



Community of Christ

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

Lesson 8 - Sacraments (part two)

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

Guide Times

- Blessing of Children – 10 minutes
- Universals and Particulars – 20 minutes
- Baptism/Confirmation/Evangelist's Blessing – 15 minutes
- Laying on of Hands for the Sick - 15 minutes

Recap from Lesson 6 - Blessing Of Children (10 minutes)

Prepare beforehand 5 slips of paper each with a core aspect of this sacrament as below.

Read together Mark 10:13-16. Name two observations you have from this scripture.

Have you ever been to an Infant Blessing in Community of Christ?

What did you experience? How did it compare to a baptism or christening in any other denomination?

The core aspects of blessing children are:

- A prayer of blessing offered by two members of priesthood in the context of worship.
- Priesthood standing in for and replicating the actions of Jesus when blessing the children of his day.
- Acknowledging and celebrating the gift of the child.
- Stewardship of love and support from the congregation, family and friends over the child
- Congregational covenant to seek to create a world that blesses all children, is peaceful and just, and surrounds children with love.

Take turns to take a slip of paper out of an envelope/box which will have written on it one of the above. Discuss its meaning and how it personally impacts you.

How do you think infant blessing can be used as a missionary tool? How might you do that?

Have you ever considered having a board displaying information and pictures about infant blessing in your entrance hall?

Universals and Particulars (20minutes)

Script - The concept of universals and particulars is not unique to sacraments but is a useful framework and context for discussion.

Universals refers to the whole of a subject or a category.

In the context of a sacrament, they are the unchangeable characteristics. The core of the act, everlasting, never changing core aspects.

Particulars are the distinctives, those things that are particular to the individual sacraments that may change according to situation, culture and context.

Sacramental universals include:

- Connection to God and God's creation
- Interaction between humanity and God
- Connection to past, present and future generations
- Recognition of God's grace and saving activity among us
- Acknowledgement of the Holy Spirit in the midst of the ordinary
- Covenant between humans and the Divine and the Divine with humans.

Sacramental Particulars include:

- A prescribed ritual or procedure to be followed (kneeling for communion prayers, laying on of hands, anointing with oil, immersion in water)
- Physical objects or emblems to be used in the ritual (oil, water, bread, juice)
- Prescribed words or prayers

Example

A lady who converted to Community of Christ as an adult was overjoyed to celebrate communion as we practice it. She attended the Denton congregation. However, one day she raised with me the fact that during communion ministers were always served first. To her this seemed contrary to the idea of priesthood as servant ministry. Having discussed this further the congregation changed their practice and that, in turn, influenced practice at mission centre events and throughout the British Isles. This particular had come from traditional practice and as such was open to sympathetic change.

Discuss

What sacramental particulars do you experience in your congregation? (think of a sacrament and break it down if that helps)

What cultural changes might be made, in the light of the above to someone, in Africa, Australia or your congregation? e.g. bread and wine, serving style, presentation of emblems.

Do you think we expect other cultures to conform to western ideas of sacramental practice?

How did lockdown influence our view of this? e.g. remote worship, using our own 'bread and wine', not being in same room to share.

If a congregation decided to celebrate communion every week, would that change universals or particulars? (particulars)

When else might you share in communion other than Sunday worship? (Anytime Community of Christ Christians meet together in the presence of a priesthood member.)

How do you decide which prayer option to use in communion?

Baptism/Confirmation/Evangelist's Blessing (15 minutes)

(Sharing in Community of Christ pages 44-50)

Have the group divide into 3 groups/pairs. Each group will discuss a sacrament. Provide the corresponding list of questions to each group.

Group 1. Baptism

(Take it in turns to read this script)

Read John 3: 3-5. In this scripture Jesus tells Nicodemus that in order to enter the Kingdom of God they must be born of water and spirit.

This phrase is often referred to as being born again. We leave our country or tribe of birth behind and become citizens of the Kingdom of God.

'Baptism requires personal faith in Jesus. It is a response to God's love expressed through Jesus Christ..... Those who seek to follow Jesus through the waters of baptism must know and live the principles shared in the Sermon on the Mount..... building our life on the rock of Christ teachings. Baptism is publicly testifying that you are choosing to follow Jesus with all of your heart mind and strength. This is a decision that marks a significant point in the process of repentance from all that is selfish, violent and unjust..... It is a step requiring personal and informed decisions. No one can decide for us.' (The Sacraments: Symbol, Meaning and Discipleship. Bolton and Gardner).

Discuss

Why do you think Community of Christ practices baptism by full immersion? (Jesus' example; symbolic of washing away sin)

Thinking back to the previous lesson, what symbols are involved and what do they represent?

Activity

Typically, the participant is asked if they are willing to take upon them the name of Jesus Christ prior to immersion. Pause and think for a while, or write down, what other questions you think might be asked?

Group 2. Confirmation

Script

In the sacrament of confirmation, elders placed their hands on the head of the new disciple and one offers a special prayer. The prayer of confirmation seeks God's blessing to help the new member grow in their covenant and generously share their giftedness in support of the church's mission. Confirmation supports the individual become a disciple and member as part of a congregation and worldwide community. Elders acknowledge the presence of God through the Holy Spirit and may call upon the gift of the Holy Spirit in order to continue to support the individual through their life.

Discuss

In a religious community, is it important to have a position of 'membership'? If so, why? Confirmation usually takes place as a part of a worship experience. Is that necessary? What are the advantages? Is there a time when this might not occur? What are the universals and particulars of confirmation?

Group 3. Evangelists blessing

Discuss

What do you know about Evangelists blessings?
Have any of the group had an evangelist blessing? If so, would they be willing to share? (You may ask someone prior to the class to be ready to share. At what age? Why? Who? What are their feelings about it, through their life and now?)
Do you think evangelists blessings are 'shrouded in secrecy'? If so, why might that be?

Script

An evangelist blessing is a prayer of blessing offered by an Evangelist within the priesthood of Community of Christ. (Historically it was known as a 'patriarchal blessing'. Primarily this was because the priesthood member was called patriarch evangelist. In more recent years the term evangelist has been used.)

Evangelist blessings can be offered for an individual, family or congregation.

Individual blessings are typically not held in the context of worship, however there should always be a witness to the blessing, typically someone who is recording the words. The evangelist will place his or her hands on the head of the candidate and offers words of thanksgiving, affirmation, counsel and blessing. Usually, the evangelist and candidate would meet prior to the blessing as many times as thought appropriate. Prayerful preparation would be expected from both the evangelist and participant(s)

It would be a similar process for the blessing of families or congregations. In the case of the latter the prayer would be offered in the context of worship.

Discuss

Has your congregation had an evangelist blessing? Did you witness it?

When was the last time you heard it read or referred to?

Should every congregation have an evangelist blessing?

Can you have more than one blessing? (yes)

After 15 minutes rejoin the main group.

Laying on of Hands for the Sick (15 minutes)

Script

Also known as 'administration', this sacrament, as with others, mimics the ministry of Jesus.

Jesus blessed those who were hurting in many ways. Today the priesthood lay their hands on the participant's head. Initially one of them anoints the participant's head with consecrated oil, after which the second minister offers a prayer for healing.

The oil, usually olive oil, has no magical healing qualities but will have been consecrated by prayer. Only a drop or two of the oil is used in the anointing, usually on the participant's forehead.

Historically the laying on of hands for the sick was conducted in a private space. This may still be the case when offering this prayer in hospital or a home, however, recently we have come to understand the benefits of offering this prayer in the context of worship or surrounded by those the participant wants. In this way the prayer becomes one that others support.

Discuss

What constitutes 'sick' in this context?

How does our more modern understanding of seeking wholeness in body, mind and spirit influence this sacrament?

Who can ask for administration? (Anyone)

How would you define 'healing' in this context? Is there ever a time when healing means something other than being made better? (Yes, sometimes end of life can be considered healing. Also, medical treatment should be pursued alongside spiritual blessing.)

What impact does this have on the 'readiness' of ministers to lead sacraments?

Once again be sure to give opportunity for testimony regarding laying on of hands for the sick.

If you wish to extend the discussion on sacraments with the group you may like to consider the following topics:

- Sacraments as opportunities for witness and sharing.
- Sacraments as tools for reconciliation.
- The ministry of hospitality shared through the sacraments.