

# WORSHIP

E S S E N T I A L S



## Making Communion Meaningful

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Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.

—Psalm 34:8



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## How to use “Making Communion Meaningful”

Welcome to *BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS: Your Complete Guide to Leadership Training*. You've purchased an innovative resource that will help you develop leaders who can think strategically and biblically about the church. Selected by the editors of *Leadership Resources* and *Christianity Today International*, the material comes from respected thinkers and church leaders.

“Worship Essentials” is completely flexible and designed to be easy to use. Each theme focuses on a practical area of worship ministry and comprises brief handouts on specific aspects of that ministry. The handouts give a succinct and practical overview of the issues most relevant to your goals. You may use them at the beginning of a meeting to help launch a discussion, or you may hand them out as brief primers for someone new to a particular ministry.

This specific theme is designed to help your church make Communion more meaningful for your congregation. You may use it either for a group training session or to give individually to people who are responsible for serving Communion. Simply print the handouts you need and use them as necessary.

For example, understand more about how your church's architecture and design can enhance Communion by reading “Visibility, Proximity, Accessibility” (pp. 3–4). Get help in thinking about the issue of who may participate in the Lord's Supper by exploring “Who's Invited?” (p. 5). Expand the range of possibilities on how to use different themes from Scripture at the Lord's Table by discussing “One Table, Many Images” (p. 11).

We hope you benefit from this theme as you equip your church to worship God in spirit and in truth.

Need more material, or something on a specific topic? See our website at [www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com](http://www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com).

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## Visibility, Proximity, Accessibility

*Design your worship space to enhance the celebration of Communion.*

Mark 14:16

When Sojourn Community Church moved from rented space to their own building, they had a chance to design a sanctuary that better fit their practice of weekly Communion. This Southern Baptist congregation in Louisville, Kentucky, refurbished a former elementary school.

Before Unity Christian Reformed Church in Prinsburg, Minnesota, designed a new sanctuary, they studied the interplay between theology and church architecture, including what a worship space visually “says” about the sacraments.

Both churches discovered design principles that affect Lord’s Supper celebrations. Mark A. Torgerson, author of *An Architecture of Immanence: Architecture for Worship and Ministry Today* (Eerdmans, 2007), sums up these principles as visibility, proximity, and accessibility.

### Let the Design Speak

Torgerson notes that many churches want to accent the communal nature of the Eucharist and celebrate it more fully. One solution is to create a centrally planned worship space “where the place for the Word of God (usually the pulpit) and place for the table are two major focal points.”

Most often these churches choose a fan-shaped worship space or put seating on three sides of the pulpit and table. Sitting so you see other people’s faces, Torgerson explains, “highlights the sense of being together and building relationships—instead of privatizing the Lord’s Supper.”

Torgerson also recommends making wide center and side aisles and creating ample space between rows and around the Communion table. This design choice makes room for “all aspects of the celebration, including preparing people through confession, reconciliation, and joyful participation.”

Churches with traditional pews sometimes achieve this simply by removing front pews and replacing others with moveable chairs.

### Prepare the Table

Half round, fan shaped, or three sided seating layouts improve proximity. When the table is too far away...or pushed against a far wall (say in a deep chancel)...or behind a solid altar rail...or placed high above where people sit, then worshipers feel a disconnect.

“It’s like putting the family dining table in the attic or garage. Our Communion tables need to be near enough that the people sense this is a common table for a shared meal.

“It does not have to be symmetrically placed in relation to other focal points but does need to facilitate a sense of relationship to a communal meal celebration,” Torgerson says.

He suggests designing the table to a human scale, so people can easily preside. Generally that’s no more than 5 or 6 feet long and about the height of a kitchen counter, 39 to 40 inches.

Another proximity tip is to create space near the sanctuary for people to prepare the elements and wash trays, pitchers, goblets, and so on after Communion. Churches also need space to store candles, vessels, banners, napkins, and other Communion fabrics. This dedicated space is often called a sacristy.

### Share the Elements

Besides making the Communion table a focal point and arranging seats so everyone can see the table, churches need to make this space accessible.

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## PREPARATION

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“Emphasizing the communal aspect of the meal works best when no seat is particularly far from the table and the floor surface is flat, without balconies, tiered seating, or many steps. You want enough room for people, including wheelchair users, to easily and physically come forward in a centralized space,” Torgerson says.

He recommends allowing 5 to 6 feet around the table for the presider and servers and 7 to 10 feet (or more, depending on congregation size) if people will come forward to be served.

“Churches that don’t use a Communion table often place portable tables throughout the auditorium. The tables are stacked with trays, or even vacuum packed portions of juice and wafer in disposable containers. There are very few words of preparation. You walk up and get a package or receive one that’s passed down the row.” Torgerson says.

Even in its current sanctuary, Unity CRC varies distribution methods. Sometimes people are served in their seats and all partake at the same time. More often they come forward in successive circles, kneel at the platform or get served at stations placed around the sanctuary.

Simply moving to receive Communion increases the people contact that signals an “all one in Christ” identity. At Sojourn, all the elements come from the Communion table. About two thirds of people break off bread and dip it in juice held by lay servers who stand by the platform. The other third go to servers at other stations.

—JOAN HUYSER-HONIG; Adapted from “How Church Architecture Affects Lord’s Supper Practices,” from Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, [www.calvin.edu/worship/](http://www.calvin.edu/worship/). Used with permission.

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## Reflect

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1. Where in our worship space is the Communion table placed? What does its placement say about how important the Lord’s Supper is to us?
2. How often do we vary our distribution methods? How does our seating design affect this decision?
3. Should Communion be more of an individual or a congregational experience, and why?



## Who's Invited?

*Access to the Lord's Table is a sensitive issue for those who partake and those who don't.*

Exodus 12:43

*The issue of who can take Communion draws diverse responses from church leaders of various traditions and denominations. Here are some different approaches to help you know who to invite to the Lord's Table.*

**Take a simple approach:** Take the stance that Communion is for those who have accepted Christ as their Savior and Lord, and leave the question of who partakes up to the conscience of the individual. Another simple approach is to restrict access to the table to only those who are members of the host congregation or denomination.

**Establish criteria about who is qualified:** Some churches and denominations have decided a person should not be self-accredited to receive Communion. Instead, these churches will allow access to the table only after the person's faith testimony is judged to be credible. This can also mean that a person must be baptized or a member of some church (not necessarily the host church) to take Communion.

**Avoid alienating seekers:** Since almost all churches require that those who take Communion meet certain conditions, some people present in the service will be excluded from participating. How do church leaders explain this restriction without unnecessarily alienating seekers? Stress that it's the Lord's Table and not ours. Partaking of Communion without a relationship with Christ would be a meaningless exercise. Ask those who do not have a relationship with Christ to be at ease during the process and wait to partake until that relationship is established. Invite seekers to learn from the experience and sense the reality behind the symbols.

**Make the Lord's Table an invitation to seekers:** Churches that emphasize ministry to seekers have a unique challenge. Such a church may have no formal membership, and by inference a high number of seekers present. Explain that Communion is for those who are clear about their relationship with Christ. They have experienced on the inside something they are about to experience on the outside in a ritual exclusive for believers. Invite non-believers to do one of two things: either feel completely free not to participate without any sense of discomfort, or to recognize that this is a moment when a personal expression of faith can happen for the first time.

**Give non-participants something to do during Communion:** Offer spiritual exercises in the bulletin, or skeletal prayers they can use during that time. Make an open invitation for everyone to "do business with God" during this time, whether partaking of Communion or not.

—CRAIG BRIAN LARSON; Copyright © 1995 by Christianity Today International. Originally printed in the book *Changing Lives Through Preaching and Worship*.

## Reflect

1. Who is allowed to take Communion in our church? How do we determine whether they partake worthily?
2. How would our church approach someone who we suspect partakes of Communion in an unworthy fashion?
3. In what ways do we involve non-participants during Communion?



## Table Training

*Create the proper atmosphere to increase clarity and avoid a feeling of routine.*

Matthew 26:26–28

With the diversity of church traditions surrounding Communion, we can assume there is a fair amount of confusion on the subject among the people in the pews. How can churches train people to rightly understand Communion?

**Constant training:** Preaching sermons on the subject is not the answer. Turnover in churches is simply too high. Membership classes offer a fitting opportunity to cover the subject, but they reach a limited population. So constant training is vital; each time the church receives Communion, pastors feel obligated to give a mini-teaching on the subject—in terms that even an uninitiated person can readily understand. Other methods include putting an informative insert in the bulletin so the pastor doesn't have to cover all the ground verbally, and using the children's time to explain the Lord's Supper to everyone.

**Explaining Communion to seekers:** In most Communion services, there will be some present whom we might call seekers, or unchurched, some of whom might consider the rite odd. How can pastors explain Communion to them? Carefully explain the meaning behind the bread and cup in inclusive rather than exclusive language, never using a term like *propitiation* without explaining what it means. Put seekers at ease about what will happen so they don't stand out or feel awkward that the presider will always give them signals about what to do.

**Keeping Communion holy:** Pastors and church leaders must articulate the standards and make sure those who officiate understand the full meaning of Christ's work on the cross, both theologically and personally.

**Keeping Communion meaningful:** Churches must ensure that Communion does not become a routine repeated set of words or activities. This can mean showing people how Communion is relevant for their lives today, talking about how Jesus can soothe painful memories, forgive us for our bitterness, or heal us of the wounds others have given us.

**Keeping Communion from being too casual:** Put the table and elements in the church only when Communion is being served. This alerts the congregation that this service will include something special. Establish an atmosphere of joy with dignity, and avoid humor. Softer music, perhaps with acoustic instruments only, can help establish the proper mood.

—CRAIG BRIAN LARSON; Copyright © 1995 by Christianity Today International. Originally printed in the book *Changing Lives Through Preaching and Worship*.

## Reflect

1. What spirit do we want to surround Communion? Celebration? Solemn reflection?
2. How do we train those who serve the elements in their understanding of Communion?
3. Does our Communion service ever seem routine or casual? What can we do to prevent this from happening?



## Ways to Enrich Communion

*Three congregations share ideas and practices that are innovative and successful.*

Psalm 42:2

The early church celebrated Communion weekly. Catholic churches offer it weekly or even daily. Though Eucharist frequency varies widely among Protestants, denominations and congregations are re-visiting the sacrament.

### An Embodied Way to Receive the Gospel

Ethan Magness is a vicar at Grace Anglican Fellowship, north of Pittsburgh. The church attracts worshipers from nearby Slippery Rock University and Grove City College.

Unlike many church plants reaching out to 20-somethings, Grace Anglican doesn't offer multimedia services. Instead, worshipers say they like how traditional liturgy gives worship a corporate feel. And the congregation celebrates Holy Communion every Sunday.

"Having a more sacramental focus in worship is new for these folks. Most seem to really appreciate frequent reception of Holy Communion. They also appreciate the traditional Anglican connection of the preached gospel and the gospel as it is received in Holy Communion," Magness says.

His parish sees the "Eucharist as sealing the promise of the gospel in the preached word," and therefore uses the 1928 Book of Common Prayer. Magness describes it as "far more atonement centered" than the 1979 edition.

### Exploring, Not Killing, the Mystery

Wanting to make worship more relational inspired worship leader Andy Keck to begin a Lord's Supper project at Orange United Methodist Church in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

"The Lord's Supper, through its language, movement, and action, provides us with a rich model. Putting it at the center of worship renewal can help a person's relationship with Christ and with other members of the body of Christ," he explains.

Orange United Methodist consulted with Gayle Carlton Felton, author of *This Holy Mystery* (Discipleship Resources, 2006), to design a project keyed to several ways of learning. Certainly the most visible result was a stained-glass window that the church commissioned.

Its hymn competition yielded two songs now sometimes sung at communion by the congregation or choir. "'Now We Come,' by Brad McIntyre, is almost Taize in its singable quality. 'Come and Feast, for All Are Welcomed,' by Larry E. Schultz, combines a Communion message with our church mission statement," Keck says.

Orange adults studied William Willimon's *Sunday Dinner: The Lord's Supper and Christian Life* (Upper Room Books, 1981). Keck says that getting "a real grounding in the sacrament" frees worship leaders to be more creative with liturgies, such as varying the words to confession or invitation to communion.

"After the project, I did an 18-month series in the church newsletter, going line by line through the liturgy. We're trying to walk the line between exploring the mystery and killing the mystery," he adds.

### For All Ages

Whenever congregations propose having Communion more often, members ask whether the sacrament will lose meaning. That very question came up at Sandersville United Methodist Church in Sandersville, Georgia. But Joy Pendry was glad someone asked.



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## PRESENTATION

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“We have Communion the first Sunday morning of each month. Our evening contemporary service celebrates it every third Sunday night. It’s fairly unusual for individuals in the congregation to refrain from taking the sacrament during worship. But we’d noticed an unfortunate trend of lower attendance on first Sunday mornings,” she says.

That trend prompted her to head up a project to help all ages more deeply understand Communion in their daily lives. The project began with an all day *This Holy Mystery* study, led by Gayle Carlton Felton and attended by leaders from several congregations. “We wanted parents to learn first, so they can answer questions as children begin their own Holy Communion study in January,” Pendry says.

Already members are raising issues common to many churches:

- “We go forward in small groups to kneel at the altar rail, be served, hear a prayer, and get dismissed. How can we make it feel less regimented and more joyful?”
- “Communion services last so long. Can we be more efficient?”
- “What if I don’t feel worthy enough to receive the sacrament? Should I still partake?”
- “How do these ideas on Holy Communion relate to the sacrament of baptism and other denominational beliefs?”

Pendry says Sandersville has a built-in reason to help all ages experience the “Christian unity that comes from the oneness of the shared loaf and cup.

“Our Book of Resolutions says, ‘Because the table at which we gather belongs to the Lord, it should be open to all who respond to Christ’s love, regardless of age or church membership. The Wesleyan tradition has always recognized that Holy Communion may be an occasion for the reception of converting, justifying, and sanctifying grace,’ ” she explains.

Lay servers change monthly and already include children and youth on the teams. In the next phase, Sandersville will bring the elements to homebound and nursing home members. “We’ll offer a light lunch after morning worship, provide brief training, assign visits, and prayerfully send forth each team,” Pendry says.

—JOAN HUYSER-HONIG; Adapted from “How Three Congregations Are Enriching Communion,” from Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, [www.calvin.edu/worship/](http://www.calvin.edu/worship/). Used with permission.

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## Reflect

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1. Have we tried any of the methods suggested above to educate our congregation about Communion? What other methods could we use?
2. How often do we serve Communion? Is there congregational consensus about whether it is served too often or too frequently?
3. What questions do we get about our Communion practices? How do we answer?





## A Deeper Experience

*These ideas will help your congregation explore different ways to serve the Supper.*

Psalm 73:28

Your leeway in celebrating the Lord's Supper will depend on your tradition's liturgical stipulations, doctrines, theology, or church architecture. But chances are that some of these ideas will fit your situation.

The first three suggestions come from or are adapted from ideas presented by Martha Moore-Keish at a recent Calvin Symposium on Worship.

- Preach a children's sermon based on Isaiah 11:6–9 ("The wolf shall live with the lamb..."). Place stuffed animals in unlikely pairings—lion and lamb, bear and cow, maybe even a snake and a doll. Ask children if animals live together like this at a zoo. What would happen if the zookeeper put a wolf and lamb in the same cage? Help them imagine how God will someday make all these animals friends and how God wants all those who come to his table to be friends.
- Use a clip from the 1984 film *Places in the Heart* to explain God's vision for communion in the future. Summarize the story line and then show the last ten minutes of the film.
- Ask visual artists in your church to create banners or other art based on verses that deepen worshipers' understanding of the Eucharist:
  - ◆ "People will come from east and west, and north and south, and take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God." (Luke 13:29)
  - ◆ "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood will have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." (John 6:54)
  - ◆ "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." (1 Corinthians 11:26)
  - ◆ "Then the angel said to me, 'Write, Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.'" (Revelation 19:9)
- Vary the setting. Celebrate communion outside your church walls or invite another congregation to join you.
- Vary the method. If you usually pass individual cups and bread pieces pew by pew, then consider having people come forward to receive Communion.
- Use elements common to other cultures to remind you that Christians around the world celebrate this sacrament. You might ask your missionaries how they commemorate the Lord's Supper with their new converts. Or use bread that's different from what your congregation usually uses—rye, pita, chapati, or rice cakes.
- Include children. At Church of the Servant Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, professing members gather in successive circles around the pulpit and communion table. Children or teens stand in front of their parents if they want to receive a blessing from an elder or deacon. Pregnant women sometimes receive a blessing on behalf of their unborn children.

—MARTHA MOORE-KEISH; Adapted from "Seven Ideas for Helping Worshipers Experience Communion More Deeply," from Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, [www.calvin.edu/worship/](http://www.calvin.edu/worship/). Used with permission.

## Reflect

1. How does our theology or denominational practice affect each of the suggestions offered?
2. What methods of serving Communion have you seen in other churches that could work in our church?
3. How would our congregation react to these different ways of serving Communion?



## Using What You Have

*Follow the ancient patterns and enlarge the existing symbolism*

Isaiah 58:13–14

Your congregation doesn't have to invent new Communion songs, prayers, and visuals, though you certainly may, if that's how God has gifted you. All you need to do is use what's already present in the practices of the age-old, worldwide body of Christ. Simply follow the ancient patterns and make the symbolism bigger.

### Follow the Ancient Pattern

The Lord's Supper is a communal experience, not just individual, explains Hughes "Scotty" Oliphant Old, dean of the Institute for Reformed Worship at Erskine Theological Seminary. This communal experience flows out of knowing how God's people prayed long before the Reformation. Old explained that Jesus followed Jewish tradition in blessing God for food, asking God to bless the food, and remembering salvation history.

Early Christians built on this tradition to create a Eucharistic prayer called the Great Thanksgiving. Over the centuries, churches have focused more or less on certain parts or have varied the order. But the Great Thanksgiving often includes:

- **Sursum corda.** Christians have used the "Lift up your hearts" call to prayer since the third century.
- **Sanctus.** Worshipers speak or sing verses that start with "Holy, holy, holy."
- **Benedictus or institution.** The presider often uses the words Paul received from the Lord to explain the significance of bread and wine (1 Corinthians 11:23–26).
- **Memorial acclamation.** Everyone responds by singing or saying the mystery of faith: "Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again."
- **Epiclesis or prayer of consecration.** The presider or presider and worshipers ask the Holy Spirit to transfigure the Communion meal so that Jesus is fully present. Here many liturgies have worshipers do the Doxology, Lord's Prayer, and passing of the peace.
- **Breaking and giving.** The minister performs the visible word by breaking bread and pouring wine (or lifting trays of already broken and poured elements). The people receive the Lord's Supper.
- **Postcommunion thanksgiving.** Worshipers thank God for the sacrament and ask to be sent out with God's power and presence so others see God in their lives. This section often includes prayer, liturgical responses, and spoken or sung psalms, such as 103, 113, 116, or 138. "We need to teach our congregations the Eucharistic piety. It isn't just what the minister does. The whole congregation needs to give thanks by offering their lives to God," Old said.

### Make the Symbolism Bigger

Water, table, bread, cup, gestures, words. They're so ordinary, as daily as God's presence with us, whether or not we notice.

Then again, as author Larry Sibley paraphrases John Calvin: We can't take God full strength. That's why God comes to us through ordinary things.

"So maybe we ought to make this symbol much stronger than we usually do. A large loaf of real bread, a flagon of wine, and be generous with it—and [during baptism,] flowing water rather than a damp hand on the baby's head, because that's how God is present," said author Sibley.

"Dispense with the text for the rite, for both the presider and congregation," suggests Fritz West, pastor of St. John's United Church of Christ in Fountain City, Wisconsin. The presider can memorize all or parts of a Communion prayer. She or he can also internalize the basic structure and offer a free prayer.

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## PRESENTATION

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“One is not often asked to memorize set pieces in our culture, but persistence reaps reward—especially with children. Memorized pieces can become benchmarks of the faith. Repeatedly using the Taizé communion song ‘Eat This Bread, Drink This Cup’ became for our children an entrée into a simple, but faithful, theology of communion,” he says.

Learning the words freed him to communicate more with his actions. And West noticed that St. John’s people who’ve memorized the Communion liturgy are more likely to see and respond to his gestures. Saying the words of institution by rote lets him extend the bread and cup, by eye contact and posture, so it feels more like an invitation to the congregation.

—JOAN HUYSER-HONIG; Adapted from “Lord’s Supper Practices: Use What’s Already There,” from Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, [www.calvin.edu/worship/](http://www.calvin.edu/worship/). Used with permission.

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## Reflect

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1. What are the separate pieces of our Communion ceremony?
2. How well does the congregation understand each piece? How well have we educated them about the pieces and what they mean?
3. In what ways could we enhance the symbols and methods we already use?



## One Table, Many Images

*Bring variety to the Lord's Supper by using different Scripture passages and themes.*

1 Corinthians 11:26

Most churches have a usual pattern for serving the Lord's Supper. Here are some suggestions for getting out of the rut by emphasizing a different image for Communion each time.

**Thanksgiving (Matthew 26:26).** Jesus gave thanks before serving the meal. Early Christians broke bread with "glad and generous" hearts. Make the supper joyful.

**Remembrance (1 Corinthians 11:24).** Beyond mere memory, we recall God's redemptive acts in Jesus Christ.

**Community (1 Corinthians 10:16–17).** We are family at the table. Celebrate as brothers and sisters united in Christ.

**Sacrifice (Matthew 26:28).** Christ's blood was shed for us, as a lamb is slaughtered for sacrifice. The Cross should evoke praise, as seen in Revelation 5:11–14, not just somber remembrance.

**Christ's Presence (Mark 14:22–24).** The early church did not debate the theological nuances; they simply affirmed, celebrated, and enjoyed Christ in the breaking of the bread.

**The Coming Kingdom (Luke 22:16).** In Communion, we anticipate the day when believers from every age will gather at God's table, celebrating the final triumph of Jesus Christ and his holy bride, the church.

—MARTIN THIELEN; Copyright © 2006 by Christianity Today International. Adapted from *The Church Leader's Answer Book* (Tyndale, 2006).

## Reflect

1. Do you agree that variety should be used in the Communion ritual? Why or why not?
2. Does our congregation expect the same wording and ritual each time Communion is served? How can we prepare them for variety?
3. When in the church year would the themes mentioned in the article be most appropriate?



## Going Deeper During a Service

*How one church creates a meaningful time of reflection and worship*

1 Corinthians 11:26

*Since the early church, Christians have worshiped in services structured around the spoken Word (the sermon) and the embodied Word (the Lord's Supper). Frequency, form, and styles have changed over time, but the commitment to both remains. Christ Community Church in St. Charles, Illinois upholds that commitment, but in a unique, seeker-sensitive environment. We met with CCC's senior pastor, Jim Nicodem, to discuss crafting meaning times of Communion and, specifically, to understand why his church proclaims the embodied Word first and the spoken Word second.*

### **Explain why your church observes Communion in the first half of its service?**

We do Communion first because, by and large, people are clock-watchers. If we transition from a sermon into Communion, and we're running late, then Communion is going to feel rushed. But if I'm running late in a sermon, my hope and prayer is that I've still got their attention and they're not looking at their wristwatches, at least for a few more minutes. But, if I'm running five minutes over and I stop and introduce Communion, then because it's a transition, everybody looks down at their watch and thinks, *We're already five minutes over!* That brings in a hurried, just-get-it-done feel. And we don't want that.

### **How do you prepare the congregation?**

We lead up to it in a time of worship. After worship, we have a time on our knees for confession of sins. This is kind of interesting for a large congregation meeting in an auditorium that has a performing-arts feel. To get on your knees you have to do a tight turn and kneel down, but there's something powerful about humbling ourselves like that.

In a congregation like ours—where a lot of people don't yet have a commitment to Christ—to get them on their knees takes a little bit of explaining to do. If it's not done right, it can be a very awkward moment. You need to think through even simple stuff like if a person's knees don't work, due to surgery, arthritis, or something else. You have to give people the right to stay in their seat.

### **What is the time of confession like?**

I sometimes lead the congregation through this time, mentioning areas of our lives where we may have things to confess—our relationships, our thoughts, our attitudes, our words, how we've used our resources, and so forth.

### **How do you move from confession to Communion?**

After worship and confession, we explain the elements. We never take it for granted that people understand what Communion is. Our unofficial motto is that we want to be a seeker church with depth. For us, "seeker church" is not an excuse to water things down. It's a requirement to always explain what's happening. We use highly charged terms, but we explain them so that nobody feels left out.

### **What are some ways you avoid "going through the motions"?**

In our church, the whole experience of Communion typically revolves around a theme. Obviously Communion itself is a theme, but there are different aspects of it we can look at. Sometimes our theme will be Jesus' suffering; other times it will be the washing away of sins.

Our next Communion service is going to focus on that theme, our sin being washed away. All of our singing and special music have to do with that theme. I'll choose Scripture that talks about that washing process. Our confession of sin that day will involve something along the theme of washing. So, we'll use one theme to organize our music, confession, and worship.

## **How do your sermons interact with Communion?**

We have Communion the first weekend of every month, regardless of the series we're in. We could be in a parenting series; obviously it would be hard to tie communion into the theme of that sermon. So there will be days when the sermon and Communion will have different themes. Sometimes, however, the sermon provides an easy transition. We did a series called "Crosswords," and we chose words that had to do with our salvation—justification, redemption, and so forth. When the theme for the week dovetails between the sermon and Communion, it's a wonderful thing.

## **Is there a conflict being seeker sensitive and crafting a meaningful Communion experience?**

I used to be under the impression that when Paul talked about being careful not to partake unworthily (1 Corinthians 11:28), he was referring to unbelievers who didn't understand what was happening but were taking part in this Christian celebration. And I was looking at the passage one day and realized that "eating unworthily" was addressed to believers who were misusing the Communion time.

Jack Hayford said on one occasion that he treated communion as an invitation to unbelievers by explaining the meaning. At my church, I might say, "One of the biggest accusations made about Christians is that they're hypocrites. And I would never want you to do anything hypocritical. If you're not yet a follower of Jesus, please feel free not to participate, because I don't want to make a hypocrite out of you. On the other hand, if you're not yet a committed Christ follower, but you'd like to be, this could be the first Communion that you take meaningfully." It becomes an evangelistic moment.

## **Does observing Communion early in a service change how you involve your worship team?**

We've learned that people who lead worship are not necessarily also possessors of a teaching gift when it comes to introducing something like Communion. We've made it the teaching pastor's job to give the explanation. The pastor also explains the mechanics of Communion—how we get a wafer and a cup into everyone's hand. We put those responsibilities on people who are appointed to be our communicators, not people whose gifts are in music and worship.

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## **Reflect**

1. Why is it important to be intentional about making Communion a special time?
2. How does where we place Communion in our service affect how the congregation experiences it?
3. Does our congregation have a chance to prepare spiritually for Communion? How could we improve in this area?





## Further Resources

*Books and resources to help your church conduct its communion services.*

📖 [BuildingChurchLeaders.com](http://BuildingChurchLeaders.com): Leadership training resources from Christianity Today International.

- “Worship Administration” Best Church Practices
- “Planning the Worship Service” Practical Ministry Skills
- “Worship” Training Theme and PowerPoint

📖 [LeadershipJournal.net](http://LeadershipJournal.net): Leadership training resources from Christianity Today International.

**Calvin Institute of Christian Worship.** [www.calvin.edu/worship/](http://www.calvin.edu/worship/). Promotes the scholarly study of theology, history, and practice of Christian worship.

**An Architecture of Immanence: Architecture for Worship and Ministry Today** by Mark A. Torgerson. The author describes how the design of church space enhances worship, including Communion. (Eerdmans, 2007; ISBN 978-0802832092)

**Christ, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper: Recovering the Sacraments for Evangelical Worship** by Leonard J. Vander Zee. The author advocates a re-appraisal of the sacraments for today’s church, and offers practical ways to include them into worship. (InterVarsity, 2004; ISBN 978-0830827862)

**Designing Worship Together: Models and Strategies for Worship Planning** by Norma deWaal Malefyt and Howard Vanderwell. Offers practical information about planning the worship service as a team. (The Alban Institute, 2005; ISBN 978-1566992961).

**Eucharist: Christ’s Feast with the Church** by Laurence Hall Stookey. This book presents an ecumenical approach to the Eucharist, while emphasizing the Calvinistic strain of the sacrament. (Abingdon Press, 1993; ISBN 978-0687120178)

**The Great Worship Awakening: Singing a New Song in the Postmodern Church** by Robb Redman. The author profiles a revival of liturgical worship traditions, including Communion. (Jossey-Bass, 2002; ISBN 978-0787951269)

**Leading in Prayer: A Workbook for Ministers** by Hughes Oliphant Old. This compendium of liturgical worship prayers includes a chapter on Communion. (Eerdmans, 1995; ISBN 978-0802808219)

**The Lord’s Supper** by Martin Marty. This small book describes the origin of Communion, the role it plays in worship, and how to prepare for the Lord’s Table. (Augsburg Fortress, 1997; ISBN 978-0806633398)

**The Meal That Jesus Gave Us** by N. T. Wright. This book provides an overview of Holy Communion suitable for youth in confirmation classes, recent converts, and adults who want to do more than go through the motions. (Westminster John Knox, 2003; ISBN 978-0664226343)

**Understanding Four Views on the Lord’s Supper** by Russell D. Moore, I. John Hesselink, David P. Scaer, and Thomas A. Baima. In this book, four views of Communion—Baptist, Reformed, Lutheran, and Roman Catholic—are presented in a balanced format. (Zondervan, 2007; ISBN 978-0310262688)