). This will become clearer as we look at Communion in terms of *sign, symbol and sacrament*.

1. Communion as SIGN



Communion is a sign that points *backwards* to Jesus' death on the cross as a sacrifice for the world and *forwards* to the New Creation: the world as God has always intended it to be.



Communion is a sign of **discipleship** that connects us to Jesus, the first disciples and the Christian church down through the ages through *obedience*. In John's story of the Last Supper, Jesus calls his disciples "my friends", and says, "You are my friends if you do what I command you." (John 15:14) Discipleship isn't only about following Jesus, it is *obedient following*. Jesus commanded us to remember him in this way, and the Christian church - the community of disciples - has always done so.



- ▶ *How helpful is it see Communion as a sign? In what ways have they been part of your experience of Communion?*
- ▶ *In what ways do you find it meaningful and helpful to talk about Jesus' death as a sacrifice?*



Communion is a sign of **the centrality of the cross** for the salvation of the world. Jesus offers himself as a sacrifice: his broken body for the healing of the world, and his blood poured out for its forgiveness. "It is for you", he says. God's salvation is accomplished through the cross. Jesus dies in order that the world might live.



Communion is a sign of **the New Creation** that God makes possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus. This is what Jesus called, “the Kingdom of God”: the world finally becoming all that God intended it to be at creation. That will be a time of rejoicing. Jesus uses the image of the Great Feast in one of his parables (Luke 14: 15-24). It proclaims that what is so obviously absent now will be present in abundance: food for all, justice and peace, the whole of creation healed and restored, the end of suffering, death and mourning (Revelation 21: 1-4).



Communion is a sign of **the visible unity of the church**. “And though we are many, we all eat from one loaf of bread, showing that we are one body” (1 Corinthians 10: 17, *NLT*). For Paul, the fact that Jewish and Gentile Christians could live and worship together was the clearest proof of the work of the Holy Spirit. Our unity in Christ that transcends any differences of nationality, class, gender is “supernatural” (the work of the Holy Spirit) because our “natural” instincts are to divide into “us vs them”. The United Reformed Church believes that working for the visible unity of the Christian church is an act of obedience to which it is called.



- ▶ *How significant has this ‘forward-pointing’ aspect of Communion been in your thinking and experience? How helpful is it? What does it open up for you?*

2. Communion as SYMBOL



Communion is an enacted drama or symbolic picture of Jesus' sacrifice and God's salvation. It is what salvation means "for us": why and how it is Good News to the world in which we live today. It is what Paul means about "proclaiming Christ's death until he comes".

I want to pick out five images; these are by no means exhaustive:



- ▶ *These are different symbols for salvation that address situations in our world today. Which do you experience personally as Good News? Why?*
- ▶ *Which might be most important to emphasise when you are next responsible for a Communion service?*



Communion is a symbol of **Dying and rising with Jesus**, like baptism, proclaims that salvation as new life in Christ is through dying to the old life with Christ and rising with him to new life. This is what Jesus terms, "being born again".



Communion is a symbol of **God's saving presence in a world of suffering**, with us and for us. The scale of suffering in the world is one of the greatest obstacles to faith in a God who loves us and cares what happens to us. People who suffer ask in bewildered agony, "Why does God let this happen? Where is God in all this? Why doesn't God care?" The cross proclaims that God is right here with us, sharing our suffering and agonising with us. And because God raises the dead, suffering cannot have the Last Word.



Communion is a symbol of **Salvation as healing for the world**. One of the biblical images for all that is wrong in the world

(what it terms “Sin” with a capital “S”) is that the world is *broken*. It resonates strongly in the IT age of 24 hour news, where we know so much about the tragedies, evil and dirty secrets in our world. We experience broken relationships, broken promises, broken political and economic systems, the breakdown of social cohesion, justice, and law and order. We know that the planet itself is broken and is in danger of destruction. We know, too, that it is humanly impossible to fix all the brokenness. And we believe that this is not how God intends the world to be. Communion proclaims that Jesus’ body is broken on the cross for a world that needs healing - “re-remembering”.



- ▶ *In what ways is thinking about salvation in these different ways new to you?*
- ▶ *How helpful are you finding it?*

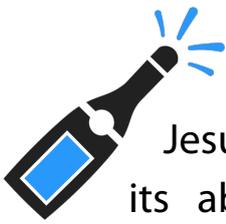


Communion is a symbol of **Salvation as liberation.**

Jesus proclaimed that he had come to “bring good news to the poor, announce release to the captives and let the oppressed go free”. (Luke 4:18). He announced a Jubilee - the year when debts were forgiven and the slaves were set free (v19). Jesus is crucified by Rome as a terrorist for announcing that this world belongs to God, not to Rome. When Apartheid ended, most black South African Christians saw it as God’s answer to their prayers for salvation: not for forgiveness for their sins, but for liberation from the sins that were committed against them and made their lives a living hell. Communion proclaims that God’s salvation in Jesus means that the end will come for every oppressive system and its victims will be set free.



- ▶ *How appropriate is it to think of salvation in political and economic terms?*
- ▶ *Where might that be heard as Good News in the world today?*



Communion is a symbol of **Salvation as abundant life**

Jesus describes salvation as “life in all its abundance” (John 10:10). This is

Good News for a world in which starvation and austerity mean that “life” for most of its population means mere existence, and survival is the most they can hope for. It is also Good News for churches struggling to survive in the face of ever more scarce resources of people and money. When we announce in Communion that Jesus is the Bread of Life, we proclaim that God yearns to give us all we need, not only to survive, but to thrive. It is a call to learn Jesus’ own secret of trusting God for all that we need, rather than being trapped in a life of anxiety about our future (Matthew 6:25-34). Communion proclaims that we can genuinely experience God’s abundance as we follow Jesus and trust God as he did. This is what frees us from addiction to survival.



- ▶ *How abundant is the life of your church? What would it mean to talk about God’s abundance in the poorest and most desperate parts of the world?*
- ▶ *How could that be a reality, rather than “pie in the sky when you die”?*

3. Communion as SACRAMENT



Communion in the United Reformed Church is a sacrament of the whole Christian church. Unlike some denominations, it recognises the validity of the eucharistic practices of all the mainstream churches. Communion as a sacrament is also a “means of grace”.

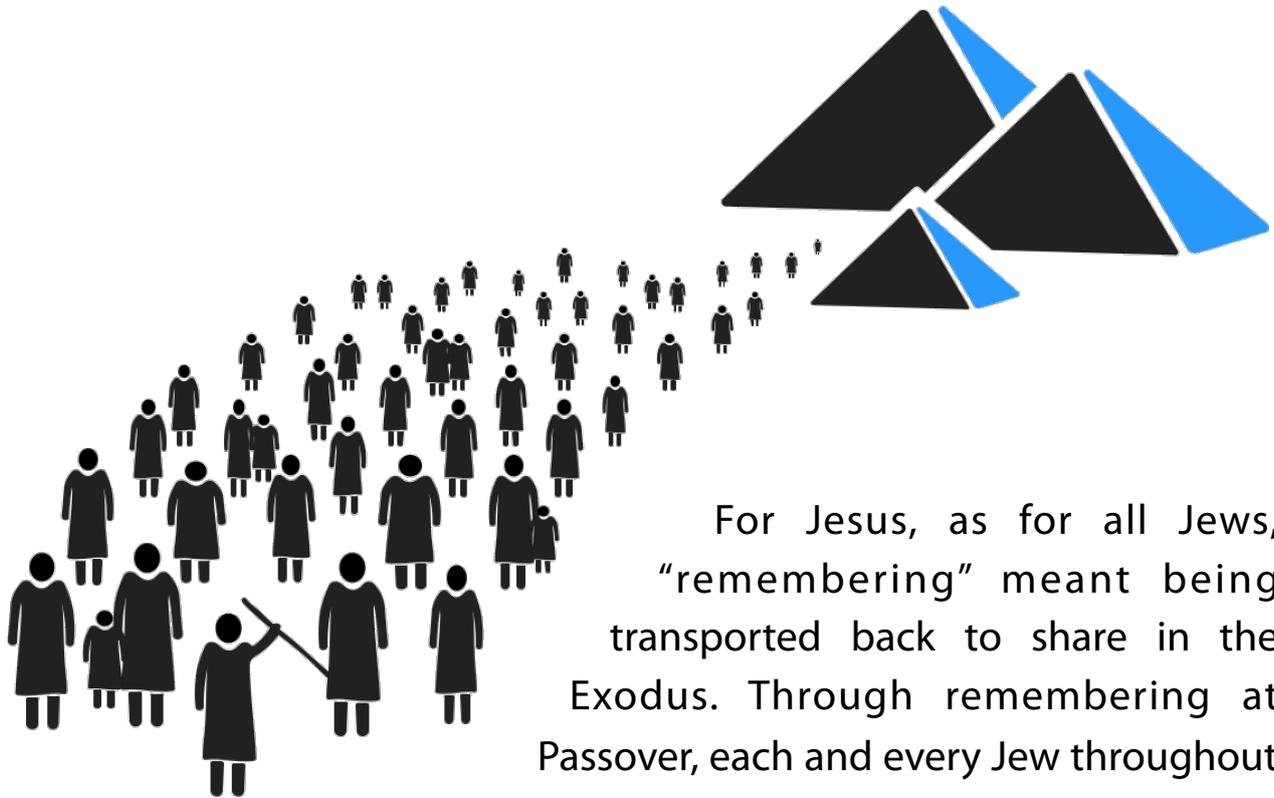
It involves remembering Jesus, feeding on Jesus and proclaiming Jesus. As an expression of God’s salvation for the world, it has a “critical edge” that shapes our involvement in God’s mission.

Sacramental remembering

“Remembering” is central to Communion. Sacramental remembering, though, is much more than an act of “thinking back”, equivalent to, “Do remember when the Christmas tree fell on Grandpa while he was asleep in his chair?” It is the way in which Christ’s death 2,100 years ago becomes something “for us”.

The occasion at which we remember Jesus breaking bread and sharing out wine was a Passover meal, commemorating the night when the Israelite slaves left Egypt. They were saved from the Angel of Death by marking their doors with the blood of a lamb, so that the angel killed all the first-born Egyptians but “passed over” their houses. After they had left, Pharaoh changed his mind about letting them go and sent his army to bring them back. When they reached the Red Sea, Moses parted the waters and led them to safety. He then closed the waters over the Egyptian army that was pursuing them. When the Israelites saw the dead soldiers, they knew that they were finally free (Exodus 14: 30).

The Exodus is what made the Israelites into the People of God. To be Jewish is to have been freed from slavery in Egypt in order to be given and live by the Law. The Exodus is the Jewish equivalent of Good Friday. Jewish families gather for the Passover Meal every year to remember their salvation through the events of Exodus.

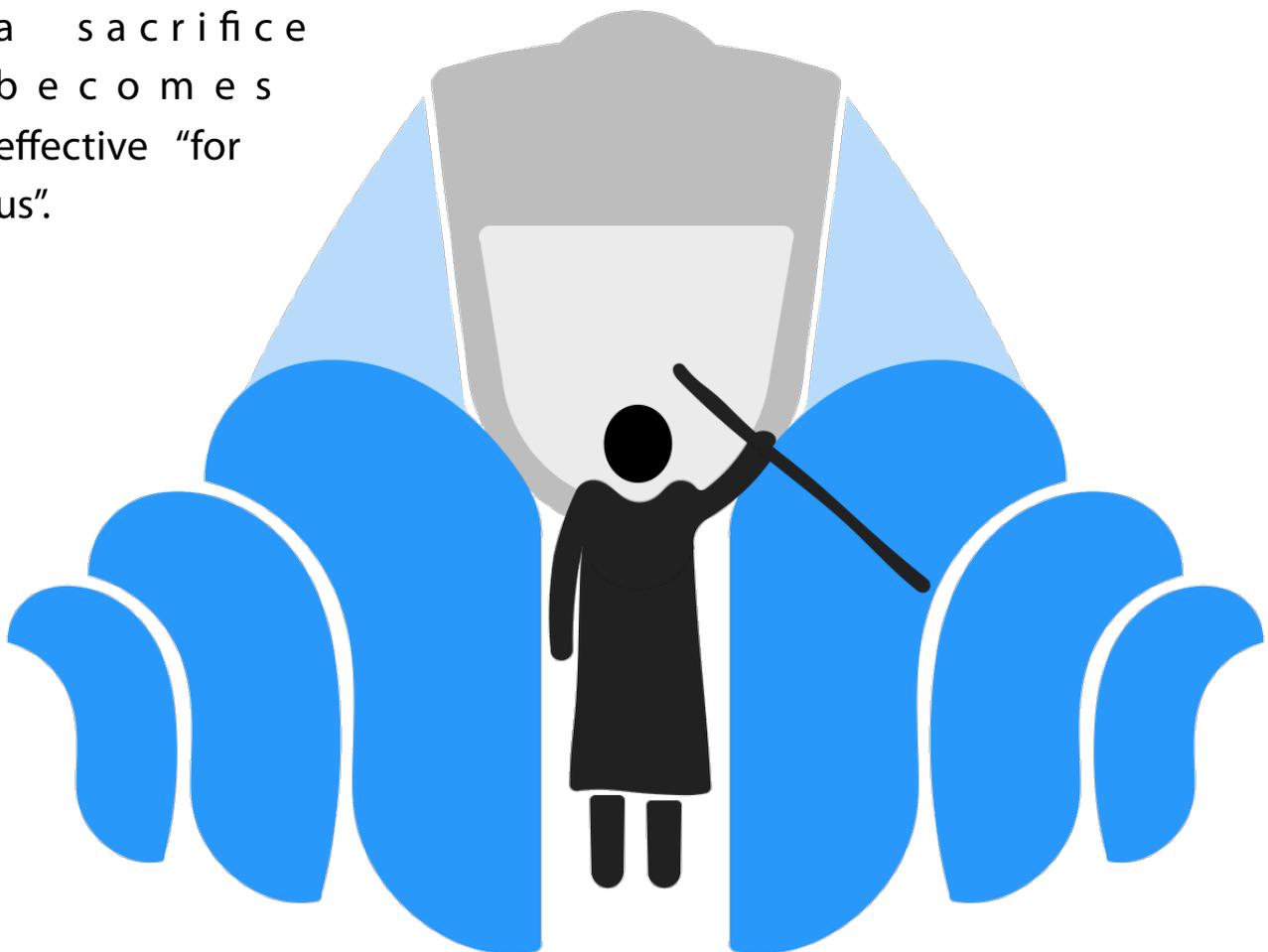


For Jesus, as for all Jews, “remembering” meant being transported back to share in the Exodus. Through remembering at Passover, each and every Jew throughout every generation can say, “The Lord our God brought me out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (see the opening of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:1). Through this sacramental remembering, every Jew was once a slave in Egypt, who has been “born again” into the family of Israel through the Exodus.

In sacramental remembering, we are “transported back” to share personally and collectively in the saving events of Good Friday. This is how “we have died with Christ and live with him” (Romans 6:8).

This is not just an elegant piece of conceptual theology: it is made a reality through sacramental remembering. We have died to the old life, in order to be raised to new life in Christ. This is what makes us the People of God, the church. This is how we are given new life and live it every day: by dying to the old and rising to the new.

This “remembering” is how Jesus’ death as a sacrifice becomes effective “for us”.



Sacramental Feeding

The image of Jesus as the Bread of Life who must be “eaten” in order to have life works powerfully as a symbol, especially when Jesus links the symbol to God feeding the Israelites every day with manna in the wilderness. Then Jesus becomes a sort of “spiritual daily bread” given by God for our spiritual nourishment that needs to be “ingested” in order to live (spiritually) for the next 24 hours (or until the next Communion meal). Granted that the symbol of “feeding on Jesus” (especially drinking his blood) can be anything from mildly uncomfortable to quite shocking, its symbolic significance is clear. I suspect that most of us would be considerably less comfortable if we thought that Jesus was really (rather than merely symbolically) present and being eaten.

Yet Jesus’ real presence at Communion through the bread and the wine is precisely what is being affirmed in saying that Communion is a sacrament as well as a symbol. When you as President pray for the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the bread and wine (and usually, the congregation too) during the Thanksgiving (eucharistic) Prayer, Jesus, by the Holy Spirit, becomes present through the bread and wine.

We're much more used to this notion of "real presence" than we might suspect. We believe that Jesus was the means by which God was "really present" among us; that to see and touch Jesus was to see and touch God. We believe that Jesus is "really present" among us every time we gather together in his name for worship, prayer, Bible study etc because he promised, "Wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, I am present in their midst." (Matthew 18:20). We can't see or touch Jesus himself; often, we experience his presence through the words, touch and actions of the people among us. This is, as we saw earlier, "sacramental presence": God or Jesus "really there" among us, but not "nakedly there". The divine presence is made visible and touchable through physical, earthly things.

In Communion, Jesus is really present in the bread and wine. Forget anything you may have heard about the bread and wine actually turning into Jesus' body and blood (this is the Catholic teaching, called "Transubstantiation") or any of the other medieval arguments about what happens to the piece of bread or glass of wine in your hands. The point is that Jesus, by the Holy Spirit, is among us in order to give us Life.

Christian faith is the journey of discipleship - lifelong following of Jesus and involvement in his mission. Eating and drinking belongs in that context: the Communion meal is “food for the journey”. We need to eat regularly. Just as Jesus taught us to ask God for “daily bread”, Jesus offers himself to us as “Daily Bread”.

But why does he want us to eat and drink “remembering his death”? Doesn’t that make it difficult to rid ourselves of any senses of cannibalistic eating? That isn’t what Jesus intends us to think about as we “take, eat and feed on him in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving”.

Instead, we are to remember that our new life in God always come to us as a gift - a sacrifice. It comes at huge cost to God and to Jesus, but as a free gift to us. It is a new life that can only be possible through the death of the old - and it is by Jesus’ death, not ours. The food that Jesus gives us for the journey is the new life ... so it always comes through his death.

Dying and rising is the pattern of our life as disciples of Jesus, not just one-off event. As we eat bread and drink wine again and again, we return again and again to the source of the life God gives us: the crucified Jesus.

Sacramental proclamation

The United Reformed Church recognises that Communion belongs to the whole Christian church. That is why it recognises the validity of the different eucharistic practices of the mainstream churches. Its ecumenical conviction is that to do differently would be to “unchurch” other Christians who practise a different form of Communion. It is not willing to do so.

- ▶ It shares the Reformation conviction that the church is constituted by the **gospel** (rather than by its organisation as an institution), and that the sacraments are “the gospel made visible”. Communion is evangelical - an occasion to hear and encounter the Good News, and an invitation to follow Jesus. For this reason, we do not restrict participation to church members, baptised Christians or adults. Instead, we practise “Open Communion” and issue an invitation to anyone present to share in the meal. More and more URC churches include children as a matter of course, rather than insisting that they have to be old enough to understand what is happening, or be confirmed.
- ▶ Communion is a proclamation of the **faith** by which the Christian church exists and lives: trust in its conviction that the death of Jesus is not the end of all hope, but the means by which God gives New Life to a world trapped in despair and death.

- ▶ Communion is the proclamation of the **hope** by which the Christian church exists and lives: this world transformed into the Kingdom of God, with life in all its fulness.
- ▶ Communion proclaims that the **love** of God for the world is most clearly visible in the crucified Son. God does not abandon us to suffering or self-destruction. There is nothing that can separate us from the love of God in Jesus. There is nothing that God will not do or give for the world's salvation.
- ▶ The church is most faithfully and visibly the community of disciples of Jesus when it mirrors that love. Communion proclaims that the church is a community that lives for the sake of the world, not for its own sake. It is visibly the community of Jesus-followers in **a life of service and self-sacrifice for the very least first**, not in institutional success.
- ▶ Communion proclaims that life is to be found in "losing our lives for the sake of the Good News. The church is most faithful to its calling when it is **freed from addiction to survival and success** in order to challenge the "principalities and powers" - the systems and power-brokers that are ranged against the Kingdom Jesus proclaimed.



Chapter THREE

Communion as “critical edge”: Communion and self-examination



Communion is a time for individual and communal self-examination. It is an occasion for measuring how faithfully we are following Jesus and how true we are being to what we believe and proclaim. It is a serious matter; Paul talks about it in terms of “eating and drinking in a worthy manner”:

Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup, For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgement against themselves.

(1 Corinthians 11:27-29)

When Paul talks about “discerning the body”, he is talking about the church. One of his favourite images for the church is “the body of Christ”. It is the visible presence of Christ - “Jesus-shaped” in the relationships between its members and in its actions in the world. Communion holds up the mirror of Jesus to those of us who eat and drink through all that it symbolises and proclaims.

- ▶ It challenges us as **individuals** about how faithfully we are following Jesus and being shaped to be recognisably like him. How serious are we about following Jesus? To what extent is the New Life visible and growing in us?
- ▶ It challenges us as **a church**. To what extent does our church look and function as a visible sign of the a transformed world (the Kingdom)? Are we free from anxiety about our survival? Are our relationships characterised by love, care, sharing all we have and regarding other people as more important than ourselves? Do we mirror Jesus' radical welcome of outcasts and people on the margins? Is forgiveness the lifeblood of our relationships? Do we put things right, rather than let things fester? Is church surprisingly and refreshingly free of gossip and backbiting? Do we love our enemies? Are we radically generous?
- ▶ It asks questions of **our mission**. How restless are we about the ways in which the world is so obviously not yet the Kingdom? How impatient are we to see the world transformed and become all the things Communion symbolises and proclaims? How actively are we working for it? At what cost? Do people outside the church recognise us a followers of Jesus and experience us as Good News? Are we making a Jesus-shaped difference?

Communion asks how closely we are walking the walk; how faithfully we are living the life of Jesus today. Paul says, "Look in the mirror. When you don't like what you see, sort it out!"



Chapter FOUR

The Service: putting it all together

Your role

Communion services are special moments in the life of the church. Communion is a drama containing several elements:

1. The Approach to Communion
2. The Narrative of the Institution
3. Thanksgiving
4. Sharing
5. The Peace
6. The Prayer after Communion
7. Blessing

Your role as an authorised elder is to be the Communion President. It is a representative role. Pictorially as President, you represent the whole Christian church, as well as the United Reformed Church as a denomination. This is the significance of your authorisation. The elders who serve at Communion represent the local church.

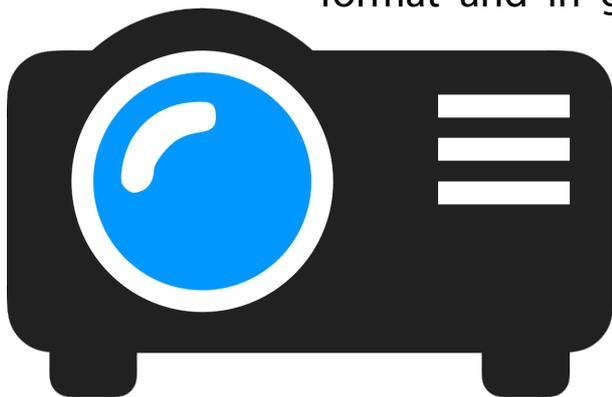
Your sacramental “duties of office” as President are to imitate the actions of Jesus at the Last Supper, so that it is done “in memory of him”. These are known as the four “eucharistic actions”:

1. Taking the elements (bread and wine)
2. Giving thanks (the Thanksgiving Prayer, including the *epiklēsis*, or calling on the Holy Spirit)
3. Breaking the bread (and sometimes during out the wine)
4. Giving the elements to be shared.

You need to pay careful attention to **logistics, liturgy** and **leadership**.

1. The LOGISTICS

- ▶ Familiarise yourself with the Communion arrangements of the local church. Will the bread and wine be present throughout the service, or are they brought to the table at the start of Communion itself? When do the elders take their places at the table? Will people expect to hold on to the bread and wine until everyone is served, and then eat and drink together? Will you serve the elders, or do they serve you? Does each elder know which section of the church they are serving? Who serves the organist? Will the children join the congregation for the service?
- ▶ How will you conduct the actual Communion? Is it part of the service, or a separate addition? Are you being asked to take the service, or only to preside at Communion? If you are taking the whole service, will you preach from the table? If you want to make any changes to local custom, have you let everyone know? If you want to use a chalice and pass it round, you will need to have alcoholic wine to ensure the cup is sterile. Is this acceptable?
- ▶ Ensure everyone has what they need. If you plan to use printed orders of service, are there enough? If you are using slides, has the projectionist got them in a usable format and in good time? Have you given any hymns to the organist? Do you need gluten free bread?



2. The LITURGY

Be creative! There are any numbers of wonderful Communion liturgies available through your minister, books, the Synod and the Internet. The more deeply you have thought about Communion, the easier you will find it to make it meaningful by drawing out connections with the life of the church, its situation in the community, world events, and burning issues of the day.

You might want to pick a theme for the service, which you reinforce through images, music, poetry and other readings. Study the newspapers and watch the TV news, while asking, "How does what is happening connect with what is symbolised by Communion?"

The point is to draw out the elements of symbol and proclamation as they relate to the life of the church in the world. This will prevent the impression of Communion being some sort of weird churchy rite that Christians practise behind closed doors and which has little or no relevance to their discipleship and mission in the wider world. Communion is the gospel made visible: the more people see their world and its issues reflected, the more they will find God's salvation in Jesus relevant to their lives and mission, and be nourished in their faith and discipleship.

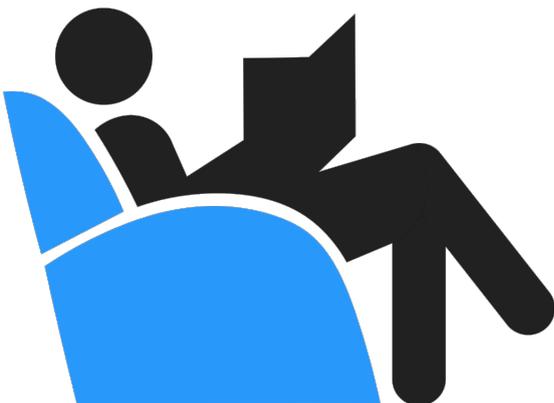


- ▶ *A service on the theme of world hunger?*
- ▶ *Images of significant Christians who have lost their lives for the gospel (eg Martin Luther King, Oscar Romero), or Christians who have taken on the "powers and principalities" (St Francis, William Wilberforce, Desmond Tutu, Nelson Mandela)?*

3. Your LEADERSHIP

You need to be the safe pair of hands that will enable everyone to relax and enjoy the service - which means you need to be on top of things. You need to find ways of dealing with feelings of self-consciousness: your job is, in a real sense, to be an actor. Play your part well for everyone's sake.

One way of ensuring that you do is to get to the point where, as far as possible, you are more captivated by your fresh encounter with the gospel than by fear what the congregation will think of you! That is where your own time of self-examination in preparation for leading the service will be crucial. Don't even think of getting up to preside unless and until you have done so. Then you will find the experience a blessing, and you will be a blessing to those who eat and drink with you.



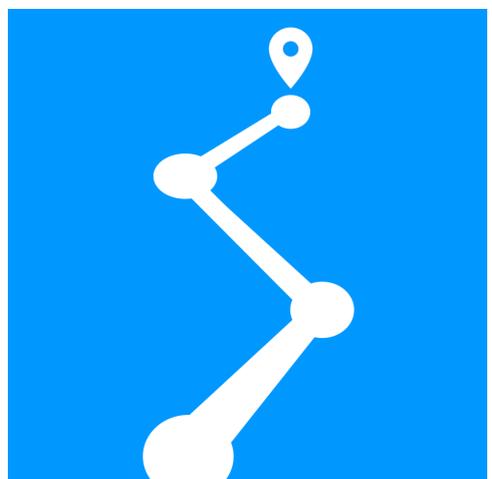
- ▶ *An Amnesty International candle on the Communion table?*
- ▶ *Afro American spirituals? Liberation songs from the Third World? Contemporary music by well known music stars?*
- ▶ *Youtube videos? Download the day's headlines or particular news reports from the TV?*

Space:
for your thoughts and reflections





Discipleship



a **Missional Discipleship** resource, helping local churches in **Walking the Way**
Living the life of Jesus today