

“QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS”

Session 5 – Bonus Session!

Communion and Church Government in the Presbyterian Church in Canada

What is Communion?

In obedience to our Lord’s command and example, we observe two sacraments, Baptism and Holy Communion. These are visible expressions of the Gospel given as means of entering and sustaining the Christian Life. A “visible expression of the Gospel” simply means the words of our faith made into actions. Just as a wedding ring can symbolize the vows taken at marriage, and Baptism the washing of forgiveness and new birth, Communion symbolizes things too:

- our unity with Jesus (just as Jesus did so long ago, we do)
- our unity with the Church throughout the world (just as people do in churches around the world and for thousands of years, we do)
- our relationship as a family (just as a family shares a meal together, we as a church family do)
- God’s nourishment and provision for us (just as God provides the world and all good things for us, we share this reminder of God’s spiritual provision)
- our thanksgiving to God (just as we thank God for our food, we thank God for all good things, and for all that Jesus did for us)
- our celebration (just as we celebrate happy events together, as holidays and birthdays, we celebrate God’s love together)

These symbols help us to understand our faith; they make our belief tangible.

7.7 Holy Communion (From “Living Faith”)

7.7.1 In breaking bread and drinking wine Jesus told us to remember him.

In this action called Holy Communion, Lord’s Supper, or Eucharist, Christ offers himself to us and we present ourselves to him in worship and adoration.

7.7.2 In Holy Communion Christ places his table in this world to feed and bless his people. The Holy Spirit so unites us in Christ that in receiving the bread and wine in faith we share in his body and blood.

7.7.3 The Lord’s Supper is a joyful mystery whereby Jesus takes the bread and wine to represent his atoning sacrifice, deepening our union with himself and with each other, giving us of his life and strength. Here Christ is present in his world proclaiming salvation until he comes--a symbol of hope for a troubled age.

7.7.4 The Eucharist is thanksgiving to God.

We pray for the world and with gratitude offer our lives to God.

We celebrate his victory over death and anticipate the joyous feast we shall have in his coming kingdom.

We pledge allegiance to Christ as Lord, are fed as one church, receive these signs of his love, and are marked as his.

7.7.5 Those who belong to Christ come gladly to his table to make a memorial of his life and death, to celebrate his presence, and together as his church offer him thanks.

New Testament Passages Concerning Communion

Matthew 26:26-28 NIV

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, **gave thanks** and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; **this is my body.**”

Then he took the cup, **gave thanks** and offered it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. **This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out** for many for the forgiveness of sins.”

Mark 14:22-24 NIV

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, **gave thanks** and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take it; **this is my body.**”

Then he took the cup, **gave thanks** and offered it to them, and they all drank from it. “**This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out** for many,” he said to them.

Luke 22:15-20 NIV

And he said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this **Passover** with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.”

After taking the cup, he **gave thanks** and said, “Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.”

And he took bread, **gave thanks** and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, **after the supper he took the cup**, saying, “**This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out** for you.

1 Corinthians 11:17-34 NIV

In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God’s approval.

When you come together, it is not **the Lord’s Supper** you eat, for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. Don’t you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not!

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and **when he had given thanks**, he broke it and said, “**This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.**” In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “**This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.**” For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, **you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.**

Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. **A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.** For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.

That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.

So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for each other. If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment. And when I come I will give further directions.

Living Faith Chapter Seven - God's Church

- 7.1.1** The church is Christ together with his people called both to worship and to serve him in all of life.
- 7.1.2** The church is one.
It is one family under God whose purpose it is to unite all people in Jesus Christ.
- 7.1.3** The church is holy.
It is set apart by God through the Holy Spirit to be a chosen people in the world.
- 7.1.4** The church is catholic.
It is universal, including all people of all time who affirm the Christian Faith.
- 7.1.5** The church is apostolic.
It is founded on Christ and the apostles and is in continuity with their teachings.
- 7.1.6** The church is in constant need of reform because of the failure and sin which mark its life in every age. The church is present when the Word is truly preached, the sacraments rightly administered, and as it orders its life according to the word of God.

The Presbyterian Church - Our Church Government

Presbyterians get their name from the Greek word “presbyteros” meaning “elder.” This word occurs many times in the New Testament and also in the Greek translation of the Old Testament. It refers to mature members of the community who are respected for their experience and faithfulness (but not always “old members;” Paul’s protégé Timothy was in his early 20s when assigned the task of church leadership). The word may also designate a particular office of leadership. A Presbyterian church is one governed by elders. Today, Presbyterian churches in Canada are governed by elders who are elected by members of the congregation. Although elders are ordained for life, congregations may choose term service for elders.

Zion made the shift to Term Eldership about 10 years ago. Elders are ordained for life, but serve a six year term. If re-elected to the Session following their six year term, an Elder would be re-admitted to the active Session, but not re-ordained. If an elder had been ordained in a different congregation within the PCC, if elected to serve, they too would be admitted rather than ordained.

There are several widely practiced forms of church government that are based on scriptural evidence. For instance, one might be “Congregational” or “Episcopal,” or “Presbyterian.” The Presbyterian form of government (rule by elders) evolved when the Reformers focused on both freedom and responsibility in the community of believers. As a result, the form of government is an upside-down pyramid; the higher you go, the more people are involved in making the decisions.

Ministers of Word and Sacrament

Ministers are tasked with Preaching, leading Bible Study, and properly instructing and leading the congregation in the Sacraments. They share with the Session in providing Pastoral Care. Another title for Minister is “Teaching Elder.” Ministers are ordained by, are under the discipline, and are members of the Presbytery. A minister’s authority to administer the Sacraments is derived from the Congregation, through the Session, under the discipline of the Presbytery.

To become a minister in the PCC, a person must first demonstrate to their Session a sense of “call;” Session must recognise and affirm that sense of call and the gifts of ministry evident in the candidate; Presbytery receives candidates from Sessions and through meetings and interviews, further recognises and affirms the candidate (or not!), and then recommends them to one of our Theological Colleges.

Presbytery continues their oversight through the course of the Student's study, informed by mandatory Psychological Assessment and Guidance Conferences. Upon successful completion of studies (a Master of Divinity degree, or other degree as determined by the General Assembly) and the affirmation of the College faculty, and successfully completing Examinations for Ordination, the candidate must receive a call to service from a Congregation or recognised Chaplaincy before being ordained. The ordination is for life.

The Church Courts

There are 4 "courts" or forums in a Presbyterian system. Most of the important decisions that affect the church are made there. The Courts are guided by "The Book of Forms," written to be "a useful guide for the members, office bearers and the courts of the church in the transaction of ecclesiastical business."

The session of a congregation is made up of ruling elders and a minister who serves as Moderator. Ruling elders are men or women who have been elected by the local congregation. The session has overall responsibility for the direction, Christian education, and pastoral care of the congregation. It sets the time and place of worship, provides for Communion services, authorizes and approves Baptisms, and works together with the Minister in ensuring the congregation is well served. Through designating a Representative Elder to Presbytery, it has representation in the presbytery.

Presbyteries are made up of ministers (Ministers of Word and Sacrament and Members of The Order of Diaconal Ministries) and elders from each congregation (one elder for each minister). Presbyteries oversee each of the congregations within its boundaries and support the ministers serving those congregations. Presbyteries are often responsible as well for any Church Camps within their bounds. There are 46 presbyteries in the PCC.

Synods are made up of several presbyteries. The role of synod has changed over the years. Some synods operate camps. Others offer educational and training events. Some continue to actively oversee the work of presbyteries and sessions within its bounds. There are eight synods.

The General Assembly meets once a year on the first week in June and is the highest court of the church. An equal number of lay and ministerial commissioners attend. The General Assembly receives reports and recommendations from its Agencies and Committees. It also receives and debates petitions, overtures, references, complaints, appeals from the entire Church and establishes committees when issues require further study. It also elects a Moderator who presides over the Assembly, and continues in a communicative, representational, and ceremonial role for the following year.

The General Assembly is the main decision-making body of our Church. Its decisions are final and are made carefully. Some issues require study over a number of years.

Any decision substantively affecting polity (form of government and court procedure) or doctrine must go under "the barrier act," which means a decision is reached by one Assembly, sent down to Presbyteries for study and vote, returned to the following Assembly, and voted upon again. Such changes in polity or doctrine must receive majority approval from the initial approving General Assembly, majority approval from the Presbyteries under the Barrier Act, and then majority approval from the following General Assembly.

Occasionally, on issues which affect the unity of the PCC, it may be decided that the Barrier Act include Sessions as well as Presbyteries, and in the case of Church Union in 1925, individual congregational votes as well.