

The gifts of God are for the people of God.
Offer bread then wine.
The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is with us.

Conclude with a prayer such as:

Lord Jesus Christ, you have put your life into our hands;
now we put out lives into yours.
Be with in her home here at..... And continue to bless and
strengthen her in your service, Amen.
May the Lord bless you and keep you , the Lord make his face
shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face
toward you and give you peace. AMEN.

An Alternative Invitation (from the Iona Community)

This is the table,
Not of the Church, but of the Lord
It is made ready
for those who love him and who want to love him more.
So come
You who have much faith and you who have little
You who have been here often
and you who have not been for a long time
You who have followed readily,
and you who have stumbled.
Come.....
not because I invite you, but because our Lord invites you
and promises to meet you here.....

Main Resources: Faith and Festivity, Paul Beasley-Murray, 1991
Celebrating Communion, Stuart Lange, 1994



Vivian Coleman
Discipleship Coach
Eastview Baptist Church

Leading Communion



Compiled in 2010 by Vivian Coleman,
Discipleship Coach



So you've been asked to lead Communion?

It may be your turn to lead worship at a Sunday service. Or perhaps there is an elderly shut-in or a hospital patient who will be grateful for your pastoral visit to include a shared communion. It may be that you are involved in a home group, an Easter camp or a family celebration, where it has been suggested that communion would provide a fitting conclusion.

In Baptist churches we believe the celebration of Communion can be appropriate in all these contexts. While many denominations confine the responsibility of leading 'The Lord's Supper' to ordained clergy or licensed lay ministers, that was not the case in the Free or Nonconformist Church tradition of the seventeenth century English Baptists, from whom we in Baptist Churches of New Zealand received much of our heritage. Nor do we lay down the times or places of the ordinance - the Baptist word for what other traditions call a sacrament. However, the Communion tradition has been around for nigh on two thousand years. It is important that those entrusted with leading this rite understand its background, its meaning and its common features within the worldwide Church of Jesus Christ.

Unity and Diversity....

This ritual comes to us from a meal of bread and wine that Jesus shared with his friends the night before he died, and which he instructed them to re-enact as a way of remembering him. Down the centuries, in myriad different nations and cultures, and in spite of huge changes in the way the church has expressed its faith, it has been a constant and almost universal feature of Christian worship. Different traditions prefer different names for what is at heart the same communal celebration: the 'Lord's Supper', the 'Eucharist', or 'Holy Communion'.

The first of those three names is that used in 1 Corinthians 11: 20 by the apostle Paul referring to the early church's re-enacting of that last meal or **Lord's Supper** in home-based gathered worship. This is the first time we hear of the ritual, since Paul's letter was written before any of the gospels, which also describe Jesus' last meal. In Corinth at the time of Paul's letter, the gathering was a shared meal or Love Feast, but the expression Lord's Supper these days usually refers to a meal with no food other than the bread and wine. The second name, **Eucharist**, is a Greek word meaning 'giving thanks', and was passed down to us from the second century church. The third name, **Holy Communion**, was commonly used in the days of the Protestant Reformation. It comes from the biblical word *koinonia* meaning 'fellowship' or 'participation.' Each name contributes to the richness of our understanding of what Christ asked us to "do in remembrance" of him.

St Paul said, whenever we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

So following Jesus example and command, we gather here, and take these ordinary things, bread and wine, which Christ will make special, as we remember him.

Here a scripture should be read and a brief comment made.

It is my practice to use the sermon theme from the previous Sunday, to underline the connection with the congregation. If in doubt, use Psalm 23.

Thanksgiving

As we meet in this celebration we remember all the faithful in heaven and earth. We are part of the world wide church of God's people. And the Lord is here, God's spirit is with us.

So let us give thanks to the Lord our God. Let us pray:

Lord, it is right to give thanks and praise, always and everywhere, to you, the true and living God. You are the source of life and you made us in your own image. **We remember that** in your great love for us you sent your Son to be our Saviour. He suffered death on the cross for us. But you raised him from the dead and sent your Holy Spirit to make us your people. So now **pour out your Spirit** upon us, and upon these gifts of the earth, that this bread and this wine may be for us a participation in the body and blood of Christ. Amen

Re-enacting the Drama

We remember Jesus who took bread in his hands, broke it, gave it to his friends and said – "Take eat, this is my body given for you. Do this to remember me." (*break bread*)

We remember Jesus Who took the wine cup in his hands, and gave thanks for it. He gave it to them and said -- "This is the new covenant sealed by my blood, When you drink from it, do this in memory of me." (*pour wine or at least lift cup*)

2:

Brief service for home or hospital, or other occasions when simplicity is desirable.

This is very brief, the minimum, and can be easily expanded. The use of traditions such as the Lord's Prayer or the Agnus Dei can be very helpful where dementia is present, for long standing memories will still be retrievable.

Invitation:

A candle may be lit.

Jesus said "Come to me all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest".

Prayer: We praise you, God for your creation, your love, your strength and all your gifts to us. We come to worship Jesus in this special celebration, and ask for a clear sense of your presence as we worship and remember.

More could be added.....

We say the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples ---

Our Father in heaven, holy be your name.

Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Do not bring us to the test, but deliver us from evil,

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory, are yours

For ever and ever, Amen

Institution

Let us hear the story from the Scriptures of how this meal began: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body which is for you; do this in remembrance of me."

In the same way, after supper, he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

Passover and Communion

Moishe Rosen was converted to faith in Jesus Christ as his Messiah. He went to a Baptist church on communion Sunday. He asked what communion was, since he had never taken it. They said it was much like Passover. Moshe got excited because Passover was a big deal. Lots of food, many courses. He came to church starved and waiting for a good time. At the very end of the service, the deacons passed out chunks of bread. Very tiny chunks. Then a thimble filled with a little juice came around. Moshe's stomach was growling, but no food was in sight. They stood and sang "Blest Be the Tie that Binds" (he noticed they all had ties on) and the service ended. Moshe Rosen was very disappointed. Communion was not like Passover one bit.

From Ceil and Moishe Risen, Christ in the Passover. Chicago, Moody, 1978.

Most people know that Jesus' words and actions in the first celebration of Communion had their origins in the Passover tradition of his Jewish faith. While Moishe's experience shows us that the Christian Communion is not simply transposed from Judaism, it is helpful to recognise that some of the symbolism and even specific words come to us from the Hebrew Passover. Passover or Pesach was a spring holiday instituted by God to be a yearly reminder of God's miraculous deliverance of his people from slavery in Egypt. Although families in Jesus' day practised Passover in different ways from what is described by Moses in the Torah, key elements of praise, deliverance, unleavened bread, the slaughter of a perfect lamb, and phrases like "the blood of the covenant" and "the cup of blessing" were still used.



Jesus and his disciples were practising Jews, whose everyday worship life was focussed on the temple rituals they travelled to witness several times a year. They were thoroughly at home with the laws that had been set down to show that God took sin seriously, and had provided a way to escape its effects. We are not familiar with the elaborate rituals of Hebrew worship – they have not been

performed since the temple was destroyed in 70 CE. So how can we understand what these ceremonies intended?

Scots theologian Tom Smaill suggests a parallel with our custom of 'saying it with flowers'. When we want to acknowledge, recognise, celebrate or commiserate, we send flowers. To do so takes effort and it involves money, but the connection with the person we are giving them to is more important than the time or the effort..

Passover and Communion.....

This is how the Jews were able to connect with God, not through flowers but through their sacrifices - animals, birds and grains that they gave to support the Temple priests or be burned on a holy fire. They used them to express their feelings, to say thanks, to reaffirm their commitment to him, and to restore the relationship when things went wrong. So a common example would be – a sinner would take an animal, as near perfect as possible, and confess their sins while firmly holding the animal. The thinking was that the guilt of the sinner passed onto the animal which was then slaughtered and burnt on the altar, to symbolise God's complete forgiveness and atonement of the sin (see Leviticus 1 : 3 - 4)

Jesus and his disciples had seen this done hundreds of times in Jerusalem, and even when they were at home up north, had sent tithes to the Temple to make sure it was done on their behalf . Every spring they tried to get down to Jerusalem to participate in the Passover feast, the annual remembrance of the escape from Egypt and the miraculous protection of their ancestors by the blood of a lamb painted on their doorposts. In Jesus' death they came to see him as the perfect Lamb of God, the Passover sacrifice that would save and protect them by his blood. That sounds so strange to us we think of blood as negative, a sign of pain, and spilt blood as something dirty. But the sacrifice system of their Law meant something positive to Jews, blood was for them a sign of cleansing and forgiveness; it got rid of stains, like soapy water is to us. That's why one disciple was able to write that '*the blood of Jesus cleanses us from sin.*' (I John 1: 7)

Centuries after the Law was given, the Christian writer of the letter to the Hebrews spends several chapters explaining why the blood of bulls and goats could never really take away sin, and how the sacrifice rituals in fact foreshadowed Christ, the one who would come as a perfect priest and a permanent sacrifice. The cross then, was in a sense an altar – one where a once-for-all sacrifice was made, so bulls and goats are not needed anymore. *Christ the Passover Lamb has been sacrificed for us* (I Corinthians 5:7). But amazingly the altar of sacrifice is now empty, because the one who offered himself to die was raised by God to new life and power. Christians believe that what Jesus did 2000 years ago was for us. When we are joined with him through faith and baptism, we participate in that death and all it signified. That's why we can say, *I have been crucified with Christ* and why one day we will be raised with him. Today we see past the blood and gore of that ancient Passover feast, and its first century human version, to an empty cross and give thanks for the day of our deliverance.



Two Alternatives for the Distribution:

Eat. Drink. Remember who I am.
Eat. Drink. Remember who I am
So you can remember
who you are.
Eat. Drink. Remember who I am
so you can remember
who you are
and tell the others.
Eat. Drink. Remember who I am
so you can remember
who you are
and tell the others so that all
God's people can live
in communion...
in holy communion.

*The broken bread,
the broken Christ for you.
Eat this bread
and have fellowship with Christ
in his suffering and death.*

*The poured out wine,
the blood of Christ given for us.
Let the blood of Christ flow
in your veins.
live his life with him,
resurrection life,
beyond the power of death.*

Example Service



The Sanctus (see p15) could be used here.

Transform us as we come together in faith and obedience, redeem us by your grace and sustain us with your life, through Jesus Christ our Lord who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever Amen

Re-enacting the Drama

So now we follow the example and command of our Lord Jesus Christ, who on the night he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, broke it and said, 'This is my Body broken for you; do this in remembrance of me. (Break bread)

In the same way he took the cup saying this is the new covenant sealed by my blood. Do this whenever you drink it in remembrance of me. (Pour wine or lift cup)

The Agnus Dei (see p16) could be included here:

The gifts of God are for the people of God.

The bread and then the wine are distributed. When congregation servers and leader have been served, and trays and glasses have been returned to the table, the grace can be said:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is with us all.

Prayer of Commitment

God of grace, we give you thanks and praise, for what you have given and promised us in this meal. You have made us one with all your people in heaven and on earth. You feed us with the bread of life, and renew us for your service.

May we who share Christ's body live his risen life; we who drink his cup bring light and hope to others. Keep us firm in the faith and send us out in the power of your spirit to live and work to your praise and glory. Amen.

Concluding worship *(usually song and blessing)*

Because Holy Communion is familiar to most Christian worshippers, it can be helpful to ask ourselves just what it is all about.

Here are some important themes:

Instituted by Jesus

1 Cor.11:23-25; Mt.26:26-29; Mk.14:22-25; Lk.22:19-20.

1. It was instituted by Jesus.

The New Testament accounts all indicate the Lord's Supper was instituted at Jesus' last meal before his suffering and crucifixion. The variation in their wording probably reflects the influence of different local traditions, and perhaps the influence of the particular biblical narrator. The wording most often used at communion services is that recorded by Paul in I Corinthians 11: 23-25

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me'. In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'

2. It is a commemoration:

Communion is a constant reminder of the heart of our faith, that 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.' (2 Cor 5: 19) When we partake, we do so 'in remembrance' of the Son of God, who came into our world and was 'broken' for us. We are reminded

of his earthly life and ministry, of his self-giving, of the sacrificial death through which his followers find forgiveness and salvation, of his resurrection, and of his risen presence in us by the Spirit.

Like the Passover, the Lord's Supper is where God's covenant people thankfully remember the saving acts of God, and experience a sense of timeless solidarity with God's people in all generations. *Not with our ancestors did the Lord make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive this day!* (Deut.5:3). The gospels of Matthew and Mark tell us how Jesus was establishing the memorial feast of a 'new covenant'. The function of the memorial is the same, but the content has changed. The saving acts of God are now centred on Jesus, who is the new 'Paschal Lamb.'

The commemoration is intended, then, to call God's new covenant people back to the centralities of their faith in Jesus Christ, and to their continuity with God's people in every generation. We recall the suffering of Christ on our behalf. The 'remembrance' is enacted in the senses of sight, touch, and taste, and through the Holy Spirit experienced in our minds and hearts. Somehow - and this is more poetry than science - Christ is present in this act of remembrance.

As with the Passover remembrance, there is to be narration and

A Commemoration

explanation, giving meaning to the signs and the event they depict. There is a focus on the cross, yes, but the 'remembrance' is also much wider, taking in both the incarnation and resurrection of God's Son, and the whole of God's saving purposes in Christ. This covenant meal witnesses to God's commitment to us in Christ. It is a sign that confirms God's promise of salvation, and to which we respond as followers of Jesus. We remember with thanksgiving that wonderful exchange that God has made for us; Christ has taken our guilt, and we have received Christ's innocence.

For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ. (2 Cor.5:21).

A Thanksgiving

3. It is thanksgiving, a celebration

Like family feasts in many cultures, this meal is a celebration. Communion is no morbid remembrance of someone now dead, but an invitation to connect with the risen Christ, and to give thanks for all that God has done for us. The second century name 'Eucharist', derived from the Greek word for giving thanks, picks up the note of thanksgiving and celebration. Behind the earliest Eucharistic liturgies is the Jewish idea of *berakah*, 'blessing', an offering of praise in response to God's kindness to us. Some traditions use Psalm.116:12:

*What shall I render to the Lord for all his bounty to me?
 'I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord;
 I will pay my vows to the Lord now in the presence of all his people.'*

The Lord's Supper may be serious, but it should not be sad. It is an outpouring of gratitude to God, for the completed work of Jesus Christ. The atmosphere is not funereal but one of praise and thanksgiving. However, as in all worship services, leaders should remember that some in the communion services will be feeling weary or jaded, others will be preoccupied with various problems, sufferings, and fears. They need to be led with integrity, starting from where they are, and not coerced with a superficial or cheery tone. The quiet work of God's

Spirit can bring healing and hope, even in the midst of pain. *Come to me all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* (Matthew 11: 28)



A Celebration

This cup is the new relationship established by the shedding of my blood. Go on doing this whenever you drink it, as a remembrance of me.

Therefore, said Paul, every time you eat this bread and drink this cup you are proclaiming the Lord's death, until he comes again in glory.

So let us fulfil this command and follow Christ's example in both word and action, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Just as the Lord Jesus on the night of his betrayal, took some bread, so do we take these ordinary things of the world, bread and wine, to be set apart for this special use. And just as he gave thanks to God, so too we come to God in thanks and praise for his gift of himself to us.

Thanksgiving

Let us pray:

It is our duty and our delight, Lord God our Father, to give you thanks and praise for all you have done for the world. Our hearts are full of gratitude to you because you loved the world so much that you gave your only Son, so that everyone who trusts in him may have eternal life.

We thank you that Jesus was born among us, that he lived our common life on earth, and experienced all the joys and sorrows of human existence, even suffering and dying for us. But we thank you most of all that he rose again, and that his risen presence is with us now through the Holy spirit.

Remembering these things we celebrate once again the supper of our Lord. We pray that despite our sins and doubts **the Holy Spirit may come** and bless our thoughts and actions together, so that as we eat the bread and drink the wine we may indeed participate in the life of Christ. We thank you for the opportunity to celebrate this supper together, and with the company of all your people in this world and the next....

Example Services:

1. For Sunday service in a Baptist church, or in a small group
2. For a brief service in home or hospital

Example Service 1:

For Sunday service in a Baptist church, or in a home group.

This first liturgy assumes that appropriate sung worship, prayer and sharing of the Word has led up to the Communion. A Creed and/or the Lord's Prayer may also be appropriate. In each section wording is given only as a guide. The leaders can paraphrase, expand or omit as they choose wording authentic to the local context. The (important ecumenically) anamnesis and epiclesis are in bold type.

Invitation:

Friends we are about to celebrate the Lord's Supper, an expression of our oneness in Christ and in remembrance of his sacrifice for us.

This is the Lord's Table and He is the Host. He says to us now, as he said to the disciples, "anyone who comes to me I will never turn away." He invites all who love him, and would like to love him more, to join in this feast of celebration and remembrance.

Institution

Listen to the words of the apostle Paul when he speaks of the very beginnings of this sacrament.

For I received from the Lord and in turn passed on to you, the tradition that on the night that he was betrayed, Jesus took some bread, and after giving thanks to God, broke it and said

Take this and eat it. This is my Body broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

In the same way after supper he took the cup saying

4. It is connection with God

To commune, literally, is to eat together - and that implies oneness. In Communion, we are called to celebrate our fellowship through grace with God, and by the Holy Spirit we are strengthened in our participation in Christ. He is the one who represents us before God (Heb.7:25). Through Christ we have fellowship with God

Because of Christ and our faith in him, we can now come boldly and confidently into God's presence. (Eph.3:12). The presence in the Lord's Supper is certainly real. It is the living presence of God, Father, Son and Spirit. *For where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them..* (Mt.18:20),

5. It is anticipation

In the Lord's Supper we celebrate what we already have in the Kingdom of God. But the feast is also a promise, a foretaste, of what is yet to come (Rev. 19:1-9). It is only 'until He comes' (1 Cor. 11:26; Mt.26:29). One day our experience of communion with Christ shall be much fuller, face to face, and these earthly symbols will have passed away.

6. It calls us to identify with the cross of Jesus:

The cross that we recall in Communion is not a comfortable symbol. It calls us again to follow Jesus' example of self-giving and suffering (Lk.8:23). It calls us to consecrate ourselves afresh to God, a living sacrifice (Rom.12:1; 1 Pet.2:5) committed to serve God in this his world.

7. It is communion with fellow Christians

In the Lord's Supper we fellowship not only with the Lord, but with all who belong to him. We express a bond of love with the whole 'household of God', with everyone who professes faith in Christ. That includes our local fellow believers, with all their imperfections. It includes believers of other denominations, irrespective of whether we feel comfortable about their different expressions of the Christian faith. It includes believers worldwide, with their vast diversity of races, cultures, and forms, whose daily prayers mix with ours to form an unending cycle of praise. It is good to remind ourselves of this communal aspect by including prayers for the church around the world, and by giving thanks for all the faithful believers who have gone before us. Selfish individualism sits very uneasily in the context of the Lord's Supper.

Communion also challenges us afresh to mutual forgiveness: *Get rid of all*

bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behaviour. Instead, be kind to each other, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you. Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God. (Eph. 4:31-5:2). Communion can also be a prompt to reconciliation: *So if you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God.* (Mt. 5:22-24). If Jesus Christ has forgiven others, who are we to withhold forgiveness? Never forget though, that the Lord's Supper is above all a remembrance of God's grace toward us, and our focus on love and unity is above all a response to that grace, not a prerequisite for it.

*Nothing you can do,
Could make Him love you more.
And nothing that you've done,
Could make Him close the door.
Because of His great love,
He gave His only Son.
Everything was done so you would come.*
Russell Fragar

FOR DISCUSSION:

How does our own experience of the Lord's table correspond to these themes?
What aspects may need strengthening? How? Are there other dimensions to
Communion which we feel are important?

Sacrament or Ordinance?

The word 'sacrament' comes from ancient Latin for a sacred bond, a soldier's oath of allegiance. The dictionary defines a sacrament as an outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible grace. Something in the physical world – water or bread or wine – is used to signify what God is up to in his doings with human beings. It was crucial for early Christianity that it was a religion that did not deprecate the physical world and material things. Some of the pagan philosophies did – only spiritual things were of value, and food and drink and sex and babies were bad. The message of the incarnation was that the created world is good, and full of potential.

A Christian sacrament takes up this theme in an event where outward symbols and actions are used to communicate to us an inward and spiritual reality. However, many traditional concepts of the 'sacraments' come to us not from the New Testament but from the medieval church, which recognised seven sacraments, as do present-day Roman Catholics. The Protestant Reformers of the sixteenth century noted that of these, only baptism and communion were clearly supported by the scriptures, and directly instituted by Jesus. Protestants rejected any notion

Prayer of Commitment

Prayer of Commitment and Sending

The WCC (Lima) order places intercessions before the communion, but Baptist churches have often used the prayer time after communion for attending to the horizontal dimension of our relationship with Christ and his church. Pastoral prayers for the sick and elderly, laying on of hands, and interceding for our brothers and sisters overseas, such as those suffering persecution, may all have a place.

However, there is a lot to be said for moving directly from the Communion to a prayer of rededication to Christ's service, and an affirmation of our loyalty to his mission. This theme can be taken up in the final song and a blessing /commissioning.

It is the Spirit of God who gives life to our worship. Whether or not a service enables people to glorify and enjoy God depends on more than the words. If the Spirit is to be present in power, it will be because all who participate are prepared to worship in spirit and in truth'. (John 4: 23)

FOR DISCUSSION

What of these elements do you consider to be essential? Why? What other factors should be taken into account when designing a communion service?

Is a liturgy really necessary?

A communion liturgy is a form of service carefully prepared to incorporate all the things that the church has felt should be part of a balanced celebration, and often includes provision for congregational responses. In one sense, all such patterns are simply expansions of Jesus' words and actions as recorded in the scriptures. But many Baptist congregations feel uncomfortable with anything that smacks of ritual, stuffiness, or priestly traditions, and may question the relevance of ancient liturgies of Greek-orientated Christians here in twenty-first century New Zealand.

On the other hand, a prepared liturgy of some sort is valuable, if we are to avoid imbalances, clumsiness, and eccentricities. There is nothing intrinsically unspiritual about prepared and written services. Liturgies tested and refined over the years may have a dignity and spiritual expressiveness that is very effective in leading congregations into heartfelt worship. The best liturgies are strongly laced with scripture, allow for extemporary prayer at appropriate points, and respect the informal style of worship that has been characteristic of the Baptist tradition. We should select the liturgy we use with care, adapt where necessary, and in all cases pray that the Holy Spirit breathes life into every celebration.

Then they lift the cup, saying:

In the same way he took the cup, saying:

*This cup is the new covenant sealed in my blood,
shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.*

Whenever you drink it, do this in remembrance of me.

Every time we eat this bread and drink this cup,
we proclaim the saving death of the risen Lord,
until he comes.

Alternatively the bread may be broken in silence. Familiar words of scripture may be said, but these must be brief, clear, and appropriate. Possibilities include Isaiah 53:6, 1 Peter 3:18, 1 Corinthians 6:20, and 2 Corinthians 5:21. Other words may be used, as the bread and then the wine are held up in full view, eg.

When we break the bread,

is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?

When we give thanks over the cup

is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ?

Holding out the bread and the wine the congregation, the leader reaffirms the invitation to the Lord's people, using words such as.:

The gifts of God for the people of God.

or...

*Jesus said: I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry,
and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.* John 6:35

The traditional liturgy also includes a response called the Agnus Dei. (Lamb of God) This can be utilised by the celebrant or responsively by the congregation; in the second case, the response is that in bold type. Using these words is another way to emphasise the universal nature of this distinctively Christian ritual:

Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, **have mercy on us.**

Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, **have mercy on us**

Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, **grant us your peace.**

(Or you can say "*Lamb of God, you take away the sin etc.*")

The Distribution

You may suggest words that each worshipper can use as they pass the elements,

eg *This is the body of Christ broken for you/ blood of Christ shed for you.*



The distribution is the climax of the service.

Whichever format is followed for the sharing of the elements with those who have served the congregation, (ie before or after the congregation) it should be done discreetly, so as not to take the focus away from communion with Christ himself.

that sacraments could automatically and mechanically transfer grace to those who participate in them, without regard to faith or understanding. Communion was for them a remembrance, a symbolic event, rather than a spiritual reality. For this reason they avoided calling the celebrant a priest, the table an altar and the meal a sacrifice, since all these terms imply something magical is occurring. Some Reformers did speak of a sacrament being not only a 'sign' (symbol), but also a 'seal', a pledge or promise from God., made effective through the Holy Spirit. Baptists, however, were more comfortable with the idea of sign, and because of the misunderstandings connected with the word Sacrament, have tended to use the word Ordinance, meaning a prescribed religious ceremony, to describe Baptism and Communion. (The practice of foot washing in some Baptist traditions is a "third ordinance.") Baptist thinking in recent times has become much more open to the richness of the Spirit's work in our lives, and many today would testify to Communion - and Believers Baptism and possibly Infant Dedication - being both sign and seal. Of course, God mediates grace to us in many other ways as well, and uses a variety of experiences to nurture our assurance of his love toward us in Christ. In this sense, all of life can be sacramental.

The Centrality of Communion

Dr Paul Beasley Murray, formerly Principal of Spurgeon's College, the English equivalent of our Carey College, writes:

The Lord's Supper is part and parcel of the worship of the church. In past generations, Baptist churches had the unfortunate custom of making the Lord's Supper into an optional extra service tagged on to the main service, and often attended by only a few. The reason was to ensure that the table was 'fenced,' and that only committed Christians took the bread and wine. However such a fencing resulted in many Christians regarding the service as an optional extra.

He challenges this distortion, reminding us that the New Testament practice was a weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper. Although there are practical reasons for some worship services to not include communion, he agrees with Baptist leaders Payne and Winward who wrote

It is a departure from apostolic (NT) worship to celebrate the Lord's Supper infrequently or to regard it an appendage.

If our tradition is to celebrate communion monthly - and that seems to be the practice in many Kiwi Baptist churches - the centrality of the practice in the New Testament churches reminds us to ensure the service holds together as whole, with Communion being integrated into the sermon, songs and prayers. In this way, we can avoid any suggestion that the ceremony is an optional extra.

The Format of Communion

It has never been mandatory in Baptist churches to use any particular liturgy for communion, or for worship generally. Leaders are free to select from or adapt any possible framework, and the service can vary widely from a more liturgical style, with congregational responses, through to the reading of a couple of Bible verses and the silent distribution of the elements. However, in light of the fact that this tradition has been present in the church for nearly 2000 years, it is appropriate to note the historic consensus of what should normally be included in communion.

Paul Beasley-Murray outlines a typical English Baptist service:

- Opening Worship (praise and confession)
- Scriptures and Sermon
- Reception of new members
- Song of fellowship
- Greeting
- Invitation to the Table
- Words of Institution or other scripture
- Prayer of Thanksgiving
- Re-enacting the Drama - Distribution of Bread and Wine
- Prayers for one another and beyond
- Prayer of Commitment
- Hymn of hope and joy
- Blessing and Sending

The items that are underlined are usually seen as the core elements of a Communion, however brief the service might be. Even in a home or hospital setting, they can be included in a sentence or two.

Why are these the core elements? Because they have been present in communion liturgies since the very beginning of the Christian church, or because they are practised today by such a wide cross-section of denominational traditions that they are taken as the faith community's consensus of this age-old spiritual practice. When the World Council of Churches outlined the elements of the Eucharistic liturgy in its document 'Baptism Eucharist and Ministry' at Lima in 1980, those eight elements were all included, along with others Baptists may find less appealing, such as a Creed, Lord's Prayer, or the Passing of the Peace. In addition the Lima document specified two ancient traditions which Free Church ministers tend to either overlook or to wrap up in the Communion prayers. These are:

world. This is one way of including one of those strange Latin terms, the **Anamnesis**, a remembrance of the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ. It is usually followed by a hymn of praise beginning Holy, Holy, Holy (adapted from Isaiah 6:3) which is known as the Sanctus:

*Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.*

Later in the prayer the liturgical churches also use the **Epiclesis**, asking the Father to send the Holy Spirit in a special way. In many traditions, the intention of the prayer is the consecration, even transformation, of the bread and wine, but in our Free Church tradition the emphasis is not on the objects (bread and wine) but the subjects, the participants and their experience of, and openness to the Holy Spirit. The ending of the prayer is a blessing or doxology and often includes a reference to the Communion of Saints, that mystical connection between followers of Jesus who went before and those who are still alive. The Lord's Prayer may also be used.

The worship leader's knowledge of the local context will help shape the Thanksgiving Prayer, and guide them as to what components to include. Only rarely in a Baptist church would all of these be used. However, to omit any prayer at all at this point, as sometimes happens in an effort to be informal, is a serious misjudgement.

Following Jesus' Example - Re-enacting the Drama

The Breaking of the Bread is an important action, a sign of Christ being broken for our salvation. The Apostle Paul saw in the breaking of one loaf and the pouring of one cup a symbol of our oneness in Christ. The congregation should see bread broken, and if possible wine being actually poured. A common loaf and common cup may be used, with due regard to hygiene. If the words of institution have not already been given, the narrative is given here. The order given in the next chapter suggests the following.

The leader breaks the bread in full view of the people, and says:

Just as the Lord Jesus, on the night of his arrest, took bread, and after giving thanks to God, broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:

Take, eat. This is my body, given for you.

Do this in remembrance of me,

So we take this bread and break it, in remembrance of him.

Thanksgiving (Great Eucharistic) Prayer

- and some strange Latin words

Most churches over the centuries have been very careful to reserve the right to lead this crucial section of the communion service to the ordained clergy. Baptists on the other hand often delegate this prayer - or in some cases two prayers, one before the bread and one before the wine - to a deacon or other leader. This is because our history proudly proclaims that we have no need for a priest to act as an intermediary between God and his people. And in any case, the tradition of clergy only being able to celebrate communion owes more to the Hebrew Temple tradition than to New Testament church. However, in practical terms, this custom of deacons leading in prayer can result in the event becoming something of a hotch potch of ideas that do not belong in this Prayer, where the focus should be utterly on the Lord Jesus. Paul Beasley-Murray notes that while it is natural but not essential for the pastor to preside at the Lord's Table, when deacons pray at Communion, they should be given instruction as to what is required.

Thanksgiving or Communion Prayer

This is because the commonalities of this central prayer as used over the centuries and around the world are a vital testimony to the fact that the church of Jesus Christ is one, a family with many different homes and languages. Even in the Free Church tradition, there is a place for consciously using one or more elements of this traditional prayer in order to signal this unity. If we know what comprises a full Eucharistic order, we can then decide what may appropriately be left out or included. Following the classic shape of the liturgy helps worshippers from a variety of backgrounds experience their continuity with the Church's heritage, and reinforces a sense of unity.

The prayer often begins with a greeting and dialogue, for instance, "The Lord be with you" in the Catholic/Anglican churches, or "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all" in the Orthodox Church. The congregation responds by giving glory to God, often in the call and refrain:

Lift up your hearts!
We lift them up to the Lord.

The theme of thanksgiving is introduced with words like "Let us give thanks to the Lord our God." This section is called in Latin the Sursum Corda and can take a wide variety of forms, not necessarily responsive. The theme of thanksgiving is expanded to include a description of Jesus Christ and what he has done for the

- The **Anamnesis** - remembering the mighty acts of God, especially in the life death and resurrection of Jesus Christ
- The **Epiclesis** - inviting the Holy Spirit to come as we share Communion.

The basic structure of a communion service dates back to the earliest centuries of the Christian church, but there is considerable room for variety. Too much freedom, however, can detach us from the sense that this is a practice shared by the whole Church, across the world and down the centuries. The movement, the drama, the unfolding of the story is enhanced by following the ordered progression that has been evolved by generations, one that prepares worshippers physically emotionally and spiritually for what is to follow. It also enable visitors or newcomers from other traditions to recognise what is happening as something that occurred in their own context as well. Sensitivity to the deeply-held values of others needs to be kept in tension with our own theological and liturgical integrity. One example might be in attending to the language used in the service. Greetings in other languages, gender-inclusive pronouns and careful choice of Bible versions might be ways we can ensure that people of all ages and cultures feel included. Another aspect of sensitivity might be in ensuring the focus is not all on what is happening up on the platform, but that the community aspect of the communion is experienced by all.

FOR DISCUSSION

What communion traditions did you practice before coming to this church? Did you find anything missing, different or offensive in the way it is offered here?

Eight Elements and Two Traditions

We noted earlier the unfortunate habit of tacking communion onto the end of a service without any connection or preparation. Ideally the whole of the Opening Worship would be looking ahead to the celebration, and songs and prayers would include explicit or implied reference to the Lord's Table.

Many Christian traditions use a creed as an affirmation of faith in response to the read and preached Word. Although Baptists have no official creed - and in fact use sung worship as the most powerful of our affirmations - it is helpful to use creedal statements at times such as baptism or communion when we are reminded of our unity with Christians of other traditions.

The Nicene Creed, produced by AD 381, is the only truly ecumenical creed in existence. By using it we align ourselves with practically the whole of the universal church. The shorter Apostles' Creed is even more ancient, and there are also a number of modern statements of faith such as **We are not Alone**, a Canadian creed found at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_New_Creed. (The others are also found on Wikipedia). Another historic practice which reminds us that we share this tradition with other

Opening Worship

denominations is that of presenting the bread and wine with the offering .

Scriptures and Sermon

Sunday worship is often described as the ministry of Word and Sacrament. In the liturgical traditions that take their identity from forms of worship prior to the Reformation, Sacrament (in the Mass or Eucharist) is the main focus of the weekly service. If a sermon is given, it is usually a brief homily on a set scripture, and people do not look to it for the nurture of their souls; that was and is what they expect from the Communion. By contrast, in the Free Church traditions that emerged after the Reformation, Sacrament was replaced as the high point of the service by the Sermon, a Scripture-based message which was indeed understood to feed the soul. Today, depending somewhat on their “musical worship” style, Baptist churches may not hold the sermon in such high regard as was the case last century, but in general the Word certainly trumps the Sacrament. Baptists expect to get a dose of Bible every Sunday, and don't worry if Communion is brief or rare.

Paul reminded the Christians at Corinth that whenever they ate the Bread and drank the Cup, they were proclaiming the Lord's death (1 Cor 11: 26) . The story must always be told, the Word proclaimed, when Communion is shared. The sermon may be three minutes (as with a service in a home) or thirty, but without the reading and preaching of the Word, the rite becomes

“at best an unexplained mystery and at worst a magical act.” (JJ von Allmen.)

Therefore at every celebration of the Lord Supper, there should be opportunity for the Word to be proclaimed. A wise leader will create the service so that the Lord's Supper follows naturally from the theme of the sermon, and brings to a climax all the worship that gone before. It is possible to design a service where Communion comes at an earlier stage, for example so that Children's Programme leaders can participate, but Paul Beasley-Murray takes the view that putting Response before Message like this is somewhat of a “theological nonsense”.

Invitation to the Table

Words of introduction and invitation are often taken from scripture, but others may be added to explain who “the meal” is for. The heart of it should be something like...

This is the Lord's table.

Our Saviour invites all who trust and serve him to share his joyful feast.

or...

This is the Lord's Table. All who love the Lord are welcome to participate in freedom and joy.

Scriptures and Sermon

Twenty-first century Kiwi Baptists do not usually ‘fence’ the table, meaning to confine participation to those who are baptised, as did our forbears. The Spirit may use the words and actions of the meal to touch the hearts of a visitor or a seeker with the grace of Christ. Some congregations even welcome children to the Table on this basis. We trust individuals to ensure they or their children do not participate flippantly or showing disrespect to God.

FOR DISCUSSION - who do you think should be invited to receive Communion?

The Lord's Supper is a celebration of God's grace, not human achievement. It is a means of grace through which the promises of the gospel are proclaimed afresh. The power of the celebration does not lie in our ability to think hard about Jesus' death and our sin, but in the way God's Spirit uses the celebration to nourish and sustain us.

Words of Institution or Narrative

We need to explain what we are doing and why, as a reminder for ourselves and an introduction for any who are not familiar with the this ceremony. This is called the ‘institution’ - the process of initiating or establishing something. Obviously the story of this meal begins in the Upper Room, in the events described in three of the gospels, but also noted in Paul's letter to the Corinthians written some decades earlier than Mark, the first gospel. Either of these Scriptures - Mark 14: 22 - 25 or 1 Corinthians 11: 23 - 26 - would be suitable. Some churches include these in the Thanksgiving Prayer, but to me it seems more seeker-friendly to introduce what could be seen as “a bizarre ritual” by being in eye contact with the congregation. If you prefer to use a summary rather than literal scripture, the institution would be:

*On the night before he died,
the Lord Jesus took bread;
he gave thanks and 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,
gave thanks and gave it to them saying:
'Drink this all of you.
This is my blood of the new covenant.
Do this to remember me'.*

Words of Institution

Invitation to the Table