



sacramental simplicity

*Baptism and the Lord's Supper and their practice
at Christ Community Church*

*On the first day of the week,
when we were gathered together to break bread...*

Acts 20.7

At Christ Community Church, we celebrate the sacrament of the Lord's Supper weekly, in keeping with apparent practice of the New Testament Church. As a result of this commitment, many who visit/attend Christ Community find themselves regularly wrestling with what the Lord's Supper means, why it is important, and how it relates to the sacrament of baptism. More pragmatically, because we intentionally bring our Covenant Kids back into the worship service during the Lord's Supper (they have been in age-appropriate teaching during the Sermon), questions arise as to what is required in order to partake, at what age/faith/maturity children should participate, and if the process of discernment is left to the parents or to the church.

The goal of this brief document is to help you and your family clearly understand our sacramental worship, leading you to rest on the finished work of Jesus as it is applied to us through the Gospel. We long to faithfully walk this journey with you and your family, that you might be nourished by a deeper understanding and experience of what IS one of the most glorious aspects of Christian worship!

As a confessional church, Christ Community Church subscribes to the Westminster Confession of Faith (1643-1647) as subordinate to the Word of God, but containing the system of doctrine revealed in the Scriptures. As such, additional pragmatic and theological descriptions of baptism and the Lord's Supper can be found there.

participating in the Lord's Supper at Christ Community

According to 1 Corinthians 10 and consistent with historic, reformed, protestant churches, at Christ Community we "fence the table" as being for those who have publicly declared their allegiance to Jesus and their union with his church on earth. The Lord's Supper is a familial, pre-emptive meal for the people of God who anticipate feasting together in the new creation, with Jesus, through the gospel. Each time we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we rehearse and rest on the death of Jesus for our life of fullness, forgiveness and freedom - forever. **Because the Lord's Supper is singularly about the effective death of Jesus for our sake, we offer the table only to those who have professed faith in Jesus and placed themselves under the authority of a gospel-declaring church (via membership) - so as to publicly unite with his people and walk in redemptive community.**

This "fencing" is for a dual purpose: our desire to glorify God whose gospel of salvation in Jesus must be kept pure; and our affection for those who would otherwise partake apart from faith/understanding. This includes those who are skeptical while honestly weighing the gospel (but not yet embracing Jesus); as well as young children who are not yet able to understand the body of Jesus or declare personal allegiance to Trinity God in a world of competing allegiances.

Thus, we ask that adults and children honor the following in discerning your participation in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper (please reach out to a Christ Community elder for a deeper discussion):

1. The Lord's Supper is freely offered to those who have publicly declared Jesus as the Christ (Savior of sinners and of the world) and united themselves by membership to the visible Church on earth. Such churches must rest on and declare the simple, singular gospel of Jesus Christ as it is revealed in the Word of God.
2. The Lord's Supper should not be taken by those who have never declared allegiance to Jesus alone as Savior, by faith. If you do not understand the gospel or have yet to profess your faith amidst his Church, please refrain from partaking at this time and enable us to walk with you in safe conversation (ask for an elder).
3. The Lord's Supper is properly given after the sacrament of baptism. Throughout the Scriptures, baptism is the initiating sign of entrance into the body of Christ. If you or your children have not been baptized, please refrain from partaking of the sacrament and pursue the elders so that we can *promptly* explain and then celebrate this unbelievably important sign (Romans 6), which can then be followed by a lifetime of sacramental nourishment!
4. The Lord's Supper is entrusted to the church, and as such we desire to partner with parents in discerning the readiness and faith of their covenant children. Please reach out to the elders/pastor to help learn our developing path for your children to enjoyably understand the sacrament and its function in worship as well as its implications in life.

parenting your children toward Sacramental Worship

Over the years, many have asked when their children are ready to participate in the sacrament. One key means of discernment is whether or not your child is already a functional participant in corporate worship. This does not merely mean that they know how to “sit still” in church, or “stand still” when we sing. Rather, this means that to the best of their capacity, they have become little worshipers of God.

On a regular basis, does your child evidence curiosity at what is happening? Have they asked you to explain and pastor them in what worship is? Have you discussed with them Who we are worshiping, Why we are worshiping, and How (songs, Scripture, prayer, confession)? If so, then there is a great likelihood that sacramental participation is a next step.

Many children are not yet at this place, which is OK! If your child regularly “checks out” of worship services, wanting to play with toys or video games (please... no!) or lay down... then they likely need to be disciplined toward worship of God first.

At Christ Community, we desire to equip you to parent your children toward God in worship! As such, we have intentionally placed children in the service for the first 30 minutes so that all of the components of worship revealed in the Word can be experienced as a family with regularity. Historically, this has been called “covenantal” and intergenerational worship - and is the model we see from creation. Children are born worshipers. If we do not train and engage our children to become worshipers of the living triune God, then by nature they will worship something lesser, namely his creation. At Christ Community Church, we hope that parents will use our intentional worship service to lead their children into an awareness of Trinity God, an understanding of the magnitude of the story of his gospel, and an experience of worship that makes sense to them in the context of their family.

To help you parent your children in worship, please consider:

- **talk with them about how worship is multi-directional.** We sing and pray UP to God and he hears! We listen and receive his Word and sacrament (coming DOWN to us), and we are changed! We speak and pray OUT so his people will be encouraged and reminded of truth.
- **worship with your children at home.** Use the previous Sunday’s bulletin to sing, to pray, to read the Bible. Sunday worship is an extension of a worshiping home, which is an extension of worshiping parents!
- **worship with your children at church.** This is critical. Many parents naturally and quite unintentionally end up worshiping “internally” and along with other adults, while their children just sit through a service watching and forming their own opinions. Rather, we encourage you to sit close with your children, whisper to them, guide them, sing with them, help them read along as you watch their view of God GROW!
- **prepare ahead and hold expectations of your children.** While worship is never easy for families with young children, we encourage you to prepare the night before (according to the Old Testament, the Israelites had a “day of preparation” so their Sabbath could be of purpose and rest). Pray in preparation. Lay out clothes the night before. Build up worship for the God who is mindful of us! Then on the day of worship, clarify expectations with your children. What does joyous reverence look like before a KING, who is full of mercy and truth and worthy of joy! *Children thrive with clear preparations and expectations.*
- **continually show them the SHAPE of the gospel story in every worship service.** At Christ Community, the general shape of our service is “Creation-Fall-Redemption-Glory.” This is the story of the gospel (good news) given to us by the God we worship! All of our songs, readings, prayers, and confessions fall into this “shape.”

In its simplest form:

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| We were created to worship a holy God. | (Called to Worship) |
| We have fallen short of holiness to do so. | (Confession of Sin) |
| We are redeemed by grace/faith in Jesus. | (Reminded by Word and Renewed in Spirit) |
| We anticipate eternal glory with God. | (Feasting at the Table in anticipation) |

meaning and mode of the Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper is a wonderful gift from God. In it, we do not so much obediently offer ourselves UP to God in participation. Rather, through it, we receive true, spiritual nourishment and grace sent DOWN to us by God. It is the grace of Jesus and the cost of his cross. At the Table, we do not simply remember the sacrifice of Christ, but rather, we spiritually feed on the gospel, as we "taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34: 8). The physical nourishment is a sign and symbol (sacrament) of the reality of spiritual nourishment given to us in Christ.

The Lord's Supper spiritually represents the effective body and blood of Jesus, spent for his people and our life of salvation, now and forever. On the eve of his arrest, Jesus himself instituted the Lord's Supper during the feast of Passover with his disciples. *Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."* (Matthew 26.26-29).

Historically, the Church has reverently, frequently, dependently and thankfully celebrated the supper. This is because the church on earth MUST continually proclaim the death of Jesus to one another and the world, lest the simplicity and purity of the substitutionary gospel be lost. The wages of sin is death. Christ paid and conquered that death. This is the gospel! We must never move past it! Rather, we rehearse it, rejoice over it, rest in it. As Paul writes, *in this world we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies* (1 Corinthians 4.8-10).

In our life and in our worship, then, we proclaim the death and resurrection of Jesus as central, singular, and sufficient. The Lord's Supper is the pinnacle moment in our worship service - visually, experientially and spiritually - when we YET AGAIN proclaim and ponder Jesus and his death. *For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes* (1 Corinthians 11.26).

The church of Christ has celebrated the Lord's Supper in numerous ways (modes) over the centuries. At Christ Community, we both receive and approach the Table, both of which communicate spiritual truths.

When the bread is passed to us we are especially reminded:

- The work of Christ unites us not only to himself, but to each other. The gospel is not just about me and Jesus. I am part of a larger family, the body of Christ, the church of Christ.
- As we pass the bread to one another (boldly speaking "the Body of Christ, for you") we are reminded of the priesthood of all believers and the privilege of giving grace to each other.

When we come forward for cup of blessing, we are especially reminded:

- I am called to personally and follow after Jesus in faith and repentance. Coming forward to the Table is a vivid picture of personal faith and continual dependence on his life/death for me to boldly approach the living God as righteous in his sight.
- We come as families, because "this promise is for you and your children." (Acts 2.39)
- The words of the gospel from those who serve ("blood of Christ poured out for you") remind me of the intensely personal nature of Christ's sacrifice - "... he who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

The practice of the Lord's Supper always comes after the preaching of the Word. This is fitting and purposeful. Having heard and received the living Word of God for life and faith, we need a response that drives us to Jesus ALONE and his completed work on our behalf! The Lord's Supper does this! By nature, we tend toward a response that drives us to ourselves and all that we must "do" and "change" and "become." But the gospel ("good news") is Jesus himself. The Lord's Supper takes us there.

the sacrament of baptism

It is not necessary for a member of Christ Community Church to embrace the blessing of *paedo-baptism* (infant baptism). Many effective, God-glorifying, Trinitarian, orthodox churches do not subscribe to infant baptism. However, as a Reformational and confessional church, we joyously celebrate the sacrament of baptism as being for professing believers *and their children*, according to the Word of God.

In the first century, Jesus Christ commanded His followers to *Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit* (Matthew 28:19-20). Since that time, the great majority of confessing Christians have baptized not only adults who profess Christ as Lord and Savior, but their infant children as well. Almost one half of the all the baptisms recorded in the New Testament book of Acts are household baptisms (Acts 16:15, 32, 33; 1 Corinthians 1:16, Acts 11:14). Within one hundred years of the time of the apostles, Origen (185-254 AD) recorded that *Little children are baptized agreeable to the usage of the Church, who received it from the Apostles, that this ordinance should be administered to children*.

Following in the understanding and leadership of historic Reformers such as Calvin, Luther, Zwingli and Knox, we affirm that the practice of infant baptism is firmly rooted in biblical precept and principle. In order to understand the biblical basis of infant baptism one must first understand that God's plan of salvation is essentially the same in all ages and has always been accompanied by God-given signs of the covenant.

Circumcision: the Old Testament Covenant Sign

In the Old Testament, God established the practice of applying the sign of the covenant (circumcision) not only to adults after they believed, but also to their infant children before they believed. God's people carried out this practice for almost 2000 years before the time of Christ (Genesis 17:7). *The application of the covenant sign to infant children of believers did not mean that the child was somehow saved by that sign* (Romans 4:11). *Each child still had to come to personal salvation by grace through faith in the promised Christ to come*. However, we must acknowledge that God still commanded that this covenant sign be applied to the infants of believers as a sign of their being set apart from the world and numbered among God's covenant people.

This external sign was also given as a sign of spiritual cleansing in anticipation of the internal purification of sin that comes only by grace through faith in the gospel. In the Old Testament, this internal purification was called the circumcision of the heart (Deut. 30:6). By the application of the covenant sign, these children were formally set apart from the world and placed into the covenant community of God's people where they were to be exposed to all the means of God's grace by which comes personal salvation. Although all the infants who received the external covenant sign DID receive the outward blessing of participating in God's covenant community, all did not necessarily receive the internal blessing of personal salvation (Romans 9:10-13).

Baptism: the New Testament Covenant Sign

In the New Testament church, we are still under God's unfolding covenant of grace. Rather than being saved by grace through faith in a Christ yet to come, we are now saved by grace through faith in the historic Christ who HAS come (Ephesians 2:8-9). God has replaced the old covenant signs with new covenant signs. No longer are God's people to observe the Passover Feast, but instead God has replaced it with the sacrament of the Lord's Supper (Matthew 26). No longer are God's people to observe the rite of circumcision, but instead God has replaced it with the sacrament of water baptism (Matthew 28:19; Colossians 2:11-12). The covenant sign once made only available to one gender (male) and one nation (Israel) is now made available to both male and female among all the nations and peoples of the world. Therefore, this new covenant sign carries with it the essential meaning of the sign of circumcision.

By direct inference and clear biblical-theological precedence, this means that baptism is to be applied not only to adults after they believe, but also to their infant children before they believe as a sign of admission into God's covenant community, the Church! *This Promise is for you and your children* (Acts 2:39; Isaiah 59)! As it regards the children of believers, the apostle Paul taught that the child of even one believing parent was holy, or "set apart" unto God (1 Corinthians 7:14). Therefore at baptism, the infant is

received into the church as a non-communing member - one who does not yet commune at the Lord's Table even while they enjoy visible identification as being a part of the people of God.

The Meaning of Water Baptism

Water baptism is an outward symbol of an inward work of purification from sin. Even more, it signifies union with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection (Romans 6:3-4), which results from the work of the Holy Spirit. The New Testament describes the inward work of God as a sprinkling with Christ's blood by the pouring out of the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 1:2; Titus 3:6; Acts 2:17). Baptism is applied to adults who profess faith after acknowledging the past work (of repentance and faith) which God has already done in their lives. Baptism is applied to infant children of *believers* in anticipation of that same work of God taking place in their lives, when they will one day trust Christ personally.

Seeing infant baptism as a sign of purification from sin and union with Christ does not mean that the child is in any way saved through the baptism, nor does it guarantee that the child will become a Christian. It is rather a sign of the promise of salvific cleansing that can *only* come through faith in Jesus.

If the God-ordained practice of applying the sign of the covenant to believing adults and their infant children was meant to be discontinued, we would expect a clear and definite word to that effect in the New Testament. What we find instead are indications of God's continuing work within the solidarity of the family in covenant relationship (Acts 2:39). Therefore, we believe that the God-given practice of applying the sign of the covenant not only to adults *after they believe* but also to their infant children *before they believe* should be continued today.

At Christ Community Church and in the Presbyterian Church in America, we receive as valid (legitimate, effective, orthodox) any baptism that has been administered in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the context of the Church on earth (protestant and catholic, liberal and conservative). The meaning of the sacrament is tied to the purpose and purity of the sign itself as it is instituted by God in his Word, and not in the faith or purity of the person or church who administered it.

Baptism should be received once, as a celebration of God's single sign of salvation.
Baptism should be received prior to partaking the continuing sacrament of the Lord's Supper.