

First Presidency statement on the Lord's Supper

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A. The Lord's Supper

As we have previously communicated in pastor mailings and the pages of the *Saints Herald* (June 1994, pages 3-4), the 1994 World Conference took action to remove the legislative prohibition on serving the Lord's Supper to persons who are not baptized members of the Community of Christ.

Our "Letter of Pastoral Counsel" to the World Conference and an accompanying editorial have been published in the June *Herald* (pages 3-4) as direction to the church in this matter.

In general, these statements affirm that we will now offer the Lord's Supper to any who choose to partake of it in accordance with their own faith and practice. This is effective immediately. However, the change in procedure does not modify our current understanding of the Lord's Supper as representative of the life and sacrifice of the Christ and as a renewal of our baptismal covenant.

In the months ahead we expect to engage in a church-wide dialogue on this and many other related issues. We are confident that this process will be enriching and instructive to us all.

We recognize that there are a number of questions, many of them hypothetical, in the minds of pastors and other church administrators who must deal with this change in our practice, particularly in places where members are concerned about the Conference action. We do not want to write policies that attempt to cover every possible circumstance, but only to suggest the spirit by which individual decisions can be made. We hope these additional guidelines will be useful in responding to such questions.

Guidelines for Administration of the Lord's Supper

1. The Lord's Supper is a Christian sacrament, rich in meaning and purpose, which calls us to remember the life and sacrifice of our Lord. In that sense, it speaks most powerfully to those who have made a covenant with Christ, a relationship usually established through water baptism.

2. In administering the Lord's Supper, however, the principle that we will follow is that the emblems will be passed to all worship participants and they will be free to partake at their own initiative. No attempt should be made to determine whether persons have been baptized in some other church or whether the form of baptism is consistent with our own. The choice is with the individual.

3. In the case of children who are members of our own church families, they will be invited to receive the Lord's Supper upon baptism and confirmation, which occurs after reaching the age of accountability (eight years of age or older). Occasionally, there may be children of other faiths in attendance with church families. In such cases, it would be appropriate to share privately with the visitors that our own tradition is to offer the Lord's Supper to children after baptism at age eight or above. Most people will respect that practice, but it remains an individual choice.

4. Many congregations have among their regular participants people who have chosen not to be baptized as a member of the Community of Christ, usually on the grounds that a previous baptism in another faith is sufficient. In such cases, pastors are encouraged to visit personally with them and to explain the new procedure, inviting them to receive the emblems at our Communion services. This personal invitation may be particularly useful in assuring them that they are not only permitted but welcome to share in this way.

5. In recognition of the change in practice, some pastors may choose, at least for a while, to make a public statement of invitation and explanation before serving the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. We do not wish to be prescriptive in this matter and would leave it to individual judgment as to whether such a statement would be useful and appropriate. We offer the following suggestion as a model for the type of statement that could be made:

The tradition of the Community of Christ is to understand the Lord's Supper as a sacrament in which we remember the life and sacrifice of Jesus Christ and renew the covenant we made at the waters of baptism.

Others who share with us may have different understandings and practices within their own faith and tradition. We invite all who participate to do so as an expression of the faithful unity and love exemplified in the life of Jesus Christ, In whose name we worship.

6. In all of our church life we seek to be governed by the sustaining presence of the Holy Spirit, which instructs in places where policies and guidelines may not. We continue to affirm that those who preside over our congregations and worship services are called to do so in accordance with the readings of the Spirit (D. and C. 17:9). Their pastoral judgment should be respected in situations where further interpretation may be required.

We intend to take very seriously the instruction of D. and C. 158:11c that we “look especially to the sacraments to enrich the spiritual life of the body.” We are called to seek a greater understanding of divine purpose in these sacred traditions and are assured that we will be blessed with a confirming assurance of God’s Spirit in our worship and study. As we make these adjustments in our administration of the Lord’s Supper, we are confident that our people will do so in good spirit and with a desire to demonstrate our essential unity through Christ Jesus.

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2. Prayers for the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper

The sacraments of the church are essential expressions of our unity as a worldwide fellowship. Sacramental practice that provides for using essentially the same forms and words church-wide (albeit in various languages) reinforces a sense of togetherness in the context of wide diversity.

We interpret the intent of World Conference Resolution 1282, approved on April 3, 2004, as calling for the preparation of alternate prayers that retain the overall structure and content of those found in Section 17 of the Doctrine and Covenants. In this way the church-wide use of common forms and wording is preserved.

In recent years, some Communion services provide for the wine to be served immediately following the bread. This is done either as the servers take the emblems to the congregation or as the congregation comes forward to receive. Where this is done, the reading of two separate prayers, one right after the other, can be awkward. For this reason, we believe that the needs of the church will be well served by having a combined prayer that can be used when the emblems are served together. Such prayers, one using the Doctrine and Covenants language and the other the more contemporary wording, are also provided at this time.

The resolution calls for use of “contemporary language.” The attempt has been to replace archaic language with wording that is in current use; this includes gender-specific references to God. These new prayers will have equal status to those found in Section 17 of the Doctrine and Covenants. In Communion services of the Community of Christ, the prayers found in Section 17 of the Doctrine and Covenants and the prayers given here in contemporary English (and their equivalent translations in other languages) are the only ones authorized for use. Those appointed to read the prayers are not free to use other wording.

The following prayers are now offered for use in the church, in addition to those found in Doctrine and Covenants 17: 22 and 23.

Blessing on the Bread

Eternal God, we ask you in the name of your Son Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this bread to the souls of all those who receive it, that they may eat in remembrance of the body of your Son, and witness to you,

O God, that they are willing to take upon them the name of your Son, and always remember him, and keep the commandments which he has given them, that they may always have his Spirit to be with them. Amen.

Blessing on the Wine

Eternal God, we ask you in the name of your Son Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this wine to the souls of all those who receive it, that they may drink in remembrance of the blood of your Son which was shed for them, that they may witness to you, O God, that they do always remember him, that they may have his Spirit to be with them. Amen.

**Combined Prayer on the Bread and Wine
(based on Doctrine and Covenants 17)**

O God, the eternal Father, we ask thee in the name of thy Son Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this bread and wine to the souls of all those who partake of them, that they may eat and drink in remembrance of the body and blood of thy Son, and witness unto thee, O God, the eternal Father, that they are willing to take upon them the name of thy Son, and always remember him and keep his commandments which he has given them, that they may always have his Spirit to be with them. Amen.

**Combined Prayer on the Bread and Wine
(contemporary language)**

Eternal God, we ask you in the name of your Son Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this bread and wine to the souls of all those who receive them, that they may eat and drink in remembrance of the body and blood of your Son, and witness to you, O God, that they are willing to take upon them the name of your Son, and always remember him and keep the commandments which he has given them, that they may always have his Spirit to be with them. Amen.