

# SACRAMENTAL LIFE: PART I

## BAPTISM & HOLY EUCHARIST

### I. Gathering

#### Hymns

- We know that Christ is raised, *The Hymnal 1982*, #296
- Come, risen Lord, and deign to be our guest, *The Hymnal 1982*, # 306

#### Collect of the Day

Eternal God, heavenly Father, you have graciously accepted us as living members of your son our Savior Jesus Christ, and you have fed us with spiritual food in the Sacrament of the Body and Blood. Send us now into the world in peace, and grant us strength and courage to love and serve you with gladness and singleness of heart; through Christ our Lord. Amen. (BCP p. 365)

### II. Illumination

#### *Introduction:*

*Symbols are integral to our understanding of the sacraments of the Church. Sacramental symbols date from the salvation history of Israel, when covenants between God and his chosen people were marked with physical signs. A rainbow marked God's promise to Noah; the tablets of stone and the Ark of the Covenant were signs of God's presence with Moses and the wandering tribes. Even now, the foods consumed at modern Passover meals are symbols of God's saving acts of deliverance from bondage in Egypt.*

*The early Christian Church inherited, continued, and deepened this sacramental understanding of our relationship with God. The Church itself, the Christian community, is an outward sign, a sacrament of God's presence among us. The symbols we use in our sacramental rituals are reminders of our salvation history, especially of events in the life of Christ. They also point forward to the fulfillment of God's eternal promises.*

Early in church history, St. Augustine formulated the understanding that God performs the sacraments; the minister is merely the human agent. Thus the validity of the sacrament is not dependent upon the virtue or spiritual merit of the minister performing the physical action. By the time of St. Thomas Aquinas there were seven sacraments recognized by the Roman Catholic Church: baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist, ordination, marriage, penance, and unction. Luther held there were only three: baptism, Eucharist, and penance. When pressed he said that only two of these were real sacraments, because penance had no "sign." Calvin said there were only two, baptism and the Eucharist.

Anglicans regard Holy Baptism and Holy Eucharist as grounded in scripture and essential for all Christians. The other five, often called Sacramental Rites, are not necessary for all Christians and have a more ambiguous scriptural warrant. Nevertheless, Anglicans have no trouble referring to all seven as sacraments. Our lesson on the sacraments will therefore be divided into two sessions, one for Holy Baptism and Holy Eucharist, the other for the Sacramental Rites.

The understanding of sacramental efficacy is another point of striking difference between Protestants and Catholics. Protestants from Luther and Calvin onwards have defined the Church around the proclamation of the Word, understood as the preaching of the Word. The Catholic tradition has understood the Church much more as the sacrament of Christ and therefore as the community practicing the sacraments. Luther held that the sacraments impart no grace that is not also found in the preaching of the Word. Calvin understood them as secondary to the Word, merely confirming God's promises given in the Word. The Roman Church, on the other hand, developed and maintains an understanding of all seven sacraments as objectively **efficacious**; that is to

say, God uses them to confer the grace signified by the outward symbol. Taking Holy Baptism as an example, God uses the outward sign of water to confer the inward grace of new birth in Christ and forgiveness of sin. Another way to say this is that “the sign effects the thing signified.”

Anglicanism seeks a balance between word and sacraments. Historically it has veered from emphasis on one to emphasis on the other. The Oxford movement of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century played a vital role in restoring the centrality of the sacraments in the Anglican Churches. Today Anglicanism attempts to hold together people who would stress one or the other. *Word* represents Christ in proclamation and in moral commitment; *Sacrament* represents Christ in communal action and through material objects. The word convinces us through our faculties of intellect and reason and may persuade us to acts of love and mercy. The sacraments persuade through motion and our five senses; they create our sense of belonging to a community reaching back in time to Christ and the apostles, and even to Abraham, and forward to the communion of saints.

In our Communion service, there are two times when the priest elevates something: the reading of the gospel and the consecration of the bread and wine: word and sacrament are lifted up. See the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:34-38): the eunuch hears the word, but then consents to be baptized. We need both; it is not enough to preach or to be convinced so that we may attain salvation; God wants a covenanted community in a sacramental world of rainbows, handshakes, rings given and exchanged, bread and wine blessed and broken and shared. Through the sacraments, God tells us that the world is more than it appears to be, that there is deeper meaning in our surroundings, in our relationships and in our lives.

The action of the sacraments is not limited to the space in which we celebrate them. God bestows upon us the grace to carry these actions out into the world. In the Holy Eucharist, for example, we recall, relive, and continue the Incarnation, carrying Christ out into the world with us. In the Rite of Reconciliation, we are reconciled in our own relationship to God but we are also renewed as reconciliation people, bringing that spirit from the pastor’s office into our communities. In these two lessons, we will look at each sacrament’s significance for sacramental living in the world.

## **HOLY BAPTISM**

Matthew 3:13-17, The Baptism of Our Lord  
*An Outline of the Faith*, Holy Baptism, BCP pp. 858-859  
Holy Baptism, BCP pp. 299-308

In Holy Baptism, we see sacramental action in its most easily understood form. We can see, feel, and hear the water but we cannot see God’s grace; we cannot see repentance; we cannot see the community’s acceptance; we cannot see faith. Water symbolizes cleansing, drowning, and rebirth, dissolving (forgiving our sins), and the downpouring of God’s grace. Water is common but essential for life, a precious commodity in the often desert locations where the Church was born. Through the symbol of water, the Church looks back in salvation history to Noah and the cleansing flood, to Israel’s passage through the Red Sea, and to the baptism of Jesus by John.

Chrism, a consecrated oil, is used for anointing the newly baptized person with the sign of the cross at baptism. At this consignation, the bishop or priest says to each newly baptized person that “you are sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism and marked as Christ’s own for ever” (BCP, p. 308). Chrism must be consecrated by a bishop.

Even as infants, we are baptized by a community and are accepted into that community. Just as Jesus welcomed little children to come to him (Mark 10:14), the Christian family welcomes even the youngest into our household. Because infants and small children are unable to make a profession of faith or to affirm the baptismal promises, parents and godparents or sponsors make these affirmations for them and promise to do all they can to nurture and encourage the child’s growth in faith. At a later time, the young adult will be able to claim this faith and renew these promises for herself (see Confirmation).

Baptism by water and in the name of the Holy Spirit is full initiation into the Christian community and is an unrepeatable sacrament. Baptized persons of any age may participate fully in the life of the Church, including receiving Holy Communion. Although we are all sinners, even after baptism, there are opportunities for forgiveness and renewal in other rites of the Church. We have the opportunity to renew our baptismal promises whenever someone is baptized and in the Confirmation liturgy. At each General Confession and in the Rite of Reconciliation, we receive forgiveness of sin. In Confirmation, there is even an opportunity for a formal reaffirmation of faith with laying on of hands by the bishop.

Because each baptism is such an important part of the life of the Church family, baptisms properly take place during the major Sunday services rather than privately. The most appropriate occasions for Baptism are the feasts of the Baptism of Our Lord, the Easter Vigil, Pentecost, and All Saints or whenever a bishop is present. Through our baptism we are deputized to continue the work of Christ.

## **THE HOLY EUCHARIST**

Mark 14:22-24 The Last Supper

The Holy Eucharist is a meal for the whole family of Christ, taken at the Lord's Table. As such, it looks backward to the Passover meal, eaten by the people of Israel as they were preparing for their liberation from slavery in Egypt. It looks backward to the Last Supper, in which Jesus took, blessed, broke, and gave bread to his disciples in preparation for his sacrifice on the cross when he liberated us from sin and death. The words of consecration are taken directly from Holy Scripture, in which Jesus commands us to "do this for the remembrance of me." Finally, it looks forward to the heavenly banquet.

We understand this remembrance as a *re-living* rather than as a commemoration. Christ's sacrifice on the cross took place in historical time but exists eternally. His sacrifice is not repeated but is celebrated in the Holy Eucharist in our own time. Christ is not sacrificed anew but, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church is present at his one sacrifice in a spiritual sense. The word *Eucharist* comes from the Greek for thanksgiving. In Holy Eucharist we give thanks for Christ's eternal sacrifice for us and we experience it anew.

Christ is truly present in the Holy Eucharist but the precise mechanism is a mystery. We call this doctrine the Real Presence. Here again, the Anglican tradition stands between the Protestant view, in which communion is sometimes seen as a memorial celebration, and the Roman Catholic view of transubstantiation in which the elements are believed to be materially transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. In the Real Presence, we believe Christ is present in the consecrated elements in a special but mysterious way. For this reason, we treat the consecrated bread and wine reverently, either consuming them immediately, reserving them for later consumption, or disposing of them directly into the earth.

The Holy Eucharist is a family meal. All baptized persons, of any age, of any denomination, are welcome at the Lord's Table. It is often called Holy Communion because we receive it as a community and through it we are united with Christ and with each other. Episcopal priests do not celebrate Holy Eucharist alone—at least one communicant must be present with the priest for Holy Communion.

In the Holy Eucharist, we not only remember the Incarnation and our Lord's sacrifice on the cross, but Jesus Christ becomes truly present among us. We are united with him individually and as a community; we continue the Incarnation as the Body of Christ. We are then charged to carry the Incarnation out into the world, to become the Real Presence of Christ in our relationships to God and our neighbor.

## THE SACRAMENTAL LIFE: PART I BAPTISM AND HOLY EUCHARIST

### III. Engagement

#### 1. Symbols and gifts; signs and grace

Begin with an activity and discussion about gifts.

- Distribute small gifts to each participant and discuss
- Ask what is the best gift each has ever received and why
- Discuss symbolic significance of gifts

The facilitator should bring out that the gifts were freely given and unearned, that they were a sign of love, and point out any strengthening or equipping qualities of the gifts.

Then, read together *The Outline of the Faith* questions and answers on the sacraments on BCP pages 857-858. Discuss the following phrases in the second answer: “forgives our sins, enlightens our minds, stirs our hearts, and strengthens our wills.” These phrases indicate a link between the grace given in the sacraments and what we need to live the sacramental life every day.

#### 2. What have we learned? What remains to be examined?

**SACRAMENTAL LIFE: PART II  
OTHER SACRAMENTAL RITES**

**OUTLINE**

<b>Sacrament:</b>	<b>Outward Sign</b>	<b>Inward Grace</b>	<b>Minister:</b>	<b>Scriptural Basis</b>	<b>Sacramental living</b>
Baptism	Water, in the name of the Trinity	Union with Christ, birth into the Church, forgiveness of sins, new life	Baptized Christian – normally one in Holy Orders	Matt. 28: 19	Live out the baptismal promises
Eucharist	Chrism; or sign of the cross	Body and Blood of Christ; forgiveness of sins, strengthening union with Christ, foretaste of heavenly banquet	Priest or Bishop	Luke 22: 19-20	Become the Body of Christ, God's sacrament, in the world
Confirmation	Laying hands	Strength from the Holy Spirit	Bishop	Acts 8: 14-17	Be a witness to Christ
Ordination	Laying hands	Strength to fulfill vows	Bishop	Matt. 28: 16-19	Serve Church in the Order
Matrimony	Joining Hands	Strength to fulfill vows	Man & Woman (blessing by priest or bishop)	John 20: 21-23 Matt. 19: 4-6; John 2: 1-11	Form a life-long union; become outward sign of relationship between Christ and Church
Reconciliation	Laying hands; pronouncing absolution	Absolution of sins	Priest or Bishop	John 20: 23	Live out reconciliation in the world
Unction	Laying hands with anointing	Strength and healing	Priest or Bishop	James 5: 14-16	Be an instrument of healing in the world

## SACRAMENTAL LIFE: PART II OTHER SACRAMENTAL RITES

### I. Gathering

#### Hymns

- The church's one foundation, *The Hymnal 1982* # 52
- Lord, you give the great commission, *The Hymnal 1982* #528

#### Collect of the Day

Almighty God, whose Son our Savior Jesus Christ is the light of the world; Grant that your people, illumined by your Word and Sacraments, may shine with the radiance of Christ's glory, that he may be known, worshiped, and obeyed to the ends of the earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*  
(BCP p. 215)

#### *Related Scriptures:*

Acts 8: 14-17  
Mark 19: 4-6  
John 2: 1-11  
John 20:19-23  
James 5:14-16  
Matthew 28: 16-19

### II. Illumination      BCP pp. 860-861

#### *Introduction*

*As the Catechism points out, these other Sacramental Rites are means of grace, just as Holy Baptism and Holy Eucharist are, but unlike the two great sacraments, they are not necessary for all persons. The Sacramental Rites are sometimes called Pastoral Rites because in them, God through the Church is addressing the needs people have in different life circumstances and passages.*

*(Note: these are presented in the order found in the Catechism.)*

## CONFIRMATION

BCP pp. 412-419

The Episcopal Church welcomes even infants and young children into the household of God by Holy Baptism. Because they are not yet able to enter into the Baptismal Covenant for themselves at that age, their parents and godparents make the promises and affirmation of faith on their behalf. Confirmation evolved so that those baptized at an early age could make a mature profession of faith and commitment to Christ. In this sacrament, we receive the laying on of hands by a bishop, linking us to the apostles in an unbroken chain. We receive strength from the Holy Spirit to live the Christian life according to our baptismal promises, reiterated in the confirmation liturgy.

Prerequisites for confirmation are Holy Baptism, instruction in the faith, and a mature intention to make a public profession of faith and commitment to Christian responsibility. Young people who were baptized as

infants are typically confirmed between the ages of 12 and 16. The Episcopal Church recommends that confirmation be deferred until age 14-15 or older in order to permit greater psychological maturity and independence for this important step. Some churches retain early Confirmation as a holdover from the older Prayer Books, in which Confirmation was a prerequisite for Holy Communion. In the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*, Baptism is considered full Christian initiation, so that Confirmation is no longer required before one may receive Holy Communion.

People who are baptized as adults are expected to be confirmed if their baptism is not accompanied by the laying on of hands by a bishop. People who join the Episcopal Church as adults are also expected to be confirmed or received.

The liturgy of Confirmation also provides for *reaffirmation* (BCP p. 419). Confirmed Episcopalians may choose *reaffirmation* when they wish to rededicate their lives to Christ, typically, but not exclusively, after a period of disengagement from active life in the Church.

## **ORDINATION** BCP pp. 510-555

The Church has recognized three distinct orders of ordained ministry since the time of the apostles. Bishops, priests, and deacons each have distinct leadership functions. Through a process of mutual discernment, the Church recognizes those who are called by God to ordained ministry and admits them to Holy Orders through prayer and laying on of hands by a bishop or bishops duly qualified to ordain and consecrate. The manner of ordination in the Episcopal Church is consistent with the customs of the early Church insofar as possible in order to affirm the continuity of these sacred orders in historical time and throughout the contemporary world.

### **1. THE ORDINATION OF A BISHOP** (BCP pp. 511-523)

Bishops are ordained whenever possible on Sundays, feasts of Our Lord, or of the apostles or evangelists. The Presiding Bishop or designee presides and is chief consecrator, accompanied by at least two other bishops. Consecration by at least three bishops both symbolizes and assures that new bishops are part of a community of ordained overseers and chief pastors stretching back in history to the time of the apostles and linking around the globe with other bishops in the one, holy, catholic Church of today.

The ordination liturgy sets out our understanding of the ministry of a bishop:

- A bishop is called to be one with the apostles in proclaiming the resurrection and interpreting the Gospel;
- To testify to the sovereignty of Christ as “Lord of lords, King of kings;”
- To guard the faith, unity and discipline of the Church;
- To provide for the administration of the sacraments;
- To ordain priests and deacons and to join in ordaining bishops;
- To be a chief pastor, a “faithful and wholesome example;”
- To share with other bishops in the leadership of the Church;
- To encourage the gifts and ministries of all the baptized;
- To oversee the life and work of the Church;
- To sustain and counsel with the ordained;
- To defend the poor and disenfranchised.

Through prayer and laying on of hands by the consecrating bishops, God confers the power of the Spirit to build up, nurture, and oversee the life of the Church.

## 2. THE ORDINATION OF A PRIEST (BCP PP. 524-535)

A priest is ordained by a duly qualified bishop in the presence of at least two other priests. The ordination liturgy tells us that:

- A priest is a “pastor, priest, and teacher;”
- Exercises his or her office in community “with your bishop and fellow presbyters”;
- Proclaims by word and deed the Gospel, aligning his/her life with its teaching;
- Loves and cares for his/her people, no matter their status in life;
- Preaches, absolves, blesses, shares in Holy Baptism and Eucharist (i.e., with the bishop), and performs other ministrations as assigned by the bishop;
- Is obedient to his/her bishop;
- Studies scripture and has an active life of prayer;
- Administers the sacraments of the New Covenant;
- Is a pastor, teacher, and councilor in order to strengthen the family of God.

Through prayer and the laying on of hands by the bishop and other priests, God confers the grace and power to equip the new priest for his/or her duties.

## 3. THE ORDINATION OF A DEACON (BCP PP. 536-547)

Candidates for priesthood are first ordained as deacons, an order of ministry first mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles as those chosen to serve the people of God and assure just treatment of the helpless while the apostles preached and taught (Acts 6:1-6). They were ordained by laying on of hands. Deacons who will later be ordained as priests are called “transitional deacons.” The diaconate is a special ministry of servant hood. The ordination liturgy tells us that:

- A deacon studies the Holy Scriptures for personal nourishment and for patterning his or her life and work on them;
- Serves all people--especially the poor, weak, sick, lonely;
- Makes Christ and his redemptive love known;
- Interprets the “needs, concerns, and hopes of the world” to the Church;
- Assists the bishop and priests in public worship and ministrations;
- Is guided by the leadership and pastoral direction of the bishop;
- Looks for Christ in all others, in order to embody Christ’s servant hood.

Through prayer and the laying on of hands by the bishop, God grants the ordained the grace and power to be “modest and humble, strong and constant,” so that this life of service may glorify God and bring many to Christ.

## SUMMARY

**Bishop:** A Bishop serves the ministry of OVERSIGHT, *coordinating* and *propagating* the work of the Church in the present and into the future.

**Priest:** A Priest serves the ministry of PRESIDENCY, leading a community in its varied circumstances to *do* the work of the Church, feeding and forming the community as it does so.

**Deacon:** A Deacon serves the ministry of SERVICE, engaging the Church and its local communities in meeting the needs of those both inside and outside its fellowship.

## HOLY MATRIMONY

BCP pp.422-438

The sacrament of matrimony is actually performed by the two persons being married, not by the celebrant. The celebrant pronounces the blessing of the marriage. It is a “solemn and public covenant between a man and a woman in the presence of God” (BCP p. 422). According to the *Constitution and Canons* of the Episcopal Church (“canon law”), prior to any marriage in the Church (not necessarily in a church building), a member of the clergy should ascertain:

- (a) That both parties have the right to contract a marriage according to the laws of the State.
- (b) That both parties understand that Holy Matrimony is a physical and spiritual union of a man and a woman, entered into within the community of faith, by mutual consent of heart, mind, and will, and with intent that it be lifelong.
- (c) That both parties freely and knowingly consent to such marriage, without fraud, coercion, mistake as to identity of a partner, or mental reservation.
- (d) That at least one of the parties has received Holy Baptism.
- (e) That both parties have been instructed as to the nature, meaning, and purpose of Holy Matrimony by the Member of the Clergy, or that they have both received such instruction from persons known by the Member of the Clergy to be competent and responsible. (Canon I.18.2)

Clergy typically prepare a couple for marriage during several joint sessions during the weeks or months immediately preceding the wedding.

In cases where either party has been married before:

- (a) The Member of the Clergy shall be satisfied by appropriate evidence that the prior marriage has been annulled or dissolved by a final judgment or decree of a civil court of competent jurisdiction.
- (b) The Member of the Clergy shall have instructed the parties that continuing concern must be shown for the well-being of the former spouse, and of any children of the prior marriage.
- (c) The Member of the Clergy shall consult with and obtain the consent of the Bishop of the Diocese wherein the Member of the Clergy is canonically resident or the Bishop of the Diocese in which the Member of the Clergy is licensed to officiate prior to, and shall report to that Bishop, the solemnization of any marriage under this Section.
- (d) If the proposed marriage is to be solemnized in a jurisdiction other than the one in which the consent has been given, the consent shall be affirmed by the Bishop of that jurisdiction. (Canon I.19.3)

The canons further state that the consent of the Bishop in these instances shall be in writing and that diocesan records of these judgments shall be maintained.

All this is to ensure that any Christian marriage is undertaken lawfully, freely, and with proper intent on the part of both persons. As the celebrant says in the opening exhortation: “Therefore marriage is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and in accordance with the purposes for which it was instituted by God” (BCP p. 423).

The liturgy of Holy Matrimony takes place in the context of the Liturgy of the Word and may be followed by Holy Communion. After the exhortation, the man and woman each give their *consent* to the marriage and the witnesses, including the congregation, promise to uphold the couple in their marriage. The actual *marriage*, or exchange of vows, comes after the scripture readings. The couple join hands as they exchange their vows to love, sustain, and support one another in success and in adversity until death. These words and the joining of hands are the outward sign of the grace given in marriage, the grace to live up to those vows. Although rings are commonly blessed and exchanged, they are not essential and are not the sacramental sign.

The marriage liturgy includes prayers for the couple (BCP p. 429-430). These prayers indicate our view of what marriage should be: “that each may be to the other a strength in need, a counselor in perplexity, a comfort in sorrow, and a companion in joy.” We ask that they be granted the grace to forgive each other and to seek God’s forgiveness whenever they hurt each other.

We pray that the married couple may be a sign of Christ’s love for the world, in other words, that their relationship itself be a sacrament, a sign of unity, forgiveness, and joy, and that their affection would overflow into their community. The marriage concludes with a priestly blessing, asking God’s grace that they may live into their marriage covenant faithfully.

The Prayer Book makes other provisions for blessing and celebrating a marriage. Civil marriages may be blessed after the fact (BCP pp. 433-434) and there is a form for devising a unique marriage liturgy, although the vows are prescribed (BCP pp. 435-436).

### **RECONCILIATION OF A PENITENT** (BCP pp. 446-452)

In the Episcopal Church, private confession is available but not required. The offices of Morning and Evening Prayer and the liturgies of Holy Eucharist contain general confessions and absolutions deemed efficacious and sufficient whenever we seek forgiveness from God with truly penitent hearts.

There are two forms of service for private confession, however, and they may be used whenever a penitent wishes. Private confession is frequently offered during a retreat or it may be sought during a time of crisis or great change, during a serious illness, during Lent, or when the penitent is greatly troubled and in need of pastoral care. The Rite of Reconciliation is by no means limited to these times, however.

The confessor may spend some time in pastoral conversation with the penitent in preparation for the Rite. A preparation exercise, such as Martin Smith’s book, *Reconciliation: Preparing for Confession in the Episcopal Church*, may be helpful. After the penitent confesses all serious sin, the confessor may offer “counsel, direction, and comfort” as well as assigning some prayer or action to be performed as a sign of contrition and thanksgiving. Only a bishop or a priest may then pronounce *absolution* in the service. If another Christian hears a confession, she may use the *declaration of forgiveness* provided on p. 448 and p. 452. The contents of the confession are a matter of absolute secrecy for the confessor (“the seal of the confessional”).

Each Christian has a ministry of reconciliation to the world, exercised through our care for others, our willingness to give and receive forgiveness to and from our neighbors, and our work for peace and justice. We live sacramentally when we embody Christ’s ministry of reconciliation in our daily relationships.

### **UNCTION (Ministration to the Sick)** (BCP pp. 453-461)

The anointing of the sick with prayer for healing and laying on of hands is recommended in the Letter of James and has been practiced by the Church since earliest times. It became associated with the time of death, however, and was at one time called “Extreme Unction.” Now it is recognized that prayers and anointing for healing of body, mind, and spirit are appropriate at any time and even may be sought by one person on behalf of another or others.