

The Lord's Supper

A ritual of harm or healing?

by Hilary Jerome Scarsella, with Rhoda Keener, Eleanor Krieder, David B. Miller, and John Rempel

This summer we are offering a reconsideration of how the Mennonite Church practices communion based on the experiences and perspectives of victims of sexual abuse and trauma. This reimagining was created by a group led by Hilary Scarsella and included John Rempel, Toronto Theological Centre; David Miller, Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary; Eleanor Kreider, Mennonite Mission Network (retired); Carolyn Holderread Heggen and Rhoda Keener, Mennonite Women USA.

In addition to this resource, we are including a four-part worship resource, "From darkness into light," written by Andrea Opel, of Belmont Mennonite Church, Elkhart, Indiana, available at www.leaderonline.org for everyone.

Introduction

What could the Lord's Supper possibly have to do with sexual violence? For most, the connection is not obvious, but this is a vital question. It has prompted my own research and has guided the work of the group putting forth this article and the liturgy that follows.

For me, Hilary, the question materialized for the first time while I was in seminary and struggling through a difficult phase in my own process of trauma recovery and accompanying others as they too confronted the violence of abuse in their lives. As we spoke together of all that depleted our souls and gave us hope for survival, I noticed that a surprising number of those I walked with named their participation in communion as an experience that exacerbated their harm. Much to my heartbroken surprise, as I allowed that observation to sink in, I realized that in my own life as well, sharing the bread and cup in the congregation that I loved was an act that had worked powerfully against my prospects for cultivating a life free of abuse and that compounded repercussions of traumatic harm that I continued to live with. It will take the entirety of this article to flesh out the reasons, and this we will do. For now, let it be enough to say that though the connection between the Lord's Supper and sexual violence is, at first, difficult to see and painful to reflect upon, the connection is nevertheless real, and it influences deeply both individual lives and the very fabric of our faith communities.

In this article, you will find reflections that seek to reveal the relationship between our sacred meal practices and systems of sexual violence. Our reflections include suggestions for taking heed of these dynamics in Lord's Supper services. You will also find liturgical examples of our suggestions following the article. You are welcome to use our suggestions verbatim. We hope also that this article as a whole will equip you who read it to design services appropriate for your own contexts that bear the concerns discussed here in mind.

We who submit to you this reflection and liturgy are members of a group that has been meeting intentionally for two years with the task of developing a Lord's Supper liturgy that refrains from perpetuating the harm of sexual abuse, is designed for regular use by whole congregations, and takes seriously the historic structure of Mennonite communion services. Our group includes David Miller, Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary professor and former pastor with experience in congregations confronting the evil of sexual abuse; Eleanor Krieder, author and liturgist with expertise in all things worship; John Rempel, historian, editor of the Mennonite *Minister's Manual*,¹ and a scholar of the Lord's Supper with respect to Anabaptist tradition; Hilary Scarsella, theologian specializing in the relation of Christian faith and practice to trauma and recovery; and Rhoda Keener, psychotherapist and director of Sister Care for Mennonite Women USA. Until she needed to step back to better tend her commitments to the

1. John Rempel, ed., *Minister's Manual* (Newton, KS: Faith & Life Press, 1998).

Mennonite Church USA discernment process with regard to John Howard Yoder's abuse of women, Carolyn Holderread Heggen, psychotherapist specializing in trauma recovery, met with us as well. We have taken up this task because we believe that love for the church demands it. We present a liturgy designed for regular use in whole congregations, as opposed to use during alternative services for survivors only, because worship that overtly endangers some cannot be worship that forms the collective into the love of Christ manifest. When the wisdom of those who have survived traumatic violence and coercion is allowed to inform our corporate worship, when those who have been egregiously harmed are regarded as valuable members of our communities, we take a step closer to becoming that which the Lord's Supper seeks to create: a graced community of imperfect yet beautifully made creatures relentlessly committed to loving God, each other, and the world.

“Worship that overtly endangers some cannot be worship that forms the collective into the love of Christ manifest.”

A final note before delving into the heart of the matter. We imagine that some readers may at this point be wondering, why focus on the relationship of the Lord's Supper to sexual abuse instead of the myriad of other injustices that plague our communities? This too is a good question. The answer is certainly *not* that the violence of sexual abuse is more important than that of racism, poverty, hunger, homophobia, sexism, colonialism, war, disease, the destruction of the environment, and so on. There is no ranking among evils. There is also no easy distinction to be made between them. The vast majority of those around the globe who suffer sexualized violence are women of color. Rape is used as a systematic tool of war. Those who are poor, hungry, socially oppressed, disabled, or diseased are targeted for sexual abuse at much higher rates than the privileged, strong, and wealthy. Homophobia itself is a form of sexualized violence, since it targets people based solely on assumptions made about their sexual lives. Focusing on the relationship between the Lord's Supper and sexual abuse, then, invites—indeed requires—that we open ourselves to asking whether those who have suffered trauma of all kinds also have wisdom to share that will bless and change our table fellowship. Some of this work is already being done.² We hope that our reflection on sexual abuse will further open the doors for this good work to flourish. Because *at least* one-quarter

2. See Father Tissa Balasuriya, *The Eucharist and Human Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979); June Christine Goudey, *The Feast of Our Lives: Re-Imaging Communion* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2002); Monika K. Hellwig, *Eucharist and the Hunger of the World*, 2nd ed. (Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1992); Izunna Okonkwo, *The Eucharist and World Hunger: Socio-Theological Exploration* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2011); Jamie T. Phelps, “Communion Ecclesiology and Black Liberation Theology,” *Theological Studies* 61, no. 4 (2000): 672.

of the people attending any given congregation will be victims of sexual abuse in their lifetimes; because the number of those who perpetrate sexual abuse among us is only slightly less; because survivors of sexual abuse are loudly and clearly telling us that we must reinterpret and, where necessary, reshape our communion practices if we hope for our faith communities to be places of safety and welcome; because we yearn for our Christian practices to bless and not curse us; it is because of this that we now turn to our reflections on the Lord's Supper in light of sexual abuse.

The Lord's Supper liturgy in light of sexual abuse

As our group worked at creating a liturgy mindful of those vulnerable to sexual violence, we found it important to give attention to each of the dynamics that follow: self-reflection and sin, forgiveness and reconciliation, physical touch, narrating the life and death of Christ, masculine/male language for God and Jesus, and embodiment.

Self-reflection and sin

It has been important in Mennonite traditions that we intentionally prepare ourselves to participate in the sharing of bread and cup. We believe that internal and communal preparation help move worshiping bodies toward the transformation we experience at Christ's table. To this end, the service in the *Minister's Manual* begins with a prayer of self-reflection, also called an act of preparation. The purpose of this prayer is to provide worshipers with space to get in touch with our inner selves, to see ourselves honestly, to bring our true selves before God without pretense, and to begin to bring the breath of our spirits back into rhythm with the breath of the divine Spirit. With respect to sexual violence, there are at least two things that are important to keep in mind in relation to this prayer and all other parts of the communion service that involve self-reflection, confession, and discussion of sin.

First, when we lead worshipers in processes of self-reflection and confession, it is urgent that we acknowledge our wholeness and goodness—that is, the ways that we succeed in embodying the love of God in the world—alongside the ways we fail to do so fully. Often, our liturgies only do the latter. This is presumably because we assume that worshipers are readily aware of the ways that we are whole, and need liturgical assistance only to acknowledge the ways we are not. However, those who experience sexual violence are formed by the trauma of the event to feel that we are entirely sinful and consumed by depravity. Several survivors have said to me that they imagine that if others were able to look inside their bodies, they would see not healthy organs but a rotting mass at their core. Processes of self-reflection that ask worshipers to look inward but allow us only to find evidence of sin reinforce survivors' sense that sin is all that can be found within. For survivors and all whose vision of themselves is distorted against their

favor instead of for it, coming before God and one's community honestly means acknowledging that we are beautifully and wonderfully made, and loved by God.

Cycles of sexualized violence depend on victims' sense of depravity in order to continue. When victims believe ourselves to be innately corrupt, we tend to believe the violence we experience is our fault, and we aren't able to see ourselves as worthy of protection. But when people who are victimized become open to the parts of ourselves that are worthy and good and dearly beloved, we cultivate strength that is necessary for finding safety and doing the difficult work of trauma recovery.

Second, when we do speak of sin liturgically, it is vital that our characterization of sin reflects the great diversity with which sin is experienced in the world. Many of us have developed a habit of equating sinfulness with behavior that prioritizes ourselves over others, a habit that can be seen in the act of preparation in the *Minister's Manual* as well. In this prayer, sin is described as failing to give of oneself, holding concern for oneself over concern for others, as pride, an absence of kindness, narrow-mindedness, self-assertion, and behavior that has imposed upon others. Theologically speaking, however, sin is not necessarily self-prioritizing behavior. In fact, the concept of sin is not confined to wrong behavior at all. It is, rather, *anything*—personal or systemic—that keeps a person from the full embrace of divine love.

While it would be quite appropriate for one who is in a position of power over others to be led in worship to confess excessively prioritizing self over others as sin, this is not at all appropriate for a victim of abuse. What keeps a victim of sexual abuse from receiving the full embrace of God's love within the immediate context of abuse is likely the opposite: an excessive priority of others over self. For a person experiencing abuse, sin (and I speak of sin here in a systemic sense, not in any way that could put personal blame on such a person for this behavior) most often manifests as lack of pride, giving away too much of oneself, excessive care for others, inappropriate tolerance, self-denial, and self-sacrifice. These are what primarily keep victims and survivors of abuse from breathing deeply, living fully, and participating in God's vision of just love for the world. These are the primary patterns from which those experiencing sexualized violence need release.

When victims and survivors of abuse are led in worship to confess prioritizing ourselves as sin, we very often bring to mind the times when we attempted to protect ourselves from our perpetrator, and confess these acts of self-protection as sin. These instances are what most closely resemble prioritizing the self in the daily lives of those threatened by violence. No stretch of the imagination is needed to see how this reinforces the cycle of abuse. When victims confess self-protection as sin and resolve to lower the priority of our own selves in relation to our perpetrators, our vulnerability to continued violence soars. When, on the other hand, sin is defined broadly in our prayers, worshipers are given the opportunity to recognize and turn away from whatever it is

that is truly keeping us from the love of God, be it wrong personal behavior or the impact violence, excessive self-priority or excessive self-sacrifice.

In the “Preparation for communion” section of the liturgy developed by this group, we attempt to model what all these considerations could look like when given liturgical form in the communion service. All members of our communities who approach communion nervously for fear that we are not worthy to participate will benefit from these adjustments.

Forgiveness and reconciliation

Passing the peace follows the act of preparation during the Lord’s Supper service. Having made ourselves vulnerably present before each other and God, we affirm our loving connection to one another and God’s just love for us as we bless each other with the peace of Christ. The spoken invitation to this sharing interprets our sharing of Christ’s peace as one element in ongoing processes of forgiveness and reconciliation. In this and every mention of either forgiveness or reconciliation, mindfulness of sexual abuse must inform our worship.

A certain notion of forgiveness often plays a devastating role in enabling cycles of abuse to continue uninterrupted. Many perpetrators explicitly beg victims for forgiveness after a violent episode or when victims show signs of thinking of leaving the relationship. Others of us are told by friends, family, or faith leaders that we *must* forgive the one harming us. Still others of us learn indirectly from our communities of faith that quickly forgiving those who harm us is the appropriate Christian response to being wronged. In each of these cases, when victims of sexual abuse understand forgiveness to mean letting go of their anger at the perpetrator or staying in relationship with him, her, or them, it functions as a major obstacle to a victim’s ability to get out of the violent situation and find safety. It demolishes the victim’s first line of defense—anger—and keeps the one being harmed in close enough physical and emotional proximity to the perpetrator that the abuse can continue.

Because the injunction to forgive—here understood as letting go of fear, anger, and the need to avoid the perpetrator—can wreak such havoc in the lives of people who are abused, and because many of us who have survived sexualized violence can, as a result, feel viscerally threatened even by the word *forgiveness*, the way forgiveness is framed liturgically in communion worship matters dearly. We must find ways to definitively convey that forgiveness—as we hope it will be understood—does not and *cannot* require us to remain subject to the unjust harm of abuse. We must take care not to equate faithfulness with a quick and simple willingness to forgive and must remember that, in the Gospels, forgiveness often entails that the ones forgiven change their ways. It is also necessary to refuse any temptation to view sexual abuse as an evil perpetrated only against the individual most immediately harmed. Sexual abuse inflicts a wound on the bodies of our

communities, which means that our communities have a role to play in processes of forgiveness that acknowledge, rather than cover over, the severity of abuse. While the exact nature of that role needs to be discerned between persons who are abused and the communities we call home, it can sometimes be a relief to survivors when our communities are willing in solidarity to take on the burden of pursuing processes of forgiveness at times when we are not able or willing. As we all worship together, let us protect each other from pressure to forgive before we are ready, making it vividly clear that forgiveness is a complex, shared process that can last a lifetime.

**“Let us protect each other
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While survivors of sexualized violence may themselves someday extend forgiveness to those who caused harm, it is important for faith communities to recognize that true reconciliation—by which we mean a restoration of right relationship—between victims and perpetrators of sexual abuse is most of the time impossible. The process of reconciliation is not the responsibility of the survivor, because the survivor is not responsible for disfiguring the relationship in the first place. It is the burden of the perpetrator to take responsibility for the harm caused. Righting a relationship so egregiously wronged requires a sincere and tremendous effort on the part of the perpetrator, an effort that the majority of those who perpetrate sexual violence are unfortunately unwilling to sustain. As people of faith who long for God’s just love to govern the world, it is often difficult for us to accept the frequent impossibility of reconciliation between victims and perpetrators of abuse. And yet, for the well-being of all who are vulnerable to sexual abuse, we must. Our challenge is to find ways to speak of the reconciliation we believe God desires for this world that do not pressure survivors to reenter relationships with those who still pose a threat to their spiritual, psychological, or physical well-being. As we share bread and cup together and pray that we may embody God’s vision of reconciliation for the world, we must simultaneously affirm that those of us who have survived sexual abuse have a place in this vision even when we are unwilling or unable to be open to reconciliation with our perpetrators. We must remember that the only measure that can determine whether a perpetrator’s effort toward reconciliation is sufficient is the degree to which the one harmed does, in fact, experience a righting of the relationship. Thus, what could be perceived as a survivor’s refusal to work toward reconciliation with a perpetrator is actually an indication that the work the perpetrator must do toward reconciliation remains unfinished. Indeed, this is the work of a lifetime.

The invitation to the *peace greeting* that this group has prepared seeks to account for these concerns in several ways. We affirm that God extends forgiveness to us, but we do not assume that all worshipers have extended forgiveness to their enemies, nor are worshipers asked on the spot to do so. Rather than presume that forgiveness is an act that can and ought be accomplished within the space of a single service, we invite worshipers to affirm a commitment to pursuing right relationships of all kinds, an ongoing process that makes the peace of Christ manifest. Rather than declare that reconciliation is a completed reality in our midst, we invite worshipers to trust that the divine work of reconciliation is ongoing whether or not it can be seen within the context of our immediate relationships.

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Physical touch

Typically, worshipers are invited to shake hands or embrace as we share the words of peace with one another. For many who have been sexually abused, physical touch can trigger trauma. Being touched without permission can destroy a victim's or survivor's sense of safety and comfort in a group. For these reasons, sharing the peace greeting can be an especially difficult time for victims and survivors of sexual abuse.

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Given that we, as communities of faith, do want to model and make space for healthy and good ways of offering and receiving touch, it is important to be mindful of what we are modeling during the peace greeting in the Lord's Supper service. Touch is healthy and good when it is welcome, which means that the first step in practicing healthy touch is discerning whether touch is, in fact, welcome. When this discernment cannot be done, it is better to refrain from touch. For this reason, in the liturgy we have prepared, we suggest inviting worshipers to place the palms of their hands together and gesture forward toward one another. This is a gesture that allows worshipers to acknowledge and honor those around us while also making it possible for those of us who cannot tolerate touch to participate freely. Because discerning whether touch is welcome during the peace greeting could be cumbersome or awkward, this approach takes the opportunity for physical touch off the table. If your community desires to maintain

the option for physical touch during the service, consider making anointing available during the sharing of the bread and cup. If it is especially important to your community that touch be an option within the peace greeting specifically, we suggest that you discern a way to develop this practice that invites worshipers to intentionally discern whether touch is welcome. However this discernment is done, it should result in a way of sharing the peace greeting that leaves those who cannot tolerate touch feeling neither re-traumatized by touch, nor excluded due to an inability to participate, nor awkward for refusing the embrace of another.

Narrating the life and death of Christ

An invitation to the communion table and a prayer of thanks for the meal that is about to be shared follow the peace greeting and lead into center of the service. In the *Minister's Manual*, the *invitation* describes the Lord's Supper as “a remembrance of the sacrifice of Christ for the sin of the world.” This line reveals what many of us intuitively know, that over the ages we have come to strongly associate our communion practices with the Last Supper and with the ensuing narrative of Jesus' suffering and violent execution. As a result, the Lord's Supper liturgy is peppered with descriptions and interpretations of Jesus' suffering.

Especially in communities committed to Jesus' way of peace and nonviolence, the story of Jesus' suffering and crucifixion is often told as a story in which God's Beloved, when presented with an unjust threat to his very body, chose to allow himself to be humiliated, abused, and killed. All this, it is often said, was for the sake of his enemies—those who acted unjustly. Jesus' decision to allow himself to be abused to the point of death for the sake of the unjust who did not deserve his sacrifice is named as the ultimate example of Christian love that followers are to emulate.

Those of us who are abused often draw a parallel between Jesus' suffering and our own. He was innocent, abandoned, systematically humiliated, psychologically and physically tortured. So are we. Some who are abused relate even more intimately to Jesus' suffering after noticing that certain dynamics of his execution can be rightly described as sexualized violence. The biblical text tells us that Jesus was forcibly stripped, and scholars such as theologian David Tombs suggest it was historically likely that rape was among the tools of torture used against Jesus when he was taken away to be flogged.³ A potentially crucial difference between the nature of the harm Jesus endured and that experienced by contemporary victims of sexual abuse is that Jesus is said to have freely chosen to endure this violence. However, discerning the nature of Jesus' freedom in the midst of a violently oppressive system is complicated. And, because it is common for abuse victims to believe during the time of abuse that we are responsible for the harm inflicted on us, victims of abuse will generally not perceive Jesus' freedom as a difference. Many who are being abused, therefore, search the story of Jesus' suffering for clues as to how we

3. David Tombs, “Crucifixion, State Terror, and Sexual Abuse,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 53, nos. 1–2 [1999]: 89–109.

ought to confront our own suffering. When the stories of Jesus' execution that we tell in our communities of faith insinuate, first, that the Christian response to egregious personal harm is to love the perpetrator, and second, that love takes its most perfect shape in death on a cross, members of our communities who are being abused can easily come to feel that in the face of our own suffering our only option is to suffer quietly.

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Of course, who would want or intend for our retellings of Jesus' crucifixion to communicate that those suffering sexual abuse (or violence of any kind) ought to endure continued harm? Surely, we would be horrified to find out that anyone hears such a message in our words. And we also believe that the story itself is at its heart one of resistance to systems of injustice. Our concern then, when it comes to the Lord's Supper service, is to discern ways to liturgically communicate the story of Christ's suffering that relieve rather than compound the suffering of the abused. To do this, it is helpful to be aware of ways that the act of sharing the bread and cup in an atmosphere shaped by narratives of Jesus' suffering can intensify the potential for harm to the abused.

One survivor describes the relationship between stories of Jesus' suffering, the abuse she experienced, and her participation in communion this way:

During the time when I was being abused, I always walked into the sanctuary silently pleading for guidance. While almost nothing of the average Sunday service was useful to me, communion became strikingly relevant. Here was the story of an innocent person, Jesus, who decided to silently endure bodily mutilation as well as emotional and spiritual anguish in order to demonstrate love for his enemies. Rather than retaliate or strive to protect himself, he let himself be murdered for the sake of the unjust. This, the liturgy said, was love, the kind of love Christian followers who take the bread and cup are instructed to emulate. Taking communion was described as a recommitment to following the way of Jesus' suffering love, and so it became a ritual of accepting the pain I was taking into my body from my abusers. It provided me with strength and resolve to keep quiet and endure. In retrospect, I see that it was a powerful part of all that prevented my escape.

The embodied dynamics of the Lord's Supper ritual, eating bread and drinking juice in community, heighten the potential impact of the stories that frame them. As worshipers ingest the bread and cup, in one way or another we merge our bodies with the body of Jesus. When the body of Jesus is understood primarily

as a traumatized body of a willing victim to unjust harm, we who encounter his body in this way mark our own bodies as those that must also endure unjust harm. As we who are being abused accept the invitation to follow Jesus' way of self-sacrifice and enemy love, and as we take into our very bodies signs of Jesus' willingness to endure bodily harm, many of us experience our own bodies and spirits newly conditioned to endure continued abuse rather than seek safety and recovery. Many of us experience our communities of faith as spaces that exacerbate the danger that threatens us instead of as shelters of safety, support, and love. The effect is precisely the opposite of what the faithful hope will manifest in communities sharing the sacred meal of Christ together. The acts of ingesting bread and juice become acts that mold many of us into the shape of victims in such a way that we are more vulnerable to abuse when we leave the sanctuary than when we came in.

For those of us accustomed to hearing the narrative of Jesus' crucifixion this way, as a call to embody the role of a willing victim, the words of institution, “This is my body, for you” and “This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood,” are phrases that in themselves represent the entire narrative and its painful claim on our bodies. For many, if nothing of Jesus' suffering is said in the service save these words, sharing the bread and cup is still grounded in a perceived call to limitless self-sacrifice. Because these words are biblical, widely used across the centuries and around the globe, and because there is a sense among us that these words must be said for the shared meal to be the Lord's Supper, they ring with authority and signal to those vulnerable to abuse that we must accept the repercussions of these words in our lives if we wish to remain members of the beloved community. While words of institution communicate hope to many, for victims and survivors of sexual violence they are often devastating.

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Before we talk about how this might be addressed liturgically, we must note a second way that words of institution can compound the trauma of sexual violence. These words from a survivor frame the problem well:

They say “The body of Christ, for you” and then expect me to put this man's body into my mouth. The message is that somehow my body is better off if it is filled up by his. Letting them put that bread in my mouth felt like practice for the next time the person abusing me put his penis in my mouth. Wanting to scream and run away, instead I would go numb, take the

bread and the juice, and then try as hard as I could to forget that it happened.

Victims and survivors of sexual violence very commonly experience post-traumatic stress syndrome, and for many of us the specific words *body* and *blood* in the words of institution trigger a post-traumatic response. Especially for those of us molested or raped orally or otherwise, these words can cause our traumatic memories of that violence to involuntarily surface. In connection to the acts of ingesting food and drink in the Lord's Supper service, the word *body* as a description for the food we swallow triggers memories of hands, mouths, or genitalia forced upon us, and the word *blood*, a liquid of the body, can trigger memories of our perpetrator's semen. Different from regular memories, traumatic memories are experienced not as a window into the past but as if the events of the past were happening all over again in the present. When we who are traumatized by experiences of sexualized violence are triggered by the words *body* and *blood* in the words of institution, the proceeding process of receiving and ingesting bread and juice in community can be experienced quite literally as traumatic violation.

Victims and survivors of abuse who are triggered in this way by the words of institution cope in different ways. Some of us, especially those still experiencing abuse, simply experience participation in communion as routinely traumatic. Some of us choose not to attend church on days when the Lord's Supper will be celebrated, and some of us choose to stop attending church altogether. Still others of us participate in Lord's Supper services by building an internal wall around our spirits and psyches that protects us from the full strength of our traumatic memories. While this saves us the pain of re-traumatization, it also means that we are unable to participate in the holy meal with the full strength of our spirits. We go through the motions without allowing ourselves to be present to their meaning, and we miss out on the gifts that the meal hopes to offer. Of course, when we who suffer the trauma of sexualized violence are unable to be fully present or present at all, the entire worshiping community is implicated. The Lord's Supper cannot be for any of us a practice of loving communion with each other and God when that very practice exacerbates the unjust suffering of many in our midst.

It is important to emphasize again that while many survivors of sexual abuse experience words of institution harmfully, we who are writing this article do not and cannot speak for all survivors. Some survivors find comfort in the regular rhythm in the words of institution. With some important exceptions,⁴ the theological tradition of the black church in the United States has long regarded the suffering of Jesus as essential to black survival and liberation. For those significantly shaped by this tradition, the risk

posed by the words of institution to those vulnerable to abuse may be somewhat lower than it is in other parts of our church.

If we hope for our celebration of the Lord's Supper to extend love and good news to those vulnerable to abuse, and if we hope for true communion among worshipers and with God to be manifest and blessed as we eat together, it is imperative that we discern ways to liturgically navigate elements of the Lord's Supper service that refer to the suffering and execution of Christ in light of the reality of abuse. We who worked together to craft the liturgy included at the end of this article have several suggestions to this end and offer three possible approaches to the words of institution specifically.

Perhaps the two most important things to remember with regard to liturgical references to Jesus' suffering are (1) that we empty Jesus' death of its full significance when we assume without discernment that it is an act we can and should imitate, and (2) that we ought not regard Jesus' suffering as good in itself. The suffering of Jesus is important to a Christian understanding and life of faith. It is one of the ways God's commitment to accompany those who suffer great harm is revealed to us. Because Jesus suffered, those who grow to love Christ must also grow to love the suffering people of the world. The fact that Jesus' suffering is important for Christian faith, however, does not mean that the suffering Jesus endured is *itself* good. There is a significant difference between expressing gratitude for the unfailing commitment to God's way of love and justice that guided Jesus' orientation toward both life and death and expressing gratitude specifically for Jesus' suffering and crucifixion. The former honors the suffering of Christ by pointing to the mission it served: resistance to injustice and insistence on a salvific love that will not succumb to violence. The latter suggests that suffering and violent death themselves are what accomplish this. To claim that unjust, traumatic suffering is in itself a means that accomplishes the embodiment of God's love and justice is to value suffering in a way that becomes dangerous for those vulnerable to abuse and injustice of many kinds.

This claim is not uncomplicated and deserves quite a bit more attention than is possible to give in the space of this article. In fact, in our two years of work together, this is the only point around which those of us who prepared this liturgy were unable to find common ground. You will note that in the liturgy that follows, the suggested *communion prayer* includes a line that reads "(Jesus) freely offered you his life and death on our behalf; through him you reconciled the world to yourself and created a new humanity, the church." This line can be read and heard as insinuating that Jesus' death itself is part of what accomplishes reconciliation, and some members of our group are convicted that the church must maintain a theological position that regards Jesus' death as salvifically productive. Other of us, myself included, are pained by this particular decision of the group, and feel that the line ought to be written in a way that clearly refuses to make unjust, violent harm and suffering necessary for salvation. Surely, this is a tension that

4. Womanist theologian Delores Williams makes claims that align with those made in this article in her book *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*, anniv. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), and several other womanist theologians and ethicists have taken up this argument.

exists across the church as well. For those interested in pursuing the topic further, black liberation theologian James Cone and womanist theologian Delores Williams have sustained a particularly illuminating conversation on the relationship of Jesus' death to salvation.⁵

For some of us, it will seem quite difficult or even intolerable to consider changes to the words of institution. Others of us will assume that if words of institution pose such a serious threat for those vulnerable to abuse, we ought to leave them out altogether. This is a tension that our group wrestled with for quite a while as we discerned a liturgical way forward.

Our North American Anabaptist Mennonite traditions value the words of institution for several reasons. Most Christian denominations agree that the Lord's Supper is the primal ritual of the church. Churches recognize each other's faithfulness to the gospel in part by the fact that we all celebrate the eucharist. With rare exception, all the official liturgies of churches East and West include words of institution, and most nonliturgical denominations use these words found in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 as well. They are spoken by the vast majority of Christians in our neighborhoods and around the world. When we speak them, we affirm that we are a part of the global Christian family and we welcome all members of that family into our midst. There are elements of both solidarity and hospitality expressed as we speak and hear words of institution. Not only do we connect ourselves to Christians around the world today, but we also connect ourselves to the tradition of the church over time and to those who have gone before us. For those of us who value this function of the words of institution deeply, omitting or changing them runs the risk of cutting ties with our sisters and brothers around the world and separating ourselves from the spirit and wisdom of previous generations. It is right that we examine all the church says and does with critical and empathetic pastoral eyes. Because of the long ecumenical tradition of their use, it is also good that we should weigh the matter of altering the words of institution with great care.

With that in mind, here are the three models that our working group discerned for using the words of institution in light of abuse:

1. **Model 1:** Remove the words *body* and *blood* from the words of institution. The great benefit of this option is that it allows the words of institution to remain largely similar to those spoken around the world and throughout Christian history, while refraining from traumatically triggering those of us who cannot hear "body" and "blood" spoken in association with the communion meal without being flooded with terror. It opens space for many survivors of sexual abuse to participate more fully without

disrupting the sense of familiarity with the service that many worshippers value.

A significant drawback is that it leaves unchallenged the possibility that worshippers may hear the words of institution as a call to become willing victims to unjust harm. We who experience participation in the Lord's Supper as a recommitment to quietly endure abuse rather than seek safety and recovery will still be at high risk each time we participate in the meal. A second drawback is that others of us in the church will find it ecumenically and theologically unwise to remove even these two words from those traditionally spoken.

2. **Model 2:** Keep the words of institution fully intact as traditionally used and add framing words to guard against harmful interpretations. The benefit of this option is that it strives to protect worshippers from the possibility that sharing the bread and cup will condition us for lives of victimhood. It treats the suffering of Jesus carefully, honestly, and in ways that both lament the injustice done to him and celebrate the love he shares with us. The hope in adding framing words to the words of institution is that worshippers will be invited to understand the suffering of Christ in ways that are both faithful and liberating. Because the focus of this approach is to interpret the words of institution anew, another benefit of this option—for those who value the historical, biblical, and ecumenical connections sustained by the words of institution—is that the words of institution are not themselves changed.

With regard to abuse, the most significant drawback of this option is that the words *body* and *blood* remain and may be triggering for survivors no matter how carefully they are framed. Another drawback is that explicitly interpreting the words of institution could make it seem to worshippers that there is only one correct or acceptable way to understand them. We know from the breadth of their use throughout the Christian tradition that there are, in fact, many edifying ways for worshippers to hear these words.

3. **Model 3:** Ground our sharing of bread and cup in the narrative of the Emmaus road sacred meal rather than that of the Last Supper. The Mennonite faith tradition is a narrative tradition. This means that we value recounting the story of the Last Supper during communion not because doing so changes the nature of the bread and cup from regular food to holy food, but because doing so grounds our practice in the life and narrative of Jesus and in the lives of his beloved community. There are, of course, other biblical narratives centered on Jesus' practice of sharing his love in the form of breaking bread that could ground the sacred meal that we share together. In this third option, we are

5. James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013); Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*.

experimenting with what sharing bread and cup might look like if grounded primarily in the narrative of the Emmaus road meal, with only an allusion to the Last Supper. This is the inverse of the traditional emphasis on Jesus' crucifixion complemented by an allusion to resurrection. While this may feel like the option that most significantly departs from tradition, it is faithful to what Mennonites have historically considered centrally important to our practice of the Lord's Supper meal.

The major benefit of this option is that it avoids the complex difficulty of the traditional words of institution altogether. Survivors of abuse are not at risk of being traumatically triggered by *body* and *blood* language, and worshipers vulnerable to abuse are not at risk of ritually accepting victimization. It also shifts the focus of our celebration to Jesus' resurrection without forgetting the Last Supper or denying the reality and significance of his crucifixion. While this option represents a significant change to a Lord's Supper service, it may be easier for worshipers to welcome than the previous two options in which it may be more obvious that the words of institution have been intentionally altered.

However, while using the narrative of the Emmaus road story is faithful to Mennonite understanding of what is important in the Lord's Supper service, it may still strike worshipers as too radical a break from what is felt as tradition. And those of us concerned about the ecumenical significance of the Lord's Supper may feel that it still represents too strong a movement away from the form of the liturgy that is commonly practiced around the world. Another possible drawback of this option is simply that it has not been tested. We don't yet know the nuances of how it will affect the liturgy and shape worshipers. Likely, as it is used, we will discover both exciting benefits and unanticipated causes for concern.

The three options that we present here are surely not the only ways to approach the words of institution in light of abuse. We offer them as options that you might explore and also as examples that might inspire your own creative discernment. Our hope in discussing these options at length is that the issues at stake have become clear enough that congregations are equipped to make their own liturgical choices in light of them.

Masculine/male language for God and Jesus

While it is certainly true that people of all genders are perpetrators of abuse, the majority of those who sexually abuse children and adults are men. When masculine imagery and male pronouns for God and Jesus are used to excess, the gendered dynamics of abuse are often mapped onto survivors' sense of who these divine figures are. For this reason, we do not refer to God in explicitly

male terms and we strive to include divine imagery in masculine, feminine, and other terms. Jesus was a man, and we don't find it wise or helpful to deny this with liturgical language. We do, however, refer to Jesus as "Beloved" in order to offer those who struggle with the gendered dynamics of abuse a way of relating to Jesus that does not immediately draw attention to his gender.

For similar reasons, it is important that those who preside over the service and serve the bread and cup represent all genders and are not exclusively men. Incorporating people of all sexes and genders into the process of sharing the meal of Christ is necessary in order to guard against the distorted, gendered power dynamics that characterize systems of sexual violence becoming those that characterize the space in which the Lord's Supper is shared as well.

“It is important that those who preside over the service and serve the bread and cup represent all genders and are not exclusively men.”

Embodiment

In large part, we have focused on the impact our liturgical language has on worshipers' experience of participation in the Lord's Supper. The holy meal, however, is much more than words. It is an embodied practice, and the embodied dynamics of the service play a powerful role in the way it shapes our lives.

Our participation is textured by the ways we do and don't move our bodies throughout the service. For example, we choose if and when to stand and move to the place where bread and juice are offered and in doing so demonstrate with our bodies that we enter into the meal freely. Moving our own bodies to the place where the body of Jesus is offered marks our bodies as also conforming. It is Jesus' body in the form of bread and juice that remains at the center of the ritual space, while we as participants make ourselves into literal followers by walking toward it. When the body of Jesus is understood to be primarily an unjustly traumatized, broken, and poured out body, and when we who are vulnerable to sexual violence move toward this body as that which is normative for the Christian life and ingest this body in the form of bread and juice, we merge our own bodies with the traumatized body of Jesus and take on the shape of bodies that follow Jesus by enduring unjust harm.

As participants choose to rise and move and consent to the invitation to share the communion meal, we move not only toward the bread and juice that represent the body of Jesus, but physically toward one another as well. With our bodies we model our connection to one another, affirming our internalization of the body of Jesus as the element we hold in common. Again, when the body of Jesus is perceived as primarily a body willing to

endure unjust, traumatic harm, one's connection to community becomes predicated on one's own agreement to allow one's body to be transformed into a body that willingly endures traumatic, unjust harm.

The meaning we create with the movement of our bodies is closely linked to the rest of the dynamics of the service discussed throughout this article. The liturgical shifts already suggested will helpfully influence the way that movement shapes the service for those vulnerable to abuse. It is, however, important to reflect specifically on how the movement of our bodies textures our worship, especially since the holy meal purports to transform the church—the *body* of Christ. Our worship may be marked by grace if the meal is brought to us in our seats and by a commitment to discipleship if we get up and walk to the place where the meal is offered. It may be received as authoritative if offered from the hands of a recognized leader. Participants may be shaped by a

sense of mutuality in the body of Christ if we are both offered the bread and cup and invited to offer it to the next in line.

Music is another way that we participate in the service with our bodies. We fill up the entire worship space with the vibrations of our vocal chords and instruments, making our words into sounds and harmonies that shape and deepen our worship. We suggest beginning the Lord's Supper service with songs of praise, because the gift of communion with each other and God is just that: a gift. Before the *invitation*, a song that connects worshipers to the sacredness of the meal about to be shared can itself begin the process of preparation for sharing the bread and cup. The song "Peace Before Us" (*Sing the Story* 16) can powerfully frame the peace greeting. Songs of welcome, gratitude, joy, hope, and attention to the movement of the Spirit among us not only support but also themselves create space within us for the transformative gift of bread and cup to be shared and received in love. (See sidebar for a list of suggestions.)

These reflections on movement and music do not by any means exhaust what can be said about the embodied dynamics of the Lord's Supper. Rather, we include them in hopes that readers will push beyond what we have offered and reflect on the ways that all our senses—sight, touch, smell, hearing, taste—in addition to our movements and the nature of our relationships, inform our sacred meal practices.

MUSIC SUGGESTIONS

- "Through Our Lives and By Our Prayers, Your Kingdom Come" *Come All You People* 67
- "Listen, Lord" *Come All You People* 71
- "Kyrie Eleison" (any edition)
- "Don't Be Afraid" *STJ* 105
- "Peace Before Us" *STS* 16
- "Come to the Table" *A Field of Voices* 8
- "Here, O My Lord, I See Thee" *HWB* 465
- "Let Us Break Bread Together" *HWB* 453
- "Eat This Bread" *HWB* 471
- "O God, Who Gives Us Life" *HWB* 483
- "Sent Forth by God's Blessing" *HWB* 478

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Brock, Rita Nakashima, and Rebecca Ann Parker. *Proverbs of Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering, and the Search for What Saves Us*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2002.
- Brown, Joanne C., Carole R. Bohn, and Elizabeth Bettenhausen. *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique*. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1989.
- Eugene, Toinette. *Balm for Gilead: Pastoral Advocacy for African American Families Experiencing Abuse*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998.
- Scarsella, Hilary H. *Sexual Abuse and the Lord's Supper: A Ritual of Harm or Healing*. (Master's thesis, Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, 2012).
- Webb, Elizabeth Ann. *The Body of Christ, Broken: Child Sexual Abuse Trauma and the Communion of Compassion*. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Dissertation Services, 2004.

Conclusion

The liturgy that follows is one designed to refrain from perpetuating the harm of sexual abuse, to take seriously the historic structure of Mennonite communion services, and to be regularly used by whole congregations. Members of the group that created it are at many different places in terms of our broader theological commitments, and by working together to craft this service we hope that it allows space for the theological diversity that is also present among and within North American Mennonite churches. That being said, we also hope that as you consider the context of your own community of faith, you find this article and liturgy useful for crafting sacred meal services that fit the particular needs of the body in which you worship. Informed by both survivors' stories of anguish and the gifts of wisdom that come from those among us who have survived traumatic harm, we invite you to imagine ways of sharing the sacred meal of Christ that make space for the Spirit to breathe life, love, justice, and grace into the lives of all who eat and drink.

The Lord's Supper Service

Preparation for communion

Minister's Manual (for reference)

Before I take the body of the Lord, before I share his life in bread and wine, I recognize the sorry things within: these I lay down.

(silent prayer)

The words of hope I often fail to give, the prayers of kindness buried in my pride, the signs of care I argued out of sight: these I lay down.

(silent prayer)

The narrowness of vision and of mind, the need for other folk to serve my will, and every word and silence meant to hurt: these I lay down.

(silent prayer)

Of those around in whom I meet my Lord, I ask their pardon and I grant them mine, that every contradiction to Christ's peace might be laid down.

(silent prayer)

Lord Jesus Christ, companion at this feast, I empty now my heart and stretch my hands, and ask to meet you here in bread and wine which you lay down. Amen.

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Suggested Lord's Supper liturgy

God of grace, as we prepare to share in the abundant life Christ offers through bread and wine at your table of love, we pray:

God, you have declared that we are your beloved creation, made in your image. You have formed our minds, our bodies, and our spirits to be good. You have offered us life in abundance. *(pause)*

Loving God,
we give you thanks.

Too often we have failed to see ourselves as your beloved children. Too often we have not cared for your creation. Too often we have neglected your offer of abundant life. *(pause)*

Loving God,
forgive us.

We know love because you loved us first. We flourish in your love, as we express your love among ourselves and with our neighbors. We find safety and peace in the beloved community of faith. *(pause)*

Loving God,
we give you thanks.

Too often we have concealed our sorrow, anger, and pain. Too often we have neglected to offer prayers of kindness, and to give words of hope and signs of care. Too often we have spoken or kept silence in ways that hurt ourselves or another. *(pause)*

Loving God,
forgive us.

God, you have shown us the way of life. We have followed Jesus, who proved what it means to be kind and faithful and strong. You have placed before us the challenge and joy of life. *(pause)*

Loving God,
we give you thanks.

Too often we are tempted to give in to our fears. Too often we are tempted to deny your faithful love. Fear, death, and denial of your love—*(pause)* these we lay down.

We step into life.

The peace greeting

Minister's Manual (for reference)

Hear the words of the Lord Jesus: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." (John 14:27)

Let us offer one another the peace of Christ. (*We exchange a handshake or embrace.*)

Suggested Lord's Supper liturgy

Be assured that God offers us grace. God is for us!

Nothing will separate us, God, from your love in Christ Jesus. And so we accept forgiveness and healing. You set us free, free from the power of sin and death. Jesus, we hear the promise that you spoke: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."

As we receive Jesus' promised gift of peace, we commit ourselves to maintaining right relationships with God, with others, and with ourselves. We exchange a gesture of peace, trusting that God's reconciling love is at work in and among us. This may be in places where we see it and in places where it is not yet seen.

The peace of Christ be with you. (*use a mirroring gesture with hands*)

Invitation

Minister's Manual (for reference)

Brothers and sisters in Christ, it is right that we call to mind the meaning of this Supper.

It is a remembrance of the sacrifice of Christ for the sin of the world; an encounter with the risen Lord; a feeding on him in faith; a communion with one another in his body, the church; and an anticipation of the day when he will come again.

It is the Lord's Table, and all who are baptized are invited to it.

Therefore, let us come to the Lord's Table in faith, knowing our weakness, renouncing our sin, trusting in Christ, seeking his grace.

Suggested Lord's Supper liturgy

Leader: Friends, this is the joyful feast of the people of God!

Voice 1: Many will come from east and west and from north and south and will eat at God's table. (Matthew 8:11)

Voice 2: At the Passover meal in the upper room, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. (Mark 14:22) He said to his disciples in "I have eagerly desired to eat this meal with you." (Luke 22:15)

Voice 3: When our Beloved, the risen Christ, was eating at the table with the disciples, their eyes were opened and they recognized him. (Luke 24:35)

Leader: Jesus says: "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." (John 6:35) The risen Christ welcomes us to the feast before us.

Communion thanksgiving prayer

Minister's Manual (for reference)

O God of perfect love, through Jesus, your Son, we have come to know you.

In the company of the whole communion of saints, we come before you in this remembrance of Jesus' death with gratitude for your great redemption.

We praise you in the congregation of those you have called to be your companions and servants.

We thank you that you forgive those who are repentant.

You did not spare your only and beloved Son but offered him up to a bitter death.

Suggested Lord's Supper liturgy

God of heaven and earth, at your invitation all things come into being.

From generation to generation you have cared for all that you created.

For this we adore you.

God of covenant love, even when your people turned from you, you sought and restored them.

For this we praise you.

Finally, you anointed your Beloved Child, Jesus, to redeem and fulfill your purpose for creation.

By your wisdom the Beloved One fed the hungry, healed the afflicted, and was anointed by a woman.

He ate with the scorned, delighted in children, and washed the disciples' feet.

He challenged the powerful and brought good news to the poor.

You sent us a friend of sinners and gave us a new covenant.

With his stripes we are healed.

O God of bountiful grace, gratitude fills our hearts as we come to the Lord's Table.

Let it be a sign to us that you are a God who forgives us gladly and accepts us graciously.

Let this bread and cup show forth Christ's holy work of redemption.

In this Holy Supper, make us one with him that we might be steadfast in following him.

Send your Spirit to sanctify our hearts so that we might praise our Redeemer and taste his presence now and evermore.

Let the bread we break and the cup we drink be a communion of the body and blood of Christ.

Hear us for his sake, in whose name we pray,

Our Father . . .

At the Passover feast, Jesus hosted a holy meal. There he enacted his gift of enduring presence.

When Jesus was handed over, crucified, and killed by the hands of lawless ones, you did not abandon him.

He freely offered you his life and death on our behalf; through him you reconciled the world to yourself and created a new humanity, the church. (See *article commentary on this line.*)

You raised your Beloved Child up; death could not hold him.

You opened your covenant with Israel to all humanity and gave us life everlasting.

By your Spirit, let the bread we break and the cup we share be a communion with the risen Christ and one another.

By your Spirit, bind us in communion with all creation;

By your Spirit, empower us to offer your abundant life to the world you love.

Remembering these gifts of grace, we celebrate and give you thanks.

United with Christ and with all who stand before you in earth and heaven, we worship you, O God, in everlasting praise. Amen.

Words of institution for the bread

Minister's Manual

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Model 1 – Remove the words *body* and *blood*

[Words of institution for the bread and cup]

Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it (*break the bread*) and said, "When you share bread together, remember me."

Jesus took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant. When you drink it together, remember me."

Model 2 – Framing words

Anticipating that he would be killed for offering life and liberation; anticipating that his crucifixion would be an attempt to silence and discourage his followers, to erase his name from their lips; anticipating that those who had him crucified expected to demonstrate their strength by taking control of his body and the divine energy pulsing in the blood of his veins; anticipating this, on the night when he was betrayed Jesus took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it (*break the bread into two parts*) and said, "This is my body for you. When you share bread together, remember me." (*bring the two parts of the bread back together*)

Model 3 – Emmaus road narrative

Narrator: After the crucifixion of Jesus, two disciples, sad and confused, made their way to Emmaus, their home village, while talking with each other about all the things that had happened concerning the arrest and execution of the one they loved. A stranger met them on the road, and engaged their conversation. Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about the Messiah in all the scriptures, and they were amazed. It was evening, so the disciples invited the traveler to stay with them. When they were at the table together, the stranger took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. At that instant their eyes were opened, they recognized him, and he vanished from their sight. The disciples said to each other, "How our hearts burned within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us! And now we have recognized him in the breaking of the bread. Jesus is here!"

Leader: And so now at this simple table we, too, bless and break the bread. (*lift and break bread*)
We raise the cup. (*lift cup*)

Prayer of thanks for the bread

Minister's Manual

Bless, O Christ, the bread that we break.

Make it the bread of our holy communion with you.

Open our eyes that we might see you by faith, on the cross, our reconciliation with God.

May your immeasurable act of generosity draw us to love you and serve you always. Amen.

Model 1 – Remove the words *body* and *blood*

[Prayer of thanks for the bread and cup]

God of grace and love,
your faithfulness roots our lives,
holding us with patience and grace. Your mercy and goodness
overflow each day, filling us with a harvest of love.

Thank you for this bread of Christ, blessed by earth, hand, and heaven. Thank you for this cup of Christ, blessed by earth, hand, and heaven.

May your Spirit feed us with this bread and satisfy us with this cup, nourishing our bodies, minds, and spirits.

As the bread is given

Minister's Manual

Eat, beloved, eat the Lord's Bread.

Model 2 – Framing words

God of grace,
your mercy and goodness overflow each day, filling us with a harvest of love.

Thank you for this bread of Christ, blessed by earth, hand, and heaven.

May your Spirit feed us with this bread, nourishing our bodies, minds, and spirits.

Model 3 – Emmaus road narrative

[Prayer of thanks for the bread and cup]

God of all goodness, we give you thanks for this bread, and for this cup. Thank you for walking with us, feeding us and comforting us.

Our hearts burn within us as we remember Jesus' words. Death could not hold him. He stands here among us and comforts us, saying: "Peace be with you!" In the breaking and sharing of this bread and cup, we recognize the One who loves and gives everlasting life to all. Jesus is among us!

Models 1, 2, 3

Server: The bread of life, or Eat this bread and never be hungry

or

Eat and be nourished by this bread.

Words of institution for the cup

Minister's Manual

In the same way he took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me."

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Model 2 – Framing words

In the same way, he took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; when you drink it together, remember me."

In choosing to entrust his body to those who loved him, Jesus denied crucifixion the ability to destroy him fully. In giving the energy of his veins to many, Jesus denied crucifixion the ability to drain that energy from the world. The presence of his body and the energy in his veins lives on in the relationships of those who share bread and cup together. The one who was crucified lives, and the life he offers abounds. The powers of destruction failed to erase Christ's message of love, for as often as you share this bread and cup, you proclaim that message until he comes.

Prayer of thanks for the cup

Minister's Manual

O Lamb of God, you shed your blood on the cross for us.

Praised be your holy name for your grace and love.

Bless this cup, O Lord.

Make it the communion of your blood, so we may find rest for our souls and joy for our journey. Amen.

Model 2 – Framing words

God of love,
your faithfulness roots our lives,
holding us with patience and grace.

Thank you for this cup of Christ,
blessed by earth, hand, and heaven.

May your Spirit satisfy us with this cup,
quenching the thirsts of our bodies, minds, and spirits.

As the cup is given

Minister's Manual

Drink, beloved, drink the Lord's Cup.

Model 1, 2, 3

Server says: The cup of salvation, or Drink this cup and never be thirsty

or

Drink and be satisfied by this cup.

Songs

See accompanying article for sung or instrumental music suggestions during distribution.

Post-communion prayer

Minister's Manual

Blessed are you, O God.

You set aside this bread and cup as signs of your Son's broken body and shed blood.

Through them you have made us partakers of Christ and of one another.

As we go forth, give us grace to count others better than ourselves, to love our enemies, and to seek peace.

Send the Spirit of Truth to keep alive in us what Jesus taught and did, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Models 1, 2, 3

(The following can be read as a prayer by a worship leader or read as a litany by the congregation)

Bless the Lord, O my soul. All my inmost being, praise God's holy name.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all God's benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who rescues your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion. (Psalm 103)

We bless you, O God, for your healing love and your gift of salvation, for your gracious gifts of bread and cup.

We bless you for nourishing us in the love of this community and for sustaining us in hope.

We pray for your strength to prepare us for your service as we offer to you our lives of worship and witness in the world you have made.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Song

See accompanying article for song suggestions. Especially appropriate: *HWB* 483, *HWB* 478.

Benediction

Beloved of God,
may the grace of Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us now and always. Amen. (2 Corinthians 13:13-14)

or

God will keep us from all evil.

God will keep our life.

God will keep our going out and coming in
from this time on and forevermore. Amen. (Psalm 121:7-8)

Dismissal

Go from here filled and overflowing with the gifts of God's abundant love and grace. Go in peace.