

# This Holy Mystery: A United Methodist Eucharistic Ministry training outline

By Beth Galbreath, Deacon, c. 2007

**Environment and supplies:** Gather around a table with all the different kinds of Communion utensils your church uses, and the Eucharistic Ministry kits, bread and juice. Computer and projection system for playing musical CD's if possible and showing the slides of the presentation. A whiteboard or newsprint for making lists. A place to share the sacrament in the commissioning service (An elder is not required until this final commissioning service). Anointing oil for the commissioning service, if desired.

## FIRST Section – 90 minutes

- I. We're invited to a dinner – by God!
  - Play “Come and Dine at the Table” (Ray Makeever, *Dancing at the Harvest*) or another Communion hymn
  - **Sharing: family dinners. What makes yours special?**
  - **Activity: Who is present at the celebration of the sacrament?** (People often list everyone except the Host: God, or Jesus Christ)
  
- II. Potluck to Sacrament: The history of “breaking bread”
  - Holy Communion is modeled on *all* of Jesus' meals. **List them!**
  - In Acts it was a potluck – the disciples breaking bread together “with glad and generous hearts.” (Acts 2:42-46) It was a Joyful Upper!
  - In 1 Corinthians 11:17-33 – communion became a source of division. “Worthily” means as the Body of Christ, not “individually pure.”
  - **List the meanings of the sacrament.** In the New Testament, at least six major ideas about Holy Communion are present: thanksgiving, fellowship (unity), remembrance, sacrifice, action of the Holy Spirit, and eschatology. Others?
  - In ancient times, eating with someone was an oath, forming a sacred bond between host and guest. Pliny the Younger was governor of Pontus/Bithynia from 111-113 AD. We have a whole set of exchanges of his letters with the emperor Trajan on a variety of administrative political matters. In Pliny's letter to Trajan, he describes the Lord's supper as a oath-making ritual forming loyalty to Christ, in contrast to the church's potluck later in the day.
  - The Wesley brothers: wrote 166 *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*, with themes of love, grace, sacrifice, forgiveness, the presence of Christ, mystery, healing, nourishment, holiness, unity, and pledge of heaven.
  - In the early church (1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries), a meal was *on* the table. The *miracle* was what happened in the Body of Christ, the people around the table, becoming unified and receiving grace.
  - In the Middle Ages, this was reversed: The miracle, and the Body of Christ, was *on* the table. “Worthily” came to mean private virtue. It became a penitential sacrament and rarely taken by the people; the private property of priests, a Miserable Downer!
  - Communion became a source of division in 20<sup>th</sup> Century. This division was largely overcome in the ecumenical movement among Protestants; there are some Catholic-Protestant connections
  - In 2004, 300 years after Wesley's birth and over 200 years after start of our church in America, General Conference adopted *This Holy Mystery* as a study document (not doctrine).
  
- III. What happens and how? and who's invited?
  - Wesley and Eastern Orthodoxy view Communion as a means of grace, and grace as lifelong process of growth
  - **What is your understanding of grace?**
  - The Holy Spirit's action is primary, not ours. We are lifted to God by the Holy Spirit; we do not bring Christ down by our ritual. Contrast with Roman Catholicism [*transubstantiation*, the

understanding that atoms of the bread and wine miraculously become atoms of Christ's body and then, in the second miracle, retain their original form], Lutheranism [*consubstantiation*, the understanding that Christ's body is present in the elements along with the atoms of the bread and wine], and Zwingli's understanding [Communion is only a memorial ritual].

- Wesleyan understanding is similar to Calvin's – it's a mystery, but at the Table we *experience God, we meet Christ*. We experience not just “remembering” but *anamnesis*, Greek for “absence of forgetting” – meaning we experience a meal with Christ once again.
- We don't presume to know how God works in the sacrament, as expressed in Wesleyan hymn “O the Depth of Love Divine,” stanzas 1 and 4 (*The United Methodist Hymnal*, 627):

<p>O the depth of love divine, the unfathomable grace! Who shall say how bread and wine God into us conveys! How the bread his flesh imparts, how the wine transmits his blood, fills his faithful people's hearts with all the life of God!</p>	<p>Sure and real is the grace, the manner be unknown; only meet us in thy ways and perfect us in one. Let us taste the heavenly powers, Lord, we ask for nothing more. Thine to bless, 'tis only ours to wonder and adore.</p>
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- Look at the invitation in the ritual: who is invited? What does “open table” mean? United Methodists treasure the “open table” (which is even more open than Wesley intended, but Wesley was working in a culture where virtually everyone had been baptized as an infant.)

## SECOND SECTION – 30 minutes

### IV. Meanings of the sacrament: Summing up, Not magic, not *just* remembrance

- **What is the most powerful meaning of the sacrament for you?**

### V. The Elements

- Unfermented grape juice
- Bread – of any cereal grain; should “taste like bread,” not dessert (cf raisin bread, frosting etc.)
- The methods - each emphasizes a different meaning:
  - Intinction: Unity of the Body
  - At the rail: penitence; individual experience of God
  - Around the table: serving each other
  - In the pews: equality of the able-bodied and not so able-bodied?
  - “Celebration Cup” – extreme of individualism

### VI. The Great Thanksgiving

- Ritual begins with Greeting and confession; role of the elder (to preside), the deacon (to bring the elements, to serve, to train servers and eucharistic ministers, to extend the Table into the world), the people (Elder cannot continue to pray on behalf of the people unless the people give their permission with “It is right to give our thanks and praise.”)
  - Mention Paul's description, earliest we have; Share Apostolic Tradition if there's time
  - Go over Great Thanksgiving: Trinitarian format
    - God the Father/Old Testament
    - God the Son/Christ
    - Epiclesis – the prayer to the Holy Spirit
- If you have time, have smaller groups look at the other Communion rituals for various seasons of the year in the *Book of Worship*. How are they similar? How different?

- The four verbs of the ritual: Taking, Blessing, Breaking, and **Giving**
- Therefore! **Let's practice table manners** for serving at the Table in the congregation. **Emphasize that we serve by *giving***; grace is not something that people snatch. Teach how to hold hands out to receive the gift, when they are not serving. Teach servers to give a person a large enough portion that their fingers will not be in the juice, and that they can really taste the food. Take turns using the equipment. Urge folks to use peoples' names if they know them, and to make eye contact if possible. This is a sacrament of *connection*.

## LAST HOUR – 60 MINUTES

### VII. The Eucharistic Ministry

- Extends the table to those *unwillingly* absent. Not a substitute for worship attendance.
- The ritual in the kit is from *This Holy Mystery* requirements. It has been adapted for use in nursing home, hospital and end-of-life situations. The portions in italics may be omitted if appropriate.
- **Go over the ritual; go over hygiene (use the sanitizer in the kit), practice.** Practice with the Eucharistic Ministry kits so people are comfortable reading the ritual, opening the containers, and sharing the elements. Remind folks: If a person cannot swallow, touch the bread and juice to their lips; dispose of the portion in the earth as with other unused materials.
- Disposal of the elements: Return them to the earth, don't put in trash or pour down the drain. Burying is not necessary, however; breadcrumbs can be scattered for birds. Elements can also be taken home and consumed.

### VIII. Closing

- Play **What Shall We Offer?** (Ray Makeever, *Dancing at the Harvest*)
- Communion if elder is available
- Anointing. “\_\_\_\_\_, as a baptized disciple of Jesus Christ, you are called by God, and gifted by the Holy Spirit for ministry in the world. May the Holy Spirit anoint you with power in your ministry at the Lord's Table.”