

THE LORD'S SUPPER AT WESTMINSTER

"The reality of our communion
with one another is the increase
of love in our hearts."

William Temple

INTRODUCTION

As one of two sacraments in the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Lord's Supper is an important part of the journey of faith for each member as well as the congregation life as a whole.

Sensing this significance and realizing that there are misconceptions about the Lord's Supper, this booklet has been prepared in order that our membership will better understand the gifts and responsibilities of the sacrament. We hope you will find it helpful as you prepare for communion and interpret it to others. If you would like to discuss this information or have questions that are not addressed herein, please contact one of the Pastors.

What is a sacrament?

A sacrament is a special act of Christian worship, instituted by Christ, which uses a visible sign to proclaim the promise of the gospel for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. The sacramental sign seals this promise to believers by grace and brings to them what is promised. In baptism the sign is that of water. In the Lord's Supper, it is that of bread and wine.

How do you understand the relationship between the word of promise and the sacramental sign?

Take away the word of promise, and the water is merely water, or the bread and wine, merely bread and wine. But add water, or bread and wine, to the word of promise, and it becomes a visible word. In this form it does what by grace the word always does: it brings the salvation it promises, and conveys the real presence of Lord Jesus Christ to eyes of faith. The sacraments are visible words which uniquely assure and confirm that no matter how greatly I may have sinned, Christ died also for me, and comes to live in me and with me.

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What is the main difference between baptism and the Lord's Supper?

While I receive baptism only once, I receive the Lord's Supper again and again. Being unrepeatable, baptism indicates not only that Christ died for our sins once and for all, but that by grace we are also united with him once and for all through faith. Being repeatable, the Lord's Supper indicates that as we turn unfilled to him again and again, our Lord continually meets us in the power of the Holy Spirit to renew and deepen our faith.

What is the Lord's Supper?

The Lord's Supper is the sign and seal by which our communion with Christ is renewed. We believe that at the Lord's Supper the community of believers is renewed by the memory of Christ's life and death, by his real presence in the power of the Holy Spirit, and by the promise of his coming again. Christ makes himself known in the breaking of bread.

What does it mean to share in the Lord's Supper?

When we celebrate the Lord's Supper, the Lord Jesus Christ is truly present, pouring out his Spirit upon us. By his Spirit, the bread that we break and the cup that we bless share in our Lord's own body and blood. Through his body and blood he once offered our lives to God; through them he now offers his life to us. As I receive the bread and the cup, remembering that Christ died even for me, I feed on him in my heart by faith with thanksgiving, and enter his risen life, so that his life becomes mine, and my life becomes his, to all eternity.

Who may receive the Lord's Supper at Westminster?

All baptized Christians who rejoice in so great a gift, who confess their sins, and who draw near with faith intending to lead a new life, may receive the Lord's Supper. This includes baptized children who have expressed a desire to participate, and who have been instructed in the meaning of the sacrament in a way they can understand.

When is the Lord's Supper celebrated at Westminster?

The Lord's Supper is celebrated in corporate worship on eight occasions throughout the year. Some dates coincide with the liturgical calendar, others with the secular calendar. These dates include the following:

Sunday worship

- The first Sunday in Advent
- The first Sunday of the New Year
- The first Sunday of Lent
- The Day of Pentecost
- A mid-summer Sunday
- World Communion Sunday

Mid-week

- Ash Wednesday
- Maundy Thursday

Communion is also offered to those hospitalized and shut-ins outside of corporate worship by a pastor, and elder or deacon.

How is the Lord's Supper administered at Westminster

The Lord's Supper is administered by a pastor who is normally assisted by elders (and/or deacons). On Sundays the communion elements are normally taken to people in the pews by elders. At the two mid-week communions, however, parishioners are invited to receive the elements at the chancel. (See appendix 1 for the current plan on communion distribution in Sunday worship.)

At Westminster we offer both fermented and unfermented grape juice. On World Communion Sunday our various types of bread symbolize the world community.

Who is responsible for preparing the sacrament?

The Session is responsible for authorizing all observances of the Lord's Supper at Westminster. The Lord's Supper could be included in a wedding, funeral, or church retreat if first authorized by Session. The Worship, Music and Fine Arts Committee of Session is responsible for providing the elements for communion and preparing and clearing the table.

Where in the New Testament is the Lord's Supper mentioned?

- Matthew 26:17-30
- Mark 14:12-26
- Luke 22:17-20
- John 6:48-59
- Acts 2:42
- Acts 20:7
- 1 Corinthians 10:14-22
- 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

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