



Community of Christ

Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message and Beliefs

Lesson 7 - Sacraments (part one)

This lesson is based on 'Sharing in Community of Christ' pages 44-50.

Guide Times

- Introduction to Sacraments – 30 minutes
- Communion – 10 minutes
- Ordination – 10 minutes
- Marriage - 10 minutes

Look especially to the sacraments to enrich the spiritual life of the body. Seek for greater understanding of my purposes in these sacred rights and prepare to receive a renewed confirmation of the presence of my spirit in your experiences of worship.

Doctrine and Covenants 158:11c

The sacraments all acts of the assembled body that symbolise God's presence with the church and with each disciple they are not separate from what the church is and what it does rather they are at the core of its ministries.

First Presidency, Community of Christ 2005

Activity 1 - Introduction: Word Clues (5 minutes)

Have 8 slips of paper, each with a sacrament written on them. Have members of the group pick one out in turn and then use first 3 words that come to mind describing the sacrament. 8 in all. Encourage no shouting out until all 3 words have been shared. Expect the words to include labels for people, places, and symbols. As sacraments are shared, give a brief description of each, 2 lines at most. Have a very short discussion about who may have seen each sacrament or who might have been part of it.

When all have been shared start to break it down into components of sacraments as follows.

Activity 2 - Symbols (5 minutes)

Are there any symbols that are precious to you in your family? sporting? events? religious? Draw it and share with the group.

Script (5 minutes)

What is a symbol? Symbols are actions or objects used to represent something else by association, resemblance or convention. Some symbols of faith that represent a divine presence are

- Things e.g. bread, water, olive oil
- Actions e.g. laying on of hands- after a couple of these, you may try asking for examples to the rest of symbols.
- Events e.g. a communion service.
- People e.g. ministers or fellow disciples.
- Communities e.g. congregation.
- Language e.g. covenant, bless.

In faith terms symbols are sometimes referred to as a worldly reality that connects us to the divine. That allows us, as humans, to appreciate the holy. When we are unable to understand or express the infinite reality of God, then symbols become the means by which we bridge our humanness to the spiritual. In the ordinariness of our lives, they become the avenues for interacting with the divine.

All Sacraments involve symbols. The symbols as objects etc in themselves are of base importance it is what they can represent that helps us connect with the holy.

Sharing (5minutes)

Before the class ask a person to briefly share their experience of an infant blessing. (either doing or having done to!) and what relationships they developed in that event. Summing up this experience, draw on the relationship between the person and the minister. Also be sure to draw on the relationship of the congregation, in this case especially the congregation's responsibility to nurture and support the infant.

The corporate act of a sacrament connects us to one another, affirms God's love for all, and binds us to the recipient in the privilege of the experience. The sacraments also shape our identity and community life as followers of Jesus Christ. As we experience the blessings available through the sacraments, we are empowered to share the peace of Jesus and fulfil our mission in the world

Sacraments should be INCLUSIVE; they are accessible to anyone who is a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Discuss (10minutes)

1. How can the celebration of the sacraments be more than just a habit or repetitive act?
2. Why is the congregation's participation vital in the celebration of sacraments?
3. Do we find experiencing the sacraments memorable and meaningful? If so why?

Looking at sacraments in more detail (Approximately 10 minutes each)

Communion

Discuss

Have someone read Luke 22: 14-20 NRSV

What are some other names we use for this sacrament? Lord's Supper, Sacrament, Lord's Table, Eucharist.

What is it? Accept a couple of responses.

This sacrament is the act of partaking of bread and wine in symbolic remembrance of the life, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Typically, although not restricted to, celebrated in a congregation on the first Sunday of the month.

What are the symbols used?

Bread (or such) and wine (or such). This is an example where the symbols can take a different form for the individual situation or for the individual – an example of inclusion.

Prayers – There are several versions that may be used.

Where do these prayers come from? (Doctrine and Covenants 17)

Activity 3

Have prayers prepared and, in the style of Lectio Divina, have someone read the modern combined prayer. Pause, ask the group to listen again, and pick out a word or phrase that stands out to them. Pause, read again, asking the group to consider what this prayer has come to mean to them.

Discuss

1. What is the core meaning of this sacrament?
2. What does it mean that we offer communion to all committed Christians?
3. Referring to the purpose of a symbol we discussed earlier, what are the symbols here representing and what is their purpose?
4. How different might communion look on another continent/culture to ours?
5. Have you ever experienced communion outside of the usual once a month model? Have a couple of people share briefly where and when and what that meant to them.

Ordination

Have someone read Acts 13:1-3

Script

Priesthood is a rather complicated issue and discussion about calling, what kinds of priesthood there are and perimeters of priesthood responsibilities are for another time.

However, in the process of calling to the priesthood, the sacrament of ordination is central.

In the light of what we learnt earlier, what people are involved in ordination?
What symbol(s) is used?

Discuss

1. If you were writing a prayer of ordination, what kinds of things would you include? (thanksgiving, counsel, and blessing)
2. Two ministers lay their hands on the ordinand's head. What is the role of the second person? (To uphold the minister offering the prayer and the ordinand in silent prayer.)
3. Why is important for this sacrament to take place in a corporate worship experience?

Marriage

Script

This sacrament is not the place to re-iterate the pre-marital practical discussions that have already taken place. The sacrament should emphasise the sacred nature of the covenant between two people in the eyes of God. The structure and formality of the wedding service will alter according to culture and custom.

What are the elements of this sacrament? (look for the following answers)

- Christian marriage typically takes place in church (although various cultures may permit specific places of a sacred nature to the couple).
- It is held in public.
- It is in the context of a worship service, with witnesses.
- The couple make vows or promises to love one another.
- In most cultures, it is a legal ceremony but some may require a corresponding civil ceremony to be conducted.
- The ministers offers a charge and if affirmed, pronounces the couple married.
- The minister offers a blessing on the couple.

Discuss

Which part(s) of this service are sacramental? (The vows and blessing?)

Conclusion

Have someone read Doctrine and covenants 163:2b

Generously share the invitation, ministries and sacraments through which people can encounter the living Christ who heals and reconciles through redemptive relationships in sacred community.