



Worksheet 8: The Lord's Supper

While the story of the last supper that Jesus shared with his disciples is recorded with variations in each of the Gospels, it is Paul's account that has become the "Narrative of Institution" that is read or paraphrased when the Eucharist is celebrated. Look up 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 to read that account.



What's in a name?

The Lord's Supper is a sacrament of the Church observed in obedience to the command of Jesus: "Do this in remembrance of me." We use a variety of names for the Lord's Supper—Holy Communion and Eucharist are perhaps the most common alternatives. Eucharist comes from a Greek word *eucharistia* meaning "thanksgiving". This meal is a "sacrifice of praise"—part of what we offer to God in our worship. It is also, and more importantly, a making present, through the power of the Holy Spirit, of what God offers to us in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In this meal, we "share communion with our Lord"—we are enfolded into Christ as the body of the Christ, the people of God, the communion of the Spirit. "Let us receive what we are; let us become what we receive—the body of Christ" proclaimed Augustine of Hippo (354-430) in Sermon 272. The Lord's Supper is a celebration of the community (Gk *koinonia*) of Christ; and it is part of the forming of that community in Christ.

Four actions

The Narrative of Institution highlights 4 actions of Jesus which the Church enacts in a Service of Lord's Supper. Jesus:

- took bread/cup,
- gave thanks,
- broke the bread, and
- gave the bread/cup to be shared.

We take the elements of bread and wine/grape juice (ordinary things for an extraordinary purpose) as we set the table in preparation for the meal. We give thanks to God for God's action in creation, salvation and making us holy in the "Great Prayer of Thanksgiving". The bread is broken and the cup is lifted in the "Breaking of Bread". We participate in the meal together in the "Communion".

The great thanksgiving

In the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving, there are 4 major sections: thanksgiving for the work of God; the Narrative of Institution; "remembrance" (Gk *anamnesis*) of the work of Christ; and invocation (Gk *epiklesis*) of the Holy Spirit. This prayer (and its 4 sections) is an essential part of the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Real presence

The Uniting Church believes that Christ is really present in the action of the Eucharist. It is not simply a memorial, a remembering of something that happened a long time ago. It is a re-remembering, a re-making of that event in our midst and for our benefit. Read Paragraph 8 of the Basis of Union—available at <http://assembly.uca.org.au/images/stories/HistDocs/basisofunion1992.pdf>



Note

This sheet is part of a series on theology in the 21st century. It is prepared for the National Assembly by the Working Group on Doctrine as a discussion starter for small groups, in congregations, faith communities or other settings. It may also be used for personal reflection. Low resolution copies of this sheet can be downloaded free of charge from the Doctrine website: www.assembly.uca.org.au/doctrine.

Five key themes

Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry (World Council of Churches Faith & Order Paper No. 111, 1982) highlights 5 key theological themes in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

These elements should be present at every celebration of the Lord's Supper:

- "thanksgiving to the Father" (first person of the Trinity);
- "anamnesis or memorial to Christ" (second person of the Trinity);
- "invocation [epiklesis] of the Spirit" (third person of the Trinity);
- "communion of the faithful" (the body of Christ, the Church); and
- "meal of the kingdom" (foretaste of God's realm).

Questions

- Recall a significant experience of sharing the Lord's Supper.
- Describe the practice of Holy Communion in your congregation or faith community. In what way(s) do(es) each of the 4 key actions occur?
- Compare the 5 theological themes in Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry with the theological themes in the last sentence of Paragraph 8 of the *Basis of Union*. What similarities and differences are there between them?
- In what way(s) does the practice of communion in your congregation or faith community embody the theological themes identified in the *Basis of Union*?



© Uniting Church in Australia
2009 National Assembly

PO Box A2266
Sydney South NSW 1235

www.assembly.uca.org.au/dctrine

Who presides?

In the Uniting Church, ordained ministers normally preside at sacraments. Because the Lord's Supper is a sacrament at the heart of the church's identity as body of Christ, in the absence of ordained ministers, presbyteries may make "provision for persons other than Ministers of the Word or Deacons to preside at the celebration of the sacraments where, in the opinion of the Presbytery, circumstances so require" (Regulation 3.4.4(n)).

Who participates?

All baptised Christians are welcome to share the meal (Basis of Union Para. 8), but not all may be permitted by the laws of their Church to receive communion with the Uniting Church. This needs to be respected as we continue to pursue the unity to which Christ calls us.

Frequency

For a variety of historical reasons, the Lord's Supper is celebrated in the Uniting Church at different intervals. Many congregations celebrate Holy Communion once a month. Some congregations may remember sharing in the meal of thanksgiving only quarterly prior to union. The shape of the Service of the Lord's Day (Gathering as God's People; Receiving God's Word, Celebrating the Lord's Supper, and Being Sent on God's Mission) encourages weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper, i.e. every Sunday service



Further reading

"The Service of the Lord's Day" in *Uniting in Worship 2* (Uniting Church Press, 2005), pp. 131-348.

"Eucharist" in *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry* (World Council of Churches Faith & Order Paper No. 111, 1982), pp. 10-17—available at <http://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/faith-and-order-commission/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/baptism-eucharist-and-ministry-faith-and-order-paper-no-111-the-lima-text/baptism-eucharist-and-ministry.html#c10499>

Benedict, Daniel. "The Rhythm of the Table" in *Patterned by Grace: How Liturgy Shapes Us* (Upper Room Books, 2007), pp. 103-120.

Inbody, Tyron. "Initiating and Maintaining the Faith" in *The Faith of the Christian Church: An Introduction to Theology* (Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), pp. 275-302.

McCormick, Patrick T. *A Banqueter's Guide to the All-Night Soup Kitchen of the Kingdom of God* (Liturgical Press, 2004).

Migliore, Daniel L. "Proclamation, Sacraments, and Ministry" in *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology 2nd Ed.* (Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), pp. 274-300.