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REPORT TO THE CHURCH ON THE LORD'S SUPPER

RECEIVED by the General Assembly

In its major study on the nature of the Church within the tradition of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Commission on Theology has sent reports to the General Assembly, the regions, and the congregations on the themes of ecclesiology (1979), mission (1981), authority (1983), ministry (1985), and baptism (1987). These reports, and the study books published by Christian Board of Publication on the same themes, constitute an important body of theological literature among the Disciples in the last decades of the 20th century. Over the past two years (1989-1991) the Commission explored the theology and practice of the Lord's Supper. Their report to the Tulsa General Assembly (1991) identifies some of the essential meanings of the Eucharist and some of the practices that require thoughtful reflection by the whole church, especially the congregations. In early 1992 a study book, expanding this report, written by James O. Duke and Richard L. Harrison, Jr., will be published by the Christian Board of Publication for churchwide study.

I. INTRODUCTION

"As members of the Christian Church, We confess that... At the table of the Lord we celebrate with thanksgiving the saving acts and presence of Christ." These words in the Preamble to The Design for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) remind us of the significance of the Lord's Supper in Christian worship. The affirmation that the church today, as in apostolic times, is called to gather at the Lord's Table on the first day of the week has been a prominent and enduring feature of Disciples church life. Indeed, it is a mark of our identity as a church. As Disciples, we recognize that the Lord's Supper is a means by which we are nourished by the love of God in Jesus Christ and through that love are made one with one another and with the Church Universal.

That this is the significance of the Lord's Supper is a truth that Disciples are made aware of perhaps more surely by our partaking of the Supper than by any statements we make about it. Who of us has not experienced at the Table the reality of God's good news and of our oneness in Christ so deeply and intensely that the words we use to speak of it seem to fall short of their mark? The Lord's Supper means more than the church is ever quite able to say about it.

The sense that the Lord's Supper is an act of inexhaustible spiritual richness is one that Disciples share in common with Christians of all times and places. The accounts of the Lord's Supper and the references to its observance recorded in the New Testament indicate how many powerful meanings it conveyed to early Christians. The desire to celebrate and express the Table's significance for the church has led faithful Christians over the centuries to develop a wide variety of forms of worship, devotional meditations, and formulations of doctrine.

As Disciples we too join with the Church Universal in seeking to acknowledge the significance of the Lord's Supper in ways that are in keeping with the witness of Scripture, with the God-given unity of all Christians, and with the love of God for all the world. We too wish to make it known by all we say and do with respect to the Table that God's Good News in Jesus Christ is at the very heart of our faith and our calling as a church.

For precisely this reason, how we celebrate the Lord's Supper (Eucharist, Holy Communion) and what we teach about it are never to be taken for granted. These are matters deserving thoughtful consideration and reconsidered ever and again. Like all Christians, Disciples are led to ask and to respond to a question of faith: are our worship practices, our teachings, and our theological reflections adequate testimonies to the significance of the Lord's Supper?

This question arose early on in the Campbell-Stone movement. It was given thoughtful consideration then, and at other times in our church's history. Concern for the vitality of our worship and dedication to the cause of Christian unity gives the Disciples good reason to reconsider the question once again. The Theology Commission of the Council on Christian Unity, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) offers the thoughts which follow as an aid for reflection and a stimulus for further study and conversation within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

II. THE DISCIPLES HERITAGE

Early Disciples teaching and practice regarding the Lord's Supper were very much bound up with the situation of the churches at the turn of the nineteenth century. The ties can be said to have been both negative and positive. On the negative side were "protests" on the part of the Campbell-Stone movement against what were perceived as mistaken or inappropriate views of the Lord's Supper current among Christians of the day, Protestant and Catholic alike. On the positive side were proposals for "a new reformation" of doctrine and practice. The protests as well as the proposals grew out of commit-

ments to the very same principles to which the traditions of the churches claimed to be beholden, foremost among them the authority of the biblical witness to the faith and order of the apostolic church.

The protests of the early Disciples were directed against any and every view of the Lord's Supper judged to be at variance with its significance for the church. They objected when it seemed: (1) that the act of communion was viewed as if it were a human work performed in order to earn God's favor or an activity that dispensed its spiritual benefits apart from faith; (2) that preaching alone, or perhaps some private experience of the Holy Spirit working within the soul, was viewed as a substitute for weekly observance of the Supper; and (3) that the churches taught their creeds, theologies, and orders of ministry in ways that hindered Christians from gathering at the Table.

The varied protests were at root the same. Disciples did not want Christians to forget that the Lord's Supper is a means by which God's people are nourished by the love of God in Jesus Christ and through that love are made one with one another and with the Church Universal.

The essence of their proposals for reform was, as Alexander Campbell put it, that "faith is then the PRINCIPLE, and ordinances the MEANS, of all spiritual enjoyment; because all the wisdom, power, love, mercy, compassion, or GRACE OF GOD is in the ordinances of the Kingdom of Heaven; and if all grace be in them it can only be enjoyed through them." (Christian System, 5th ed., pp. 148-49) Elsewhere he stated, "the current reformation if conspicuous now or hereafter for any thing, must be so because of the conspicuity it gives the Bible and its ordinances as the indispensable moral means of spiritual life and health." (Millennial Harbinger [January 1843, p. 9]).

By the term "ordinance" Campbell referred to "commemorative" or "monumental" institutions which were appointed—ordained—by God to be perpetual declarations of God's saving action in Jesus Christ on behalf of sinful creatures. Each ordinance served to convey "a special grace peculiar to itself; so that no one can be substituted for another, or neglected, without the lack, or loss, of the blessing in the Divine will and grace connected with it." (Millennial Harbinger [December 1855, p. 678]). One such ordinance was the Lord's Supper; its "special grace," is that of nourishing, strengthening, and hence perfecting of the faith and unity of baptized believers gathered in worship.

To speak of the Lord's Supper as an "ordinance" by which Christians declare and enjoy the grace of God, as Campbell and those who followed him and Stone did, was to deal with terms and to address issues which were, and still are, commonplaces of theological discussion. How to identify, to conduct, and to give a theological account of acts such as Baptism and the Lord's Supper which, as "visible signs of an invisible grace," are called "the sacraments" of the church have been topics of concern throughout history. What early Disciples had to say about these matters were variations on themes especially well-known to and often debated by members of the extended family of the Reformed churches, rooted in the Reformation led by John Calvin and others.

These debates, and even more the divisions they occasioned, led Campbell and others to shy away from the word "sacrament" and other terms associated with issues of theological controversy. Conformity to biblical precedent and language, they maintained, was the best means by which to restore the church to health, peace, and unity. Yet in fact the word "ordinance" was not itself a biblical term; it appeared in the Westminster Confession and in Reformed theology generally as a synonym for "sacrament." In short, early Disciples drew upon the resources of Scripture and Tradition alike in order to direct the churches to worship practices and teachings which would do justice to the fundamental theological significance of the Lord's Supper.

In their own worship, early Disciples clearly granted the Lord's Supper the special status as a visible sign and seal of God's grace, a status traditionally termed "sacramental." In light of apostolic precedent, they regarded its celebration to be the one essential act of Sunday worship; congregations gathered at the Table even when they had no one available to preach a sermon. Insistence upon weekly communion made the Disciples a peculiar household among nineteenth-century Christians. It made them seem more in tune with the wishes of such Reformed leaders as John Calvin than were those who avowed a strict "Calvinism," and at the same time more in line with the emphases of "catholic" and "sacramental" churches (Roman Catholic, Anglican-Episcopalian, and Eastern Orthodox) than of their Protestant kin. In addition, in permitting each congregation to worship with due regard for reverence, decency, and good order but without reliance upon a standardized liturgy, they seemed to be decidedly "free church" reformers.

III. ORIENTATION TO THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

The strengths of this mix of resources—biblical, catholic, protestant, and "free"—have been amply displayed throughout the course of Disciples history. Weekly observance of the Lord's Supper in particular, and with it an awareness of the "centrality of communion" in worship, has proved of inestimable value to us. It has served to keep us mindful of the gospel and of our oneness in Christ even when

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all else may have seemed to fail. Realizing its value, this practice is one which Disciples may rightly prize for our own church and heartily commend to others in our ecumenical dialogues and relationships.

By the same token, this mix of resources must, like any other, be responsibly tended. Concerned to express the significance of the Lord's Supper, the churches have given careful attention to their forms of worship. For the same reason they have also developed theological accounts, i.e., doctrines (teachings), of what takes place at the Table. A wide variety of such doctrines is found in the creeds, the confessions, and the theological works of the churches.

These doctrines are basically, like all theological efforts, examples of faith seeking understanding. They are intended to remind members of the church that in the Lord's Supper, as in Baptism, there is a connection between the visible signs of the rite and the invisible, spiritual reality they signify, as well as a vital relationship between the rite itself and the benefits it offers to faithful participants. This connection and this relationship are always, and inevitably, discussed in works of church theology dealing with the Lord's Supper.

Unfortunately, the doctrines of the Lord's Supper developed by churches have all too often led to confusion rather than edification, to discord and even division rather than peace and unity, to exclusivistic and sometimes arrogant dealings with Christians of differing views. The impulse to avoid the harmful effects of theology is deep and strong in the Disciples heritage. Disciples refuse to treat any doctrine or "theory" of the Lord's Supper as a "test of fellowship," that is, as a justification for denying sincere and otherwise worthy Christians the right to partake of the sacrament or for barring the way to Christian unity.

This is a healthy impulse, rooted as it is in an awareness that the Lord's Supper is a God-given means for enlivening Christian faith and promoting Christian reconciliation. Thus it becomes all the more regrettable when this impulse too—no less than officially authorized statements of doctrine—leads to mistaken views that harm the church: for example, that Disciples simply do not care if people believe anything, or nothing, with respect to the meaning of the Lord's Supper, or that we need not bother to give any theological account of our practices, or that each congregation may say and do whatever it pleases in worship, with no concern for questions of theology.

Faithfulness to Scripture, respect for the resources of our church's history, concern for the vitality of our corporate worship, and commitment to the cause of Christian unity require us to teach what we, as Disciples, understand the significance of the Lord's Supper to be. We are also to address, in light of this understanding, the various issues related to the form of our worship which are raised in our local churches and our ecumenical involvements.

IV. BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL MEANINGS OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

In what is said and done at the Lord's Supper Christians have the opportunity to experience an extraordinary array and richness of meanings. The traditional English terms used for the rite highlight a number of its key characteristics: it is the Lord's Supper (I Cor. 11:20), but also the Eucharist ("thanksgiving"), "Holy Communion" (I Cor. 10:16), "the Breaking of the Bread" (Acts 2:42, Lk. 24:35), and the Mass (beginning with the dismissal of those preparing for baptism and concluding with the sending out of baptized believers into the world for Christian service). But these names are neither a clear nor full indication of its manifold and multi-layered meaning. Disciples attentive to the witness of the New Testament will not fail to acknowledge and to reflect upon at least five strands of meaning woven together in the liturgy.

(1) **Remembrance:** As Paul recounts the tradition known to him, he speaks of remembrance; "This do in remembrance of me" (I Cor. 11:23-26). The Greek term used here, **anamnesis**, certainly involves memory, but it carries special force. It is not merely a recollection of something long gone and hence remote from us, but a re-presentation which makes what is past a vivid and lively reality here and now. Jesus Christ himself with all he has accomplished for us and for all creation is present in this **anamnesis**.

In remembering as **anamnesis** we go beyond thinking of an event that took place in bygone days. Through this joyful celebration God's saving acts and promises in Jesus Christ are re-called from the past; they are brought before our hearts and minds with stark immediacy. A Spiritual coming down from Black Christian tradition captures this meaning well: in asking "were you there when they crucified my Lord," the answer "yes" is already given.

And so it is that in reenacting the Lord's Supper the line dividing past and present is erased. We become eye-witnesses of, indeed participants in, the event. The passion of Jesus Christ, "for the remission of sins," is re-presented to us. We join the company of disciples, i.e., the followers of Christ of every time and place, who gather to share this meal with him. To "remember" the occasion in which God's covenant of love was renewed is to share in the renewal of that covenant. The Supper strengthens us, and all who partake of it, for our life-journeys of discipleship.

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(2) **Communion of the Faithful:** The Lord's Supper is a time of communion (**koinonia**). We commune with Jesus Christ and with all others who follow him. Here our Savior is present with us. For centuries Christians have debated about how to describe and explain the character of his presence, and Disciples certainly vary in their understandings of it. What we hold in common with all Christian traditions is that at the Table we encounter the Risen Christ.

We most often speak of this communion in quite simple terms. The Table is not ours, but the Lord's. Christ Jesus is the host; it is he who invites us to be guests at this meal, to sup and commune with him. Likewise, when we gather, we commune not only with him but with all those who have responded to his invitation. We are brought into a spiritual unity with all Christians, not only those with us at that very moment but with those of all times and all places.

(3) **Sacrifice.** That the passion of Christ is a sacrifice offered up for the forgiveness of sins is a theme that has been important to Christians from the earliest church to today. It has been variously interpreted, and some of these interpretations have given rise to a great deal of controversy. Within the Protestant heritage, for example, there has been strong opposition to the view that those who preside at the Table are to carry the title of priests, i.e., those who offer up sacrifices, and that they act in order to repeat Christ's sacrifice again and again.

For Disciples, heirs of the Protestant Reformation, the meaning of the sacrifice at the Table is understood primarily in the sense that we commemorate the unique sacrifice made once and for all by Jesus Christ himself. Among the many insights conveyed to us by this theme, three are especially important.

First, a great price has been paid for us, for the remission of our sins and for our salvation. We are neither required nor even able to do anything to add to what Jesus has already done. The work of Christ is a grace, an undeserved gift, freely offered to us. Second, it is not presiding officers of the ceremony but the whole people of God who, in response to the sacrifice of Christ, offer up our own sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving, a giving of ourselves to God who brings good news to sinners. Third, by the sacrificial life and death of Jesus, our own lives are given new direction: we are called to self-giving service for the sake of the church and of the whole of God's creation.

(4) **Unity.** The Lord's Supper signifies that the unity of all believers in Christ is at once a reality and a goal yet to be attained. The founders of the Disciples, notably Alexander Campbell and Barton Warren Stone, reminded their followers that the communion service demonstrated that the oneness of all believers was a fact. As worshippers receive bread from one loaf, broken for them, and share from one cup, poured for them, they were knit together in one body, in one faith, in one Lord and Savior.

They also taught that the Lord's Supper was a powerful means by which Christians of various traditions and theological views might come to a heightened awareness of and commitment to the unity of all. Further, in the struggle which led Disciples to affirm open communion, welcoming to the Table all followers of Christ regardless of denominational and creedal affiliation, a profound sense of the unity of the church is expressed.

(5) **The Feast of the Reign of God.** At the Lord's Table we proclaim Jesus Christ "until he comes." This phrase is one of many in Scripture pointing us toward the future, toward Christ's coming again (cf. Mt. 26:20, I Cor. 11:26). The Lord's Supper is an anticipation, and indeed a foretaste, of the joyful festal meal celebrating this momentous event. It calls us forward to the time when God's will for the whole of creation will be accomplished and God's reign will come in its fullness and perfection. It directs us toward that age when we live together, as God would have us do, in justice, harmony, peace, and joy.

This sign of the future cannot fail but make us painfully aware that at present we and the world we live in are far from what God intends for the creation. We realize that many sisters and brothers are not present with us at the Table, and how many living under conditions of poverty, injustice, and oppression will go without any meal at all to nourish them.

To partake of the Lord's Supper is to experience a new and confident hope in God's ultimate victory over evil. With this hope comes a mandate to care for the well-being of the world and all its inhabitants. Jesus ate with publicans and notorious sinners, and instructed his followers to care for the poor, the needy, the outcasts, and those who are "the least" in the eyes of the world. Thus the foretaste of joy which we experience at the Table is not only a comfort to us but a challenge. It prepares us to undertake our mission of witness and service in the world.

Although these five themes certainly do not exhaust the full meaning of the Lord's Supper, they convey messages too important to be neglected in the worship and teaching of our church. Each and every one of them deserves to be included in our communion services, in our preaching, and in our teaching of the faith.

It is also important for Disciples to give thought to the distinctive status and character of the Lord's Supper in the Christian community. The sacraments of the church are God-given means for the proclamation of the gospel which come down to us from the apostolic witness to Jesus Christ. Unlike other forms of proclamation such as preaching, they are not only a telling of the gospel story and its meaning but are a visible and tangible enactment of the gospel. Here words, actions, and physical elements combine to disclose God's gracious love in Jesus Christ.

God's gracious love has been and is revealed on earth through physical media: in the incarnation, by the humanity of Jesus; in baptism, by water; in the Lord's Supper, by bread and wine. In the Lord's Supper, these quite ordinary material elements necessary to sustain life are distributed to and received by the participants, and consumed. Partaking of the one bread and the common cup becomes, by God's grace, the occasion for spiritual nourishment and renewal of faith. By this sign, made in conjunction with prayers and the unfailing use of the words of institution, the reality of God's gracious love in Jesus Christ is signified and experienced anew.

The reality is all-embracing; it encompasses the past, present, and future. In the Lord's Supper the dimensions of time come to a point of convergence. The death and resurrection of Jesus are recalled (I Cor. 11:23-25) and the coming Christ (I Cor. 11:26) is anticipated in the midst of the experience of the presence of the risen Christ among his people (Lk. 24:30-31).

Precisely because the reality of divine grace in Jesus Christ is not only signified but thereby experienced anew in the Lord's Supper, the bread and the wine are by no means "mere" or "empty" signs which give rise by free association to various subjective feelings and thoughts within those who partake of them. What occurs is communion with Jesus Christ, who is also present, with the faithful, as host and as redemptive power.

His presence is not physical as in his earthly life; nor do the bread and the wine change their material properties or become something other than signs. Yet the connection between the signs and the reality they signify and the vital relationship between the rite itself and the benefits it conveys to those who receive it in faith are such that Christians rightly proclaim that Jesus Christ, who was crucified and raised from the dead, is with us at the Table.

V. ISSUES OF PRACTICE

In light of all that we know and may still learn of the significance of the Lord's Supper, Disciples no less than other churches have cause to consider the adequacy of our worship practices. Both our actions and our words are to draw those who commune into the enlarged sphere of meaning which the service opens up and to encourage receptivity to the rich spiritual benefits it makes available.

"Free church" worship such as ours, which does not rely on a standardized liturgy, provides us the opportunity to express our faith and to refresh our worship by judiciously drawing upon the resources to be found in Scripture, the Christian Tradition, and contemporary life. Theologically thoughtful uses of this freedom direct us to seek out forms of language and practice that affirm continuity with historic patterns of apostolic, Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox worship, even as they reflect the best of contemporary insights into the meaning of Christian faith in our times. Particularly worthy of commendation as a resource for celebrating the Lord's Supper is the Disciples work *Thankful Praise: A Resource for Christian Worship* (edited by Keith Watkins [St. Louis: CBP Press, 1987]).

Several issues, however, are in need of careful study and further reflection by Disciples today. Among them are these:

(1) **The Word and the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.** In the Protestant tradition, the Lord's Supper is always to be celebrated within the context of the corporate worship of the faithful in which the Word of God revealed in scripture is read, its meaning(s) explicated in preaching, and then proclaimed in the prayers and actions at the Table. These are concerns that deserve emphasis, lest the Lord's Supper be mistaken for an act of personal religiosity or corrupted by subjective feelings and thoughts unrelated to its central focus, which is the Gospel concerning Jesus Christ.

The Sunday worship of Disciples congregations follows the pattern of joining Word and Sacrament. On occasion, however, the Lord's Supper is observed as a separate form of worship, often at the close of some special gathering or meeting. In such cases there is always opportunity to hold Word and Sacrament together, and this should be done. In offering an invitation to commune, a prayer of thanksgiving, or a meditation, the scriptural message of the communion service may be recounted and reflected upon.

(2) **The Place of the Lord's Supper in the Order of Worship.** Attention needs to be given to the place of the Supper in the order of worship. Disciples in their freedom have followed various customs.

It seems that in the early years of our history the Lord's Supper was generally placed at the conclusion, as the climax, of Sunday worship, in keeping with the worship traditions of most churches. Later in the

nineteenth century, however, many American churches were led, for various reasons, to place the sermon after the Lord's Supper; many Disciples congregations adopted this custom. The sermon, preached by one individual, and the response to it by individuals making a public confession of faith became the climax of worship, in place of the action of the community gathered around the Table as a corporate body.

Whatever its values may be, this custom has the effect of elevating the pulpit over the Table by making the Lord's Supper preparatory to the sermon. It runs counter to the practice in the history of worship since apostolic times. The reading and preaching of the Word of God calls forth among those who worship a decision for or rededication to the life of faith. Thereafter, the faithful approach the Table to make and receive a sign and seal of the Gospel, to commune with the Savior Christ Jesus and all of his disciples, and to receive from this spiritual food new strength and vitality for undertaking our calling of Christian service in the world. Thus the Lord's Supper is the fitting climax to our public worship.

(3) The Invitation to Communion. Jesus Christ himself invites his disciples to his Table. The invitation offered by our worship leader(s) serves only to make Christ's call known. Many churches have at some time in the past—and even now at present—made a conscious attempt to restrict the invitation to those who are deemed “qualified” to participate. The use of creeds and other specifically denominational criteria for this purpose has been challenged and set aside by Disciples. Thus it is our custom as a community of faith to invite all baptized Christians to partake of the Lord's Supper with us.

Here, however, two points are to be recalled. The first is that each of the church's sacraments has a special character as well as a special benefit all its own. Baptism is a sign and seal of our incorporation into the body of Christ; the Lord's Supper is a sign and seal of the spiritual nourishment we receive as members of that body. Hence it is for Christians, as members of the body of Christ through baptism (whatever its form), that the Table is intended.

The second point, related and critical to our understanding of the first, is this. It is not ours to investigate and decide, as though the judgment were our own, who is and is not truly a follower of Christ worthy to come to the Table with us. This is a matter of faith, and conscience, beyond our reckoning. As Disciples, we invite anyone of sincere faith who wills to come to the Table, for we believe that we no less than others are offered there mercy, forgiveness, and new life.

(4) Confession of Sin and Absolution. The path to the Lord's Table is marked by an awareness of our utter unworthiness of the love of God. Christians find that our experience and measure of understanding of this love as a forgiving love are made powerful when we confess our sins, as individuals and as a community, and hear God's Word of acceptance. To drink worthily of the cup filled with Christ's blood poured out for the remission of sins, we drink repentantly, with humility and with thanksgiving. Hence the opportunity to confess our sins and to hear the promise of their forgiveness in Jesus Christ is essential in our worship. Indeed, without forgiveness there are some who will never feel themselves worthy to partake of the Supper. Provision for the confession of sins and for words of assurance may be made, whether by corporate statements or by prayers, early in the worship service or as the community prepares to come to the Table.

(5) The Question of Presidency. Who is to preside at the Lord's Supper is another of the important issues to be dealt with by Disciples today. Various customs and views can be found among us. There is widespread acknowledgement that the elders, now by and large understood to be “lay (non-ordained) officers” of the congregation, are to play a prominent role at the Table, offering prayers and in some cases proclaiming the words of institution. They are generally but by no means always joined by the ordained minister, who may or may not preside. Regrettably, in some cases the minister is excluded from serving, much less presiding, at the Table.

Leadership at the Table is not a prerogative given to an ordained minister alone but it is a responsibility shared by the ministers and elders of the congregation, and by other church members whom the congregation authorizes to serve the community in this role. This is a conviction for which sound theological and practical reasons can be given. But often discussions and practices regarding the roles of the elders and the minister reflect misunderstandings of our heritage.

This is especially true in any case of the exclusion of the minister from any leadership role in the administration of the Lord's Supper. First of all, the office of elder spoken of by Alexander Campbell, Barton Warren Stone, and other early Disciples was understood to be one carried out by those who were duly appointed and fully recognized as the ministers of the church. It was an ordained office, in that ordination was the formal ceremony that confirms appointment and recognition. The current arrangement in which there is an ordained minister and several “lay” elders developed only gradually thereafter, as ordination became granted ever more increasingly to elders—and evangelists—with a gift (and/or formal theological education) for preaching, teaching, and pastoral oversight.

Even today elders are appointed by our congregations to a ministry of congregational oversight, including service at the Lord's Table. This is a form of ministry even if it is not any longer understood to bear all the responsibilities of ordained ministry or formally acknowledged by an act of ordination.

Second, Disciples follow the Protestant tradition generally in emphasizing the importance of the priesthood of all believers. Our heritage affirms that all believers are eligible, by virtue of their baptism, to be chosen by the church to serve at the Table. The "priesthood" belongs to the people, the **laos** (laity, the people) of God. It is by the church's choosing that one or more of their number may lead them in worship, whether or not a formal service such as ordination is held to confirm that appointment.

Precisely for these reasons, however, the ordained minister of the congregation is not to be denied a role in administering the Lord's Supper. This practice fails to recall that the ordained minister is an elder of the church, charged with and appointed for its pastoral leadership. To refuse to allow the minister to serve at the Table is to deny the collegiality of pastors and elders.

Ordained ministers are also part of the laos, the people, and hence they too can be appointed to serve at the Table. And indeed they serve in many ways as the representatives of the whole people of God. Among Disciples as well as in ecumenical settings the ordained ministry is often referred to as a representative ministry. Thus it is altogether appropriate for the ordained minister to offer or to lead the congregation in offering the words of institution. Given our commitment to the cause of Christian unity, selecting the ordained minister to preside at the Table is of special importance: those who lead us in our worship at the Table do so by appointment, and ordination is the most universally acknowledged act by which the churches formally mark such appointment to their public, representative ministries.

(6) Prayers at the Table. Communion prayers, however many are offered, should include as a basic element the offering of thanksgiving. Christians here express gratitude for God's love, for the life and death of Jesus Christ, and for the gift of salvation. At this time the meaning of Communion as Eucharist, thanksgiving, is expressed with special poignancy.

The prayers at the Table are also to include a petition calling for the presence of the Holy Spirit, through whose power the bread and wine provide spiritual nourishment for the refreshing of our faith, the upbuilding of the body of Christ, and our living as faithful servants of Jesus Christ in the world. This part of the prayer is often called the invocation or the **epiclesis**, both words meaning "to call upon." It is also appropriate in communion prayers to focus on our remembrance of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, our anticipation of God's ultimate victory, our awareness of the presence of Jesus Christ among us, and our appreciation for the richness of meaning conveyed by the Lord's Supper.

In many churches, and many Disciples congregations, the Lord's Prayer is included in the liturgy of the Table. It is a way by which the entire congregation may be prepared for and drawn into what takes place when we partake of the Supper. In the worship of Disciples, the Lord's Prayer most naturally comes after an invitation to communion or in the context of a communion meditation.

(7) The Words of Institution. The unfailing use of the biblical words of institution in the Lord's Supper focuses our devotions on the significance of the sacrament. It is also a testimony to our unity with all Christians of all times and in all places, for no specific act of worship is more universally observed by Christians than this. The words are those of Scripture (Mt. 26:26-29, Mk. 14:22-25, Lk. 22:14-19, or 1 Cor. 11:23-26), each and every one of which is a capsule summary of the primary theological meanings of the Supper. Repeating those words time after time make it known that what we do here is not ordinary eating and drinking, but a sharing with Jesus Christ and with the whole community of faith in the meal that celebrates and communicates the Gospel.

(8) Elements and Actions of the Lord's Supper. Disciples, like Protestants generally and following the lead of Alexander Campbell in particular, are well aware that the elements and actions of the Lord's Supper are "symbolic," and tend to view them in rather rationalistic terms. But the Protestant heritage and Campbell himself had an appreciation of the import and power of living symbols more keen than that customary among Disciples today.

It is to be recalled that how we conduct the Lord's Supper may have the effect of heightening or diminishing our experience of its meanings. We would do well to set aside the sterile practice of using tiny, individual, and pre-cut pieces of bread and little cups of juice or wine in favor of loaves of bread that can be broken in the sight of all the congregation and cups that can be filled and then shared either by dipping or sipping.

At the very least, and as Campbell advocated, we should allow believers to see a loaf of bread "significantly" broken as the scriptural words of institution are spoken. Likewise, as worshippers hear the words, "poured out for you," they are to see the fruit of the vine being poured out into a chalice from

which they are to partake. There is to be a discernible relationship between what is said and what is done by symbolic action at the Table.

The use of a loaf of bread (whether leavened or unleavened) and of a significant amount of wine or grape juice is a visible and tangible reminder that God's self-revelation occurs in and through earthly media. God condescends to meet us where we are, on earth, and as we are, creatures who are taught and powerfully moved by our sensory experiences. When at the Lord's Supper the breaking of bread, the pouring of wine, and the sharing together of food that sustains us are joined with God's Word of Good News and the power of the Spirit, we are nourished by the love of God in Jesus Christ and through that love are made one with another and with the Church Universal.

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