

Sacramental and Sacred: A Catechetical Introduction with Respect to the Relevance of a
Sacramental Church in the Twenty-First Century

by

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Abstract

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“SACRAMENTAL AND SACRED: A CATECHETICAL INTRODUCTION WITH
RESPECT TO THE RELEVANCE OF A SACRAMENTAL CHURCH IN THE
TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY”

Project under the direction of The Right Reverend J. Neil Alexander

This project grew from my desire to explore the relevance of being a sacramental church in the twenty-first century and how that forms us as sacramental people in the world in which we live. Because baptism, confirmation, and eucharist are the three sacraments that most people will encounter in our traditions, they will be the focus of this doctoral project. My intention is that it will serve as a resource for any who are interested in understanding why and how the sacramental nature of the Episcopal Church enlightens our personal faith, as it also empowers us to do the mission of the church. This study is a program model that delves into the origins, evolutions, and current practices of these three sacraments to determine how they work together. Much attention is paid as to how Scripture is intertwined in the practices of a sacramental church. The person using this model may be new to our church or a longtime member in search of answers to questions previously not explored or understood. In either case, a fuller knowledge of the “inward and spiritual grace” that they convey to make us “outward and visible signs” of that grace in our sacramental lives is the objective of this work.

Approved _____ Date _____
Adviser

This project is dedicated to the glory of God

In loving memory of my parents
Mary Vance Martin Douglass and Edward Barker Douglass
who always stressed the importance of education
and who brought me to the Episcopal Church

In thankfulness for the Right Reverend J. Neil Alexander
whose mentoring made this project possible

In gratitude for my friends
Judy Harris and Sylvia Ross
who have encouraged and supported me
throughout this project

Introduction

The idea for writing about the relevance of a sacramental church in our world today has been one that has been forming in my mind throughout my entire life as an Episcopalian. I have always wanted to share our traditions, not only because I enjoyed being a part of them, but also because I have always felt that our church has something to offer everyone. At a very early age, I was fascinated with the sacraments of our church, but never really given any concrete explanations as to why these outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace given to us by Christ were important. Growing up in the church in the 1960's, I was very much aware that many Episcopalians were just going through the motions, doing the same things every week at Sunday worship that they had done all of their lives. We were a stoic group who believed that it was more mannerly to keep our faith to ourselves. There was always plenty of outreach at arm's length, or writing a check for those less fortunate.

My exposure to what Christ could mean in my life was limited to Sunday School classes, and then, at the age of twelve, a six week confirmation crash course on the Book of Common Prayer and the Ten Commandments. After that, we were pretty much left on our own, with our Episcopal Young Churchmen (EYC) group being more of a social event than any kind of a Christian life changing experience.

In my years growing up in the Episcopal Church there were not many folks who had been members of other churches. The idea of a "cradle to grave" Episcopalian was very much the norm. Then, in the 1970's, we started to get more new members who had married Episcopalians. My eyes were opened to the idea of my faith being something bigger than just attending church, singing in the choir, and doing outreach at a distance.

These new members from other traditions were more outwardly visible in words and actions as they described what Jesus Christ meant to them in their lives. I longed to have the same experience, openly expressing myself, while still practicing my sacramental Episcopal traditions. This was also the same period of time when the modern charismatic movement was taking shape and drawing many members of mainline, traditional churches into more fundamentalist worship settings. I longed for their spontaneity, while still maintaining our sacramental liturgies. Steven Pankey expresses it well: “Part of our ongoing decline, as I see it, is our inability to tell our own story, to offer a compelling reason to take part in our portion of the Body of Christ.”¹

In the multicultural world in which we live today, new members in Episcopal churches come to us for many different reasons. There are those who have not been welcomed in other churches because of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and other prejudices that thrive in our world today, despite our knowing that we are all made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26). There is a great need to be prepared to support them in their journeys of faith, as well as those who are just searching for a place to explore what faith in Christ might entail. If we do not understand our sacramental traditions and why we do them, we cannot share them with others.

As we explore the depth of their meaning, we *can* expect something life changing to happen, not just repeating the same liturgies over and over again as a rite of passage that is comfortable and familiar from the cradle to the grave. Don Saliers writes that

¹ Steven J. Pankey, *The Church-Idea for an Episcopal Moment*, Doctor of Ministry Project, (Sewanee, TN: School of Theology, 2015),103.

“liturgy ought to be that kind of place where you cannot go home again.”² Since we do experience sacramental rites through our Episcopal liturgy, then we have the responsibility to ascertain that all who partake in those liturgies understand what we are doing and why it can make a difference to them, as well as us. Alexander Schmemmann once wrote: “The Church is love, expectation, and joy. It is heaven on earth . . . it is the joy of recovered childhood, that free, unconditioned and disinterested joy which alone is capable of transforming the world.”³ If we define the Church as the body of Christ, that is, those baptized into this faith, we are each that avenue for love, expectation, and joy. We have the power to transform our lives and the lives of others as we practice being sacramental people who show the world through our thoughts, words, and deeds that we are outward and visible signs of God’s inward and spiritual grace. One way to start is by understanding the relationship between the sacraments that most people in our particular tradition of faith will encounter – baptism, confirmation, and eucharist. The early church⁴ saw these as one rite that was performed to fully initiate a person into Christ’s Body, the church, after a long period of preparation. It was a life changing event in which the participants died and arose to a new life in Christ through baptism. The Holy Spirit was invoked upon them through a laying on of hands by the bishop, that would later be

² Don Saliers, *Liturgy and Moral Imagination* class notes, Advanced Degree Program, The School of Theology, Sewanee, TN., 2015.

³ Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1973), 30.

⁴ The period of Christianity from its inception to its legalization (c. 33 CE – 313 CE). In this project, it is mainly referring to the fourth century church.

termed confirmation. And, they celebrated this new life in Christ by their first reception of his Body and Blood (Holy Eucharist), as well as every time they received it, thereafter.

The question can be asked, “Why would someone searching for a community of faith choose a sacramental church?” The intent of this work is to give those searching for answers to why a sacramental church could be important to their faith, along with those who are already a part of our tradition, a means of discernment. The catechetical approach of question and answer in short and long form will hopefully be a ready source that is easily accessed for questions that need a succinct answer, as well as a more detailed explanation of the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and eucharist, and the Episcopal traditions associated with them. Historical, theological, and biblical references will be explored to support the argument that a sacramental church has relevance in the world today as an avenue to bring dignity, peace, and justice to the hurting world in which we “live and move and have our being,”⁵ as well as to all that we experience that is good in our lives. Specific questions will include the biblical nature of these rites, the origins of them, their evolution, and their place today in our formation as followers of Christ.

The early church and its initiation practices will be explored as a model for how we can reclaim the power of the sacraments that were such a life changing experience for Christians during that era.

⁵ The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church; Together with the Psalter or Psalms of David, “A Collect for Guidance” (New York, NY: Church Publishing, 1979), 100.

The bibliography and related footnotes offer an abundance of additional information that one may also choose to further explore and expand upon the answers to these questions.

In addition, there are several other resources for one to continue to enhance their knowledge of why a sacramental church, such as found in the Episcopal tradition, is a good choice for many. These options are certainly not exhaustive, but they are a good place to continue a conversation about what the sacramental nature of our being might look like.

The revival of the ancient church's catechumenate provides adults seeking baptism with "a period of training and instruction in Christian understandings about God, human relationships, and the meaning of life, which culminates in the reception of the Sacraments of Christian Initiation."⁶ Each catechetical session is made up of the following elements: "a continual reflection on Scripture, Christian prayer, worship, and the catechumen's gifts for ministry and work for justice and peace."⁷ This approach to Christian formation is designed to illuminate not only the catechumens, but also the faith journeys of their sponsors and the catechists who are administering the program.⁸

Education for Ministry is an adult satellite program administered by the Beecken Center at the School of Theology in Sewanee, Tennessee. This small group program recognizes that every baptized person is called to ministry in the world about them.

⁶ *The Book of Occasional Services 2003* (New York, NY: Church Publishing, 2004), 114.

⁷ *The Book of Occasional Services 2003*, 114.

⁸ *The Book of Occasional Services 2003*, 114.

Through a four-year program of study, prayer, and reflection, participants learn how to think theologically as they respond to the call to Christian service.⁹ Areas covered in the program include the Old and New Testaments, history of the church, and moral and ethical theology, as well as worship opportunities and prayer.

A more recent formation program entitled *The Way of Love* is being endorsed by the Episcopal Church's current presiding bishop, The Most Reverend Michael Curry. He calls us to bear witness to Christ's way of love in our world. The program does this through the means of seven practices: turn, learn, pray, worship, bless, go, and rest. These practices are explored through small groups who use Scripture, the Book of Common Prayer 1979, music, sharing of the participants' own stories of faith, and other resources.¹⁰

Options for Christian formation for children include *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd* and *Godly Play*. Intended for children ages 3-12, *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd* uses the Montessori approach of teaching to explore the Bible and liturgy (prayers and sacraments) in an atrium setting. The subject matter for gatherings follows the liturgical year of the Church so that they correspond to what is happening on that particular Sunday in the worship service.¹¹

Godly Play is a similar Montessori based program for children ages 3-12 designed to spiritually prepare them with good answers and decisions as they move into

⁹ *Education for Ministry*, www.efm.sewanee.edu, accessed January 2019.

¹⁰ *The Way of Love*, www.episcopalchurch.org/way-of-love, accessed January 2019.

¹¹ *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd*, www.cgsusa.org, accessed January 2019.

adolescence. The Godly Play practice teaches its participants to listen for God and to make authentic and creative responses to God’s call in their lives through Scriptural and spiritual experiences. The program has grown to reach out to “adults, the elderly, and children in a diverse variety of settings such as hospitals, residential care facilities, prisons, and by facilitators of social justice.”¹² Both programs use hands-on models to represent the Christian formation topics that they are addressing. Churches in the Episcopal tradition will vary as to how they present Christian formation to children. The main goal is to give our youth avenues to experience their faith through Scripture and the traditions of the Church so that they will always feel that they have been nurtured in a manner that prepares them to live out their own missional baptismal vows. They do not have to wait until adulthood to understand how their lives of faith are to be shared in the world around them.

Another resource for older youth is the Journey to Adulthood (J2A) program. According to its website, Journey to Adulthood “is a complete youth ministry program of spiritual formation for 6th-12th grades. It encourages relational ministry and uses Bible study, prayer, rites of passage, outreach ministries and both serious and playful activities to underscore the two guiding principles of the program: 1) Manhood and womanhood are free gifts from God; and 2) Adulthood must be earned.”¹³

But first, we begin with this introduction into the origins, evolutions, and current practices of the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and eucharist in the Episcopal

¹² *Godly Play*, www.godlyplayfoundation.org, accessed January 2019.

¹³ *Journey to Adulthood*, www.episcopalchurch.org/library/link/journey-adulthood-j2a, accessed April 2019.

Church with the hope that this resource will spark added interest to delve more deeply into why these sacraments matter to us and how they affect a life changing experience that is ever moving us closer to God through Jesus Christ. The words of a song from the hymnal *Wonder, Love, and Praise*¹⁴ beautifully sum up what it means to be a part of a sacramental church that worships with the zeal of the early Christian church, as it empowers us to become “outward and visible signs” of “inward and spiritual grace” in the world around us today:

As we gather at your Table,
as we listen to your Word,
help us know, O God your presence,
let our hearts and minds be stirred.
Nourish us with sacred story
till we claim it as our own,
teach us through this holy banquet
how to make Love’s vict’ry known.

Turn our worship into witness
in the sacrament of life;
send us forth to love and serve you,
bringing peace where there is strife.
Give us, Christ, your great compassion
to forgive as you forgave;
may we still behold your image
in the world you died to save.

Gracious Spirit, help us summon
other guests to share the Feast
where triumphant Love will welcome
those who had been last and least.
There no more will envy blind us
nor will pride our peace destroy,
as we join with saints and angels

¹⁴ *Wonder, Love, and Praise: A Supplement to the Hymnal 1982* (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 1997), 763.

to repeat the sounding joy.¹⁵

To begin to understand how to live this sacramental life, we start by defining a sacrament and then take a look at how the early church viewed these sacraments as not only life giving, but also nourishment for continued life.

¹⁵ Words: Carl P. Daw, Jr. © 1989 Hope Publishing Company, Carol Stream, IL 60188. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

Sacraments

*For as the word of God preached putteth Christ into our ears, so likewise these elements of water, bread, and wine, joined to God's word, do after a sacramental manner put Christ into our eyes, mouths, hands, and all our senses.*¹⁶

Thomas Cranmer

Architect of the First Book of Common Prayer 1549

1. What are the sacraments?

*The Episcopal Book of Common Prayer 1979 defines sacraments as “outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace, given by Christ as sure and certain means by which we receive that grace.”*¹⁷

In the fourth century, Augustine of Hippo would be the first to define a sacrament as a “visible form of invisible grace”.¹⁸ The sacraments are a means by which we allow Christ to be in us and in our relationships with others. In his book, *A Theology of Worship*, Louis Weil writes: “The sacraments reveal that the physical world, far from being evil, is the domain of God’s activity. The most common things in human life – a bath, food and drink, a human touch – can serve as the instruments of an encounter with God.”¹⁹ In baptism, water is used; in the Eucharist, bread and wine; and, in confirmation, it is the laying on of hands.

¹⁶ Thomas Cranmer, *Writings and Disputations of Thomas Cranmer Relative to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper*, ed. John Edmund Cox (Cambridge, England: The University Press, 1844), 41.

¹⁷ The Book of Common Prayer 1979, 857.

¹⁸ Tad Guzie, *The Book of Sacramental Basics* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1981), 39.

¹⁹ Louis Weil, *A Theology of Worship* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 2002), 17.

Although sacraments are not the only means by which Christ enters our lives, they represent how the church observes the ways that we become empowered to do its mission, which the Book of Common Prayer reminds us is to “restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.”²⁰

J. Neil Alexander stresses the importance of the sacramental aspect of our Sunday worship. He writes: “For Jesus followers the primary act of Sunday is to gather as a community and give public witness to his death and resurrection. . . . Jesus, the Risen One – is raised up in both proclamation and preaching and in the sacraments of baptism and eucharist.”²¹ Alexander also writes that “the fact that the tradition often refers to the sacraments as holy mysteries should be a clue that we will never fully fathom their depth and meaning, nor will we ever fully grasp what God does in, for, and through us by means of them.”²² He explains sacraments as gifts from God that are free.²³ He also explains that the best way to learn about how the sacraments affect our lives is to show up Sunday after Sunday, year after year, “when the baptized of God [assemble] to make their public witness to the death and resurrection of Jesus.”²⁴

²⁰ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 855.

²¹ J. Neil Alexander, *Common Prayer: Reflections on Episcopal Worship*, “Of Sacraments and Sunday,” eds. Joseph S. Pagano and Amy E. Richter (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2019). Note: The published version of this essay was not available at the time this project was completed. For page numbers, please refer to the published essay.

²² Alexander, “Of Sacraments and Sunday.”

²³ Alexander, “Of Sacraments and Sunday.”

²⁴ Alexander, “Of Sacraments and Sunday.”

2. From where does the word “sacrament” come?

*The word “sacrament” comes from the Latin word “sacramentum.”*²⁵

Joseph Martos explains its meaning:

In pre-Christian times a sacramentum was a pledge of money or property which was deposited in a temple by parties to satisfy a lawsuit or contract. It later came to mean an oath of allegiance made by soldiers to their commander and the gods of Rome. In either case, the sacramentum involved a religious ceremony in a sacred place. Christian writers in the second century A.D. borrowed the term and used it to talk to their Roman contemporaries about the ceremony of Christian initiation. They explained that baptism was something like the sacramentum administered to new recruits – it was a ritual through which people began a new life of service to God.²⁶

3. What are the two sacraments ordained by Jesus Christ in the Gospels?

*The two sacraments ordained by Christ in the Gospels are Holy Baptism and the Holy Eucharist.*²⁷

Jesus’ baptism is recorded in Matthew (3:13-17), Mark (1:9-11), Luke (3:21-22), and John (1:29-34). The Holy Eucharist, also known as the Institution of the Lord’s Supper, is recorded in the Gospels of Matthew (26:26-28), Mark (14:22-24), and Luke (22:14-20). More detail on these scriptural passages follows in the sections on Holy Baptism²⁸ and Holy Eucharist.²⁹ They are the two sacraments recognized by the early church in their

²⁵ Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred* (Liguori, Missouri: Liguori/Triumph, 2001), 3.

²⁶ Martos, 3-4.

²⁷ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 858.

²⁸ See page 13 below.

²⁹ See page 51 below.

rites of initiation, along with a laying on of hands and anointing that would later evolve into the sacramental rite of confirmation. James Turrell writes that “the eucharistic context of one’s baptism frames subsequent eucharistic participation as a renewal of baptism. . . . the eucharist nurtures and sustains the relationship that was created in baptism.”³⁰ The scriptural stories of Jesus’ baptism that led him to his earthly ministry, and his breaking bread with his disciples, as a remembrance of him and what he taught them, are the core stories that form how we worship.

4. What are other sacramental rites recognized by the Episcopal Church?

*The other five sacramental rites that evolved through the church are confirmation, ordination, holy matrimony, reconciliation of the penitent, and unction.*³¹

Although they were not specifically ordained by Christ, they strengthen our understanding of the importance of having God’s grace present in other aspects of our journeys of faith. They provide us with a means of celebrating the joyful sacramental moments in our lives (confirmation, ordination, and holy matrimony), as well as accepting the trials in our lives that are also grace filled in nature (reconciliation of a penitent and unction). They also represent types of sacramental rites that not all people receive.

³⁰ James Turrell, *Celebrating the Rites of Initiation: A Practical Ceremonial Guide for Clergy and Other Liturgical Ministers* (New York, NY: Church Publishing, 2013), 16.

³¹ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 860.

5. Where do we find the liturgies (formularies for services) of our sacramental rites of the Episcopal Church?

The Book of Common Prayer 1979 contains the liturgies needed to perform the sacramental rites of our Episcopal tradition.

In the first Book of Common Prayer 1549, Thomas Cranmer sought to combine the offices of daily prayer and principal sacramental rites of the church into a single volume that would be readily accessible for clergy and the congregation. It was a move to include everyone in the participation of worship services so as to make them more relevant to all present. All subsequent English and American prayer books have contained these rites.

The official title of the Book of Common Prayer 1979 is the following: *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church.*

6. What would be the benefits of belonging to a sacramental church?

We receive and explore God's grace through rites and symbols that give us memories and benchmarks with which to associate that grace.

Just as we associate different rites and passages with events in our secular lives, the outward and visible signs of the sacraments are reminders of how God's grace interacts in our inward and spiritual lives. These signs may happen as we receive them ourselves or as we renew our sacramental vows when we watch others receive them. Throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus taught in parables and through symbols that would be familiar to those who were following him. Through the church, we do this very much as a family whose traditions are reminders of the importance of these events in our lives. The

continuation of them throughout the generations is not only a manner in which they are kept alive, but also the manner in which there is a sense that we are present in them not only now but when they were first implemented.

7. How does sacramental theology and practice shape the mission of the church?

It is truly a mystery how the grace of God changes our lives, but it can provide us with a means by which we have a picture of how we perceive Christ in the world about us and how we participate in what Christ calls us to do.

A sacramental church gives us a place to begin the practice of being sacramental people who can become, by our very actions, “outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace.” Through the grace that God conveys in our sacramental rites and through our responses to vows to God, we are called to take Christ to a world that can be filled with good, as well as hurting situations. Our thoughts, words, and actions reflect our sacramental beings as they are outward and visible signs of God’s grace conveyed within us.

J. Neil Alexander suggests that how we spend our time is sacramental. In our twenty-four/seven world today, when we look at our calendars, do the entries inspire us to find what is sacramental in our lives, or do they take us away from the grace that God so freely gives us?³²

³² J. Neil Alexander, *Liturgical Time* class notes, Advanced Degree Program, The School of Theology, Sewanee, TN, 2014.

8. In what other ways do we recognize the ministries of the Body of Christ that are not the seven sacraments?

We commission members of the church to various ministries such as eucharistic ministers, lectors, musicians, altar guild, ushers, vestry, outreach, spiritual directors, and educators. This list is not exhaustive. Whenever we share our gifts from God with each other, and with others who may not yet be a part of our community of faith, we are outwardly and visibly showing them that the inward and spiritual grace of Christ is a part of us and is important to us. To be sacramental in our faith includes going beyond the seven sacraments of the church, encouraging and inviting others, as we set examples of how we live out that faith through the grace that we receive from Christ.

Paul writes in his first letter to the Corinthians about how the body of Christ consists of many members with many different gifts (I Corinthians 12:12-31a). If only a part of the body is working properly, it will not function to its full capacity. We are called to bring our gifts together in a manner where they can work in harmony to strive to bring everyone to God through Christ.

When we can find that holy ground together, it is cause for celebration and it is, indeed, living a sacramental life.

Holy Baptism

*And when those appointed to receive baptism are chosen, their life having been examined (if they lived virtuously while they were catechumens, and if they honored the widows, and if they visited those who are sick, and if they fulfilled every good work), and when those who brought them in testify in his [or her] behalf that he [or she] acted thus, then let them hear the gospel.*³³

The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus (c. 215)

1. What is Holy Baptism?

*The Book of Common Prayer 1979 defines Holy Baptism as “full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ’s Body the Church. The bond which God establishes in Baptism is indissoluble.”*³⁴

Full initiation means that we do not need any additional sacramental rite to allow our full participation in other sacramental rites of the church. It means that all who are baptized may share in the Holy Eucharist (reception of Christ’s body and blood). Baptism is administered only once, while administration of the eucharist is a weekly witness to Christ’s life, death, and resurrection that continually strengthens us to live out the vows made at our baptisms. Through baptism, we become the adopted children of God, and thus, inheritors of God’s kingdom.³⁵

The prayer book states, “Holy Baptism is appropriately administered within the Eucharist as the chief service on a Sunday or other feast.”³⁶ There are four times when

³³ *Apostolic Tradition*, 20.1-2, as cited in Paul F. Bradshaw, Maxwell E. Johnson, and L. Edward Phillips, *Apostolic Tradition – Hermeneia – A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible*, ed. Harold W. Attridge (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), 104-105.

³⁴ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 298.

³⁵ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 858.

³⁶ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 298.

Holy Baptism is especially appropriate - The Easter Vigil, the Day of Pentecost, All Saints' Day or the Sunday after All Saints' Day, and the Feast of the Baptism of our Lord. It is also reserved for when the bishop is present, if possible.³⁷

The Easter Vigil is the first service of Easter Day held between sunset on Holy Saturday and sunrise on Easter Morning.³⁸ It is the renewal of the rite of initiation based on early church models that suggests a service that included baptism, laying on of hands and anointing (later termed confirmation), and first communion, all in a single rite.

The Day of Pentecost is one of seven principal feasts of the church that recalls the day when the Holy Spirit, who had been promised by Jesus (John 14:25-26), descended upon the believers of Christ in Jerusalem, and the church was born. It is recorded in the second chapter of Acts, and according to that account, about three thousand people were baptized on that day (Acts 2:41).

All Saints' Day, another of the seven principal feasts of the church, commemorates all saints, known and unknown.³⁹ It is appropriate for baptisms in that saints are people who have devoutly lived out their baptismal vows. To celebrate a baptism on this day is to join in with the communion of saints from all times, some of which may be people whom we have loved and are no longer with us.

³⁷ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 312.

³⁸ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 284.

³⁹ Don S. Armentrout and Robert Boak Slocum, eds., *An Episcopal Dictionary of the Church: A User Friendly Reference for Episcopalians* (New York, NY: Church Publishing Incorporated, 2000), 7.

The Feast of the Baptism of our Lord is also appropriate for baptisms in that it is a remembrance of Jesus' own baptism in the Jordan River.⁴⁰

In the early Church, the bishop was the normal presider at baptisms. Therefore, when possible, candidates should be baptized on the day of the bishop's visitation so that he or she can preside over the rite.

2. Where is Holy Baptism referenced in Scripture?

Holy Baptism is referenced in all four Gospels, as well as in Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 Peter, Hebrews, and Galatians.

Most notable verses include the following:

In Matthew (3:1-11), Mark (1:1-8), Luke (3:2-6), and John (1:23-28), John the Baptist proclaims a baptism with water for repentance and forgiveness of sins, as he also proclaims that Christ will come baptizing with the Holy Spirit.

In Matthew (3:13-17), Mark (1:9-11), Luke (3:21-22), and John (1:29-34), John baptizes Jesus in the Jordan River and the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus. His baptism signifies the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry. It is through our baptisms that we begin our journeys of faith as those called to minister to the world in Christ's name. We model Jesus' example when he is baptized before going out into the world to strive to accomplish the mission of the church.

Matthew 28:16-20 is an account of a resurrection story where Jesus meets his disciples on a mountain in Galilee, commanding them to go out and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

⁴⁰ See question 2, page 15 for further discussion.

This would become the basis for the Trinitarian formula used in early church baptismal rites to the present day rites.⁴¹

John 3:1-5 records Jesus' words to Nicodemus about being born again with water and the Spirit. This would be used in the 1662 English prayer book to justify adult baptism.⁴²

In the Acts of the Apostles 2:1-42, on the day of Pentecost, it is recorded that the Holy Spirit descended upon the group and, after hearing Peter's testimony about Jesus, about three thousand people were baptized. Daniel Stevick writes that "Acts emphasizes that Baptism was a response to the word and a witness to faith" because those present "received his word and were baptized."⁴³

In Romans (6:3-11), Paul writes that through our baptisms, our old selves are buried with Christ and we are then raised with him into a new life. This idea of death to sin and rebirth to a new life in Christ is included in the current baptismal rite in the prayer known as the "Thanksgiving over the Water."⁴⁴

Thomas Cranmer would include references to Scripture in the rites and prayers of the first Book of Common Prayer 1549.⁴⁵ Scripture has remained an integral part of all

⁴¹ See question 18, page 37, for further discussion of the Trinitarian formula.

⁴² See question 11, page 28 and question 13, pages 30-31, for further discussion on adult baptism.

⁴³ Daniel Stevick, *Supplement to Prayer Book Studies* 26 (New York, NY: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1973), 16.

⁴⁴ See question 17, page 36 for further discussion.

⁴⁵ *The First and Second Prayer Books of Edward VI* (London: The Prayer Book Society, 1999).

prayer books since 1549 to the present. We will see this in more detail as we continue our discussion of the sacramental rites of baptism, confirmation, and communion.

3. What are the origins of Holy Baptism?

*Rites of initiation into a community have been present throughout time. Early Christian rites of baptism evolved from Jewish initiation practices of converts to Judaism.*⁴⁶

These Jewish practices would greatly influence the early church's process of initiation. Marion Hatchett's account of Jewish initiation included the candidate's attending synagogue services, "a period of intense instruction," a questioning of "why would one wish to become a Jew," and a "repentance and renunciation of the former manner of life."⁴⁷ Also, other practices of Jewish ritual included "witnesses to vouch for the candidate," immersion in water, ritual language, and signing of the candidate.⁴⁸

Daniel Stevick quotes A. D. Nock: "Judaism and Christianity demanded renunciation and a new start. They demanded not merely acceptance of a rite, but the adhesion to the will of a theology, in a word, faith, a new life in a new people."⁴⁹ That same conversion experience would be present in the early church's preparation for initiation and subsequent baptismal liturgy of the Easter Vigil.

⁴⁶ Marion J. Hatchett, *Commentary on the American Prayer Book* (New York, NY: Harper/Collins Publishers, 1995), 252.

⁴⁷ Hatchett, 251.

⁴⁸ Hatchett, 251-252.

⁴⁹ Stevick, 55.

4. What were the requirements of the early Christians to be considered for Baptism?

*A three-year period of discernment and instruction was required before a candidate could be fully initiated into the church.*⁵⁰

The Apostolic Tradition ascribed to Hippolytus, is a document from the third century that describes the early practices of Christian initiation.⁵¹ Those wishing to be considered for initiation (baptism) into the church were called catechumens (meaning hearers; also unbaptized). Typically, they went through a three-year period of preparation for baptism known as the catechumenate. Before admission, those interested in hearing the Word of God were brought by sponsors to the leaders who questioned them as to why they wanted to become a Christian. The manner in which they lived their lives was also examined. Certain occupations were not allowed to be considered for baptismal candidacy. Prostitutes, artists, actors, those in the military, enchanters, and astrologers were among the list of those who had to give up their occupations or be removed from consideration for baptism.⁵²

Admission to the catechumenate would then continue with a pre-initiation ceremony that, according to Edward Yarnold, included four elements: “The sign of the cross was made, probably on the candidate’s forehead; salt was given to [the candidate]; hands were laid upon [the candidate]; and the candidate was exorcised.” He writes that

⁵⁰ *Apostolic Tradition*, 17.1, as cited in Bradshaw, Johnson, Phillips, 96-97.

⁵¹ See Bradshaw, Johnson, and Phillips, for a discussion concerning other theories about the authorship and dating of the *Apostolic Tradition*, 1-6.

⁵² *Apostolic Tradition*, 16.1-17, as cited in Bradshaw, Johnson, and Phillips, 88-93.

the symbolism of the sign of the cross was one of ownership, explaining that soldiers and slaves were marked on the hand as belonging to whom they owed service. The Christian counterpart to that was belonging to Christ. Concerning the use of salt, Yarnold writes:

The symbolism of salt is explained by John the Deacon writing from Rome probably early in the sixth century: “Now that he is a catechumen he will receive blessed salt, with which he is signed, because just as all flesh is seasoned and preserved by salt, so too the mind, sodden and soft as it is from the waves of the world, is seasoned by the salt of wisdom and of the preaching of the word of God.”

Yarnold explains that “the imposition of hands is the traditional sign of the dedication of an offering to God [Lev. 1.4] and a gesture of blessing.” Finally, the exorcism is performed because “in the early church pagans were thought to be possessed by the devil.”⁵³

Those admitted as catechumens could only attend the liturgy of the Word (the first part of the service) until they were baptized. They would be required to leave before the Peace and subsequent liturgy of Holy Communion (the second part of the service).⁵⁴

When candidates were finally granted permission to petition to be baptized, they would submit their names the day before Lent. Yarnold writes that they were required to attend “daily exorcisms and instruction” during Lent. Their sponsors attended these meetings, also. It was during this time that the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer were explained and expected to be committed to memory.⁵⁵

⁵³ Edward Yarnold, *The Awe Inspiring Rites of Initiation: Baptismal Homilies of the Fourth Century* (Middlegreen Slough: St. Paul Publications, 1981), 5-6.

⁵⁴ *Apostolic Tradition*, 19.1, Bradshaw, Johnson, and Phillips, 102-103.

⁵⁵ Yarnold, 8.

Daniel Stevick reminds us that in biblical times faith was not only what one said, but also was what was in one's heart (Isaiah 29:13, cited by Jesus in Mark 7:6f).⁵⁶

5. How did the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus describe the rite of baptism in the early church?

The rite of baptism was full initiation into the church that included baptism, laying on of hands (what will become confirmation), and first reception of communion by the newly baptized, all in a single rite.

The normative time for performing baptisms in the early church was at the Easter Vigil.⁵⁷

Anointings are also visible in the *Apostolic Tradition* in different forms.⁵⁸

The *Apostolic Tradition* describes preparation for the Vigil and its evening ceremony:

They instruct those who are to be baptized that they should bathe and wash on the fifth [day] of the week. . . . Those who want to be baptized fast on Friday. On the Saturday the bishop gathers together those who are to be baptized in one place and tells them all to pray and kneel. When he puts his hand on them, he exorcises every strange spirit [commanding them] to leave them and never return. After adjuring them, he breathes on them and signs their foreheads, their ears, and their nostrils. Then let him raise them up and let them keep the whole night listening to readings and preaching.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Stevick, 55.

⁵⁷ Note: Pentecost was also a day reserved for baptisms in the early Church.

⁵⁸ *Apostolic Tradition*, for example: 21.6-10 and 21.22-23, as cited in Bradshaw, Johnson, and Phillips, 112-119.

⁵⁹ *Apostolic Tradition*, 20.5 and 20.7-9, as cited in Bradshaw, Johnson, and Phillips, 104-107.

At daybreak (cock crow), the actual baptisms occurred with a blessing over the water, a renouncing of Satan and all his works, anointing with the oil of exorcism, and immersion of the candidates three times, baptizing in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. With each immersion, the candidate was asked questions that pertained to his or her belief in the Creed. The newly baptized person was then anointed with the oil of thanksgiving. The baptized were then clothed and brought into the church.⁶⁰

The garment that the newly baptized wore was white. Our present day alb, worn in worship services by clergy and eucharistic ministers, is derived from this garment.

Patrick Malloy writes:

The alb is part of a symbolic program that extends through the entire liturgical life of a Christian. It begins with the vesting of the newly baptized in a white robe and ends with the draping of the earthly remains with a white pall. All three – baptismal gown, alb, and pall – are, in effect, the same garment. They identify the vested person as one of those who, as the Book of Revelation puts it, “have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 7:14).”⁶¹

The rite of initiation continued with the bishop laying hands on the newly baptized conferring the Holy Spirit with a prayer for them. After the laying on of hands, the bishop put the oil of thanksgiving on their foreheads, anointing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.⁶² This action, performed as part of the single rite of

⁶⁰ *Apostolic Tradition*, 21.1-20, as cited in Bradshaw, Johnson, and Phillips, 112-119.

⁶¹ Patrick J. Malloy, *Celebrating the Eucharist: A Practical Ceremonial Guide for Clergy and Other Liturgical Ministers* (New York, NY: Church Publishing, Incorporated, 2007), 49-50.

⁶² *Apostolic Tradition*, 21.22-23, as cited in Bradshaw, Johnson, and Phillips, 118-119.

initiation of the early church, would become the sacramental rite of confirmation in later years. It was placed between the baptism and the first communion of the newly baptized and was reserved for the bishop to perform.

Prayers with all the faithful (those previously and newly baptized) followed, and then the kiss of peace.⁶³

The offering was brought forward and the elements were consecrated to be the body and blood of Christ. The neophytes (newly baptized) received Holy Communion for the first time. They also received milk and honey mixed together in a cup, representing three things: (1) the “fulfillment of the promise to the fathers, which spoke of a land flowing with milk and honey,” (2) the nourishment of the faithful as if they were babies, and (3) the sweetness that is given to those who hear Christ’s word. In addition, a third cup with water in it was given to them representing that “the inner man, also which is the soul, may receive the same things as the body.”⁶⁴ The *Apostolic Tradition* shows us the depth of passion and commitment for believers, and the importance and privilege of membership in Christ’s body, the church, during the era before the church was institutionalized.

6. How did the evolution of baptism affect a change in its significance in the church?

Baptism evolved into a sacrament of forgiveness from guilt inherited through Adam and Eve.

⁶³ *Apostolic Tradition*, 21.25-26, as cited in Bradshaw, Johnson, and Phillips, 120-121.

⁶⁴ *Apostolic Tradition*, 21.27-34, as cited in Bradshaw, Johnson, and Phillips, 120-123.

Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE), one of the great church fathers, had developed the theory that at birth all humans inherited the guilt of Adam and Eve. This is the concept of original sin where all share in Adam and Eve's disobedience in the Garden of Eden. His writings influenced the Christian church in that there was great concern that if one died before being baptized, he or she would not be able to attain heaven. James Turrell writes in his book on Christian initiation that baptism became a sort of "celestial fire insurance" to insure people that they would not go to hell.⁶⁵ In fact, Constantine, the emperor who legalized Christianity, waited to be baptized on his death bed because he feared that he would not remain sinless before dying. This concern about eternal damnation also accelerated the number of infants being baptized due to the high mortality rate among them at that time. The Church no longer believes that children or those who are un-churched will not attain heaven if they have not been baptized.

7. From where did our current baptismal liturgy in the Book of Common Prayer 1979 come?

Our current liturgy was revised from earlier prayer books, but heavily influenced by studies of the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus (described above), together with other early church orders. It underwent many changes along the way until those early practices were used as a model for the baptismal rites of our current Book of Common Prayer 1979.

The early Christians experienced baptism as a life changing event. As they were immersed in the waters of baptism, they died to sin, and then arose from those waters

⁶⁵ Turrell, 4.

with Christ to a new life, free of sin (Romans 6:3-4). The full initiation that included baptism, laying on of hands, and reception of Christ's body and blood was not a casual event. After almost two millennia of the church treating baptism as more of a rite of passage, instead of the conversion experience of the early Christians, the Episcopal Church began the task of revising the rites of the prayer book to reflect the significance of a life in Christ that had been experienced through participation in those early rites. From 1950 until the 1970's, a series of *Prayer Book Studies* with trial uses for proposed rites explored what a new prayer book might include.⁶⁶

The 1928 Prayer Book, in use prior to the 1979 version, was beloved by Episcopalians. There was great resistance to any change. Even though its rubrics (instructions) called for baptism to be held during Sunday worship or other holy days,⁶⁷ baptisms were often held as a private service with family and friends present, instead of including the whole congregation as witnesses. This precluded the congregation from taking vows that promised publically to ascertain that the child would be brought up in the Christian faith, as well as renewing their own baptismal vows. The sense of a church family that would be there for the child before and after he or she could express a mature affirmation of faith was greatly diminished. In considering a return to baptism held at the

⁶⁶ Note: The *Prayer Book Studies* were overseen and implemented by the Episcopal Church's Standing Liturgical Committee, which had been established at the national church's General Convention in 1928 to begin the process of liturgical revisions. Included in these studies were liturgical revisions for the Holy Eucharist, initiation, and the daily office, as well as a complete revision of the Psalter. See Hatchett, 12.

⁶⁷ The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church; According to the Use of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America; Together with the Psalter or Psalms of David (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1928), 273.

Sunday worship service, William Palmer Ladd suggests that “if we believe in the importance of the Church in society, why not make as much as possible of the ceremony of initiation into that society.”⁶⁸

The private baptisms during the era of previous American prayer books went against the grain of Thomas Cranmer’s work as the main contributor to the first English prayer book (1549). Cranmer had studied the early church’s practices and worked to incorporate their ideals into this new prayer book. He wrote in the opening rubrics that baptism was “openly ministered in the presence of all the congregation.” He also wrote that “every man present maybe put in remembrance of his own profession made to God in his Baptism.”⁶⁹ The studies for the revisions to be included in the 1979 Prayer Book would not only look to the early church for guidance, but would also be reminiscent of Cranmer’s work to bring a meaningful experience to those who participated in them.

William Palmer Ladd would write: “excessive devotion to the old and familiar may make a Church or church[person] ineffective, and even a bit ridiculous.”⁷⁰ He may have been right. By the time of the 1928 Prayer Book, liturgy had become adapted to practice, rather than practice following the standard of liturgy.

⁶⁸ Ladd, 3.

⁶⁹ *The First and Second Prayer Books of Edward VI*, 236.

⁷⁰ Ladd, 1.

8. What is an important difference in the baptismal liturgy from our current Book of Common Prayer 1979 and previous versions of the prayer book?

One important difference from previous versions of the Book of Common Prayer is that the 1979 prayer book rite of baptism is focused more on the mission of the church and what that entails for our responsibilities as those baptized into the Body of Christ.

As already discussed, previous versions focused more on getting the candidate removed from sin so as to be able to attain heaven. It became apparent that there was a great need to return to a baptismal theology that is both life changing *and* missional that reminds everyone that the ministers of the church include every baptized person, whether lay or ordained.⁷¹ It strengthens the idea of mission being the natural response to baptism, just as it was for Jesus when his earthly ministry began after he was baptized (Matthew 4:12-17, Mark 1:14-15, and Luke 4:14-15). We are all called through our own baptisms to restore everyone we encounter to unity with God and each other in Christ.⁷²

9. What is the outward and visible sign of Holy Baptism?

According to the Book of Common Prayer 1979, “the outward and visible sign in Baptism is water, in which the person is baptized in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”⁷³

⁷¹ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 855.

⁷² Book of Common Prayer 1979, 855.

⁷³ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 858.

Jesus was baptized with water from the Jordan River, as is attested to in the Gospels.

Brief descriptions in early church orders help to explain baptismal practices. The earliest known example of a church order is the *Didache*, a treatise believed to be from the first century.⁷⁴ Chapter seven of that treatise discusses baptism and the importance of pouring water three times over the head of the candidate, baptizing in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy [Spirit].⁷⁵ The *Apostolic Tradition* describes full immersion in water of baptismal candidates.⁷⁶

10. What is the inward and spiritual grace of Holy Baptism?

According to the Book of Common Prayer 1979, “the inward and spiritual grace in Baptism is union with Christ in his death and resurrection, birth into God’s family the Church, forgiveness of sins, and new life in the Holy Spirit.”⁷⁷

The inward and spiritual grace of Holy Baptism is a conversion experience that is meant to be life changing so that God’s Holy Spirit can live within us. It is how we live out our baptismal vows in the world around us. One of the collects (prayers) in the rite of Morning Prayer sums it up well:

⁷⁴ Note: The date of the *Didache* cannot be proven, but there is a wide spread belief that it is a very early form of a church order that influenced later orders. See Jones, et. al., “The Didache,” Frank Hawkins, 84-85, and Bradshaw and Johnson, 14.

⁷⁵ *Didache*, chapter seven, accessed from www.thedidache.com, December, 2018.

⁷⁶ *Apostolic Tradition*, 21.14, as cited in Bradshaw, Johnson, and Phillips, 116-117.

⁷⁷ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 858.

Heavenly Father, in you we live and move and have our being: We humbly pray you so to guide and govern us by your Holy Spirit, that in all the cares and occupations of our life we may not forget you, but may remember that we are ever walking in your sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord.⁷⁸

11. What is the Episcopal Church's position concerning adult baptism?

Adult baptism is normative in the Episcopal Church.

Prospective initiates into the church hear the Gospel, are trained in the faith, and choose to make a life changing commitment to follow Christ when they join the church. Just as the early Christians made a conscious decision to embark upon a new way of life, adults today are called to do the same.

12. What is the significance of the Episcopal Church baptizing infants?

Even though infants are not able to understand why they are being initiated as full members of the church, we want them to have that designation from the beginning of their lives, so that they may continually grow in grace as a child of God as they grow up in the Christian faith.

Daniel Stevick explains the importance of infant baptism:

Baptism is a witness to the actuality of God's love in the life of the child, as it reaches him in care and acceptance through the parents in the Church. He knows God before he knows what to call him. Infant Baptism expresses the deep continuity of human generations. What parents regard as of ultimate value for life for their children, they do not, because they cannot, withhold until the child can make up his own mind on the matter.⁷⁹

A defense for infant baptism can be found in the Gospel of Mark 10:13-16.

Thomas Cranmer, architect of the 1549 prayer book, used this passage in its baptismal

⁷⁸ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 100.

⁷⁹ Stevick, 44.

rite. It was followed by an exhortation from the minister to the congregation that when Christ called the little children to him, it was as if they were being baptized.⁸⁰

In the 1970's, when the Episcopal Church was going through the most recent prayer book revisions, Prayer Book Studies 18 on baptism and confirmation addressed the issue of infant baptism. It brought forth the idea that the Christian faith is not an individual faith, but rather, one that is corporate. The response of those who will be supporting the baptized, whether infant or adult, is far more important.⁸¹ We do not embrace our faith privately, but rather, as the body of Christ. We are here to help each other along our journeys of faith. Much as parents will help a child to grow into maturity, our church family is meant to be there to help the newly baptized grow into their own realization of what a mature life in Christ means to them. The return of Baptism incorporated into the Sunday Eucharistic liturgy supports this idea that the whole community of faith is present to take responsibility for the Christian upbringing of an infant or children not yet old enough to speak for themselves. Peter Monkres and Kenneth Ostermiller write that "infant baptism offers the community the special opportunity to welcome, bless, and sanctify each new life."⁸²

In the current baptismal rite, two questions are asked of the parents and godparents: "Will you be responsible for seeing that the child you present is brought up

⁸⁰ *The First and Second Prayer Books of Edward VI*, 238.

⁸¹ *Prayer Book Studies 18: On Baptism and Confirmation* (New York, NY: The Church Pension Fund, 1970), 14.

⁸² Peter R. Monkres and R. Kenneth Ostermiller, *The Rite of Confirmation: Moments when Faith is Strengthened* (Cleveland, Ohio: United Church Press, 1995), 36.

in the Christian faith and life?” and “will you by your prayers and witness help this child to grow into the full stature of Christ?” To both questions, they respond, “I will, with God’s help.” The parents and godparents, along with adult candidates for baptism, are also asked to: (1) “renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel against God, (2) renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God, (3) renounce all sinful desires that draw [them] from the love of God, (4) turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as [their] Savior, (5) put [their] whole trust in his grace and love, and (6) promise to follow and obey him as [their] Lord.” The congregation present is asked the following question: “Will you who witness these vows do all in your power to support these persons in their life in Christ?” They answer: “We will.”⁸³

James Turrell writes about his son’s baptism as an infant, and the child’s reception of communion at that service:

Could he discourse about the nature of Christ’s presence in the bread and wine? Of course not. But just as I would not deny him physical nourishment, so I would not deny him the spiritual nourishment to which his baptism entitles him. . . . I know that as he grows in years, he will continue to grow in understanding of the sacrament.⁸⁴

13. When was a rite for adults included in the English prayer book?

A form of baptism for those of “riper years” was added to the 1662 edition of the English prayer book.

⁸³ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 302-303.

⁸⁴ Turrell, 136.

After the institutionalization of the Church in the fourth century, fewer and fewer adult baptisms were being performed. Infant baptism became the norm for centuries to come. At the time of the publication of the 1662 English prayer book, the Church of England was expanding its mission in America. Also, there were those who had not been baptized as children because of the political situation in England when the prayer book was banned for a period of time.⁸⁵ John's passage about Jesus telling Nicodemus that one must be reborn of water and the Spirit was used to support the idea of adult baptism (John 3:1-8).⁸⁶ Our current prayer book incorporates infants, children, and adults into the same rite.⁸⁷

14. What are the roles of sponsors?

The Book of Common Prayer 1979 states:

Sponsors of adults and older children present their candidates and thereby signify their endorsement of the candidates and their intention to support them by prayer and example in their Christian life. Sponsors of infants, commonly called godparents, present their candidates, make promises in their own names, and also take vows on behalf of their candidates.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Kenneth Stevenson, *The Mystery of Baptism in the Anglican Tradition* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1998), 11.

⁸⁶ Book of Common Prayer 1662, "The Ministration to such as are of Riper Years," <http://www.Justus.anglican.org/resource/bcp/1662/baptism.pdf>, accessed June 2017.

⁸⁷ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 301-302.

⁸⁸ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 298.

In the case of infants, godparents can be parents, family members, or friends. It is important to choose someone who will be active in the child's life, guiding him or her until that time when they can make their own mature decision about their faith.

The use of sponsors goes back to the early church where those requesting admission to the process of preparing for baptism, the catechumenate, would be brought forth by someone who was already a member of the church. These sponsors also acted as witnesses for those applying for candidacy after they had completed their period of preparation. They also assisted the candidates in learning the Lord's Prayer and the Creed by heart.⁸⁹

It is evident from the *Apostolic Tradition* that sponsors played a very important role in the catechumen's preparation for baptism in that their sponsors were present with them throughout their training.⁹⁰ Our current Prayer Book reflects this responsibility in the baptismal rubrics (instructions) which state that sponsors "are to be instructed in the meaning of Baptism, in their duties to help the new Christians grow in the knowledge and love of God, and in their responsibilities as members of his Church."⁹¹

One of the earliest examples of the use of sponsors comes from a didactic sermon by Theodore of Mopsuestia, a bishop in the late fourth and early fifth centuries. He wrote

⁸⁹ Yarnold, 12.

⁹⁰ *Apostolic Tradition*, 15.1-2 and 20.2, as cited in Bradshaw, Johnson, and Phillips, 82-83 and 104-105. See also, Yarnold, 12-13.

⁹¹ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 298.

that the sponsor stood behind the kneeling candidate while the bishop signed the candidate's forehead with the oil of anointing, invoking the name of the Trinity.⁹²

A contemporary of Theodore was John Chrysostom. In his baptismal homily, Chrysostom compared the duties of a sponsor to those of a surety who must pay if the borrower cannot pay. He wrote: "If those who stand as surety for money are responsible for the full sum, those who guarantee that others will pay their account of virtue in matters of the spirit have an even greater duty to show vigilance, advising, counseling, correcting with a paternal affection."⁹³

In *The Apostolic Tradition*, children are brought forth first and asked to speak for themselves. Otherwise, parents or relatives speak for them.⁹⁴ Even though adult baptism was the norm in the early Church, it is evident from this early church order that children were a part of the initiation rites, as well.

Stevick writes that "the sponsor personalizes the concern of the Christian community for the individual initiate, before, during, and following his baptism."⁹⁵

15. What is the significance of immersion of the candidate during Baptism versus pouring water on the candidate's head?

⁹² Theodore of Mopsuestia, "Baptismal Homily – II", as cited in Yarnold, 176.

⁹³ John Chrysostom, "Baptismal Homily – II," section 15, as cited in Yarnold, 164.

⁹⁴ *Apostolic Tradition*, 21.4, as cited in Bradshaw, Johnson, and Phillips, 112-113.

⁹⁵ Stevick, 96.

Immersion of a candidate for baptism symbolized dying with Christ as the candidate was immersed in the water and arising to a new life in Christ as he or she came back out of the water after baptism.

The teachings of Paul in Romans 6:3-4, where he writes about being buried with Christ in baptism in order to walk in “newness of life,” show a biblical connection to immersion. This passage could have contributed to the use of immersion in the practice of the early Christians as is described in the *Apostolic Tradition*, but that document also called to pour whatever water was available in scarce conditions.⁹⁶ Other early church documents, such as the *Didache*, speak about pouring water, also.⁹⁷ As already mentioned above, after the legalization of Christianity in the fourth century, those wishing to be baptized increased dramatically. Immersion was no longer practical. With the gradual demise of the catechumenate, pouring water on the head of the candidate three times in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit became the norm. Sprinkling also occurred because of the high mortality rate of babies. Scripture does not describe the exact procedures, but rather, speaks of baptism as a cleansing of sins and turning to the Lord so that the Holy Spirit may be poured upon the person, as has already been evidenced in the Gospels and other New Testament accounts. Whether by immersion or by pouring, it is clear that the key components are water and the three-fold baptismal formula. It is also clear that both immersion and pouring were used in the baptismal rites of the early Church.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ *Apostolic Tradition*, 21.2, as cited in Bradshaw, Johnson, and Phillips, 112-113.

⁹⁷ *Didache*, Chapter 7.3.

⁹⁸ See footnotes 86 and 87.

16. What is the baptismal covenant and how does it show our responsibility to the mission of the Church?

*The current rite of baptism contains a covenant with vows that reflect what Episcopalians believe to be the means by which we follow Christ.*⁹⁹

Candidates for baptism make vows that reflect their commitment to a new life in Christ. The baptismal covenant is also used on other occasions, when there are no baptisms, to reaffirm the vows made by members of the Church.

The baptismal covenant begins with a question and answer form of the Apostles' Creed where the people affirm their faith in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and then asks questions about how we are to take the privilege of baptism and use it in a responsible way to show others how we share Christ with the world. The candidates for baptism, along with the congregation, are asked five questions to which they reply to each, "I will with God's help."

1. Will you continue in the apostle's teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers? [Acts 2:42]
2. Will you persevere in resisting evil, and whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord? [This question is reminiscent of *The Apostolic Tradition* where it states that the presbyter takes each candidate and tells them to renounce Satan. Then the Oil of Exorcism is applied as the presbyter prays that all evil spirits will leave them.]¹⁰⁰
3. Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ? [Matthew 28:19-20]
4. Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself? [Mark 12:29-31, Leviticus 19:18]

⁹⁹ Armentrout and Slocum, 37.

¹⁰⁰ *Apostolic Tradition*, 21.9-10, as cited in Bradshaw, Johnson, and Phillips, 114-115.

5. Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being? [Micah 6:8]¹⁰¹

These questions reinforce that baptism is missional in purpose, as can be attested to in Jesus' words to his disciples to "go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20).

The members of the early church had a spontaneity that arose from freely accepting the Holy Spirit in their lives as they professed Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. This charismatic faith compelled them to share what they had with others who were not yet Christians. Thus, baptism in the early church was more missional in nature, as God had intended it to be. The current baptismal liturgy in the Book of Common Prayer 1979 supports the theology that the sacrament of baptism has a missional purpose, instead of a more private rite to prevent people from eternal damnation.

17. How is salvation history, i.e., the continuation of the stories of the Old and New Testaments up to our modern day experiences, revealed in the words of our current baptismal liturgy?

The "Thanksgiving over the Water" is a prayer in the baptismal rite that recounts examples of biblical uses of water since creation in the Old and New Testaments, and what this water means to us today.

The first prayer of this type, known as the flood prayer, was written by Martin Luther. The current prayer was written by Leonel Mitchell for the 1979 prayer book. Both

¹⁰¹ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 304-305.

prayers show how God has used the image of water since the beginning of time. In Genesis, the Holy Spirit moved over it during creation (Genesis 1:2). The Israelites were led from Egypt through the Red Sea to the Promised Land (Exodus 14:21-29). These references to water show a type of baptism found in Old Testament Scripture.¹⁰²

In the Jordan River Jesus was baptized by John and anointed by the Holy Spirit to be the Messiah (see all four Gospel accounts, as previously discussed). Marion Hatchett writes that it represents “the baptism of Jesus as the sanctification of water for baptizing.”¹⁰³

The continuation of God’s salvation history is now told through us. The prayer states that “in it we are buried with Christ in his death. By it we share in his resurrection. Through it we are reborn by the Holy Spirit.”¹⁰⁴ Hatchett writes that the prayer “portrays the font, in the classical manner, as a bath, a womb, and a tomb. Prayer is made that those baptized may be cleansed, reborn, and buried and resurrected in Jesus Christ.”¹⁰⁵ These words challenge us to actively participate in God’s salvation story as it continues through our lives in the world today.

18. What is the significance of the Trinitarian formula for Baptism?

¹⁰² Hatchett, 258.

¹⁰³ Hatchett, 258-259.

¹⁰⁴ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 306.

¹⁰⁵ Hatchett, 275.

At the end of Matthew's Gospel (28:16-20), Jesus commissions the twelve disciples to go out and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

This direct command from Jesus to his disciples to baptize in the name of the Trinity was handed down verbally until it was recorded in the written Gospels and the baptismal church orders of the early church.¹⁰⁶ In the early church, each immersion recalled a belief in the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit.¹⁰⁷

Hatchett writes that “through the first several centuries of the church's life the three-fold immersion of the candidate was accompanied by the three-fold affirmation of faith. The creeds developed from these formulae, which were amplified in the course of time to offset the various heresies which threatened the integrity of the church's faith.”¹⁰⁸

In the fourth century, Cyril of Jerusalem, gave a sermon that compared the three immersions of baptism to Christ's three days in the tomb. Cyril writes: “What a strange and astonishing situation! We did not really die, we were not really buried, we did not really hang from a cross and rise again. Our imitation was symbolic, but our salvation a reality.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ See *The Didache*, chapter 7. Also, *Apostolic Tradition*, 21.11-18, as cited in Bradshaw, Johnson, and Phillips, 114-117, for examples of the three-fold formula for baptism.

¹⁰⁷ *Apostolic Tradition*, 21.11-18, as cited in Bradshaw, Johnson, and Phillips, 114-117.

¹⁰⁸ Hatchett, 278.

¹⁰⁹ Cyril of Jerusalem, “Rites of Baptism,” MC 2.4, as cited in Yarnold, 76.

19. What is chrism and when is it used?

Chrism is an oil of thanksgiving used during the rite of baptism by the bishop or priest to anoint the newly baptized.

The bishop or priest makes the sign of the cross on the forehead of the newly baptized, anointing him or her with the following words: “You are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ’s own for ever.”¹¹⁰ It can be traced back to the initiation rite found in the *Apostolic Tradition* where the newly baptized person comes out of the water and the presbyter anoints him or her.¹¹¹

In the Old Testament, anointing was a means by which God appointed one who would serve God in a leadership position, such as in Samuel’s anointing of Saul to be king of Israel (1 Samuel 10:1) and then later, anointing David to be king (1 Samuel 16:11-13).

In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus reads from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah that the Spirit is upon him and has anointed him to proclaim good news to those who so desperately need it (Luke 4:16-21).

In Acts, Peter refers to God anointing Jesus with the Holy Spirit so that he can go about his ministry of doing good and healing (Acts 10:38).

When we are anointed in baptism, we have the opportunity to answer the appointment of God and to pledge our allegiance to Christ who has marked us as a part of

¹¹⁰ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 308.

¹¹¹ *Apostolic Tradition*, 21.19, as cited in Bradshaw, Johnson, and Phillips, 118-119.

his body, the church, forever. Taking that anointing seriously means that we begin our own journeys of serving God and each other through Christ.

Confirmation

*Almighty God, we thank you that by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ you have overcome sin and brought us to yourself, and that by the sealing of your Holy Spirit you have bound us to your service. Renew in these your servants the covenant you made with them at their Baptism. Send them forth in the power of that Spirit to perform the service you set before them; through Jesus Christ, your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*¹¹²

Confirmation Rite, Book of Common Prayer 1979

1. What is confirmation?

Confirmation is the sacramental rite by which a baptized person makes a mature public affirmation of his or her faith and receives the laying on of hands by a bishop.

The Book of Common Prayer 1979 describes confirmation in the following manner:

In the course of their Christian development, those baptized at an early age are expected, when they are ready and have been duly prepared, to make a mature public affirmation of their faith and commitment to the responsibilities of their Baptism and to receive the laying on of hands by the bishop. Those baptized as adults, unless baptized with laying on of hands by a bishop, are also expected to make a public affirmation of their faith and commitment to the responsibilities of their Baptism in the presence of a bishop and to receive laying on of hands.¹¹³

2. Where is confirmation referenced in Scripture?

The sacramental rite of confirmation is not referenced in Scripture, however, there are references to laying on of hands and receiving the Holy Spirit.

Three accounts in the New Testament refer to laying on of hands and receiving the Holy Spirit. In Acts, Peter and John lay hands on the people of Samaria who have believed and been baptized. They pray for them to receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-17). In Hebrews,

¹¹² Book of Common Prayer 1979, 418.

¹¹³ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 412.

laying on of hands is mentioned in reference to Christian teachings at the time (Hebrews 6:1-3). In 2 Corinthians, God establishes us in Christ, anoints us by putting his seal on us, and gives us the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 1:21-22).

In the Old Testament, examples of being anointed and receiving the Spirit can be found in David's anointing (1 Samuel 16:3-13), God bringing Isaiah to those who are oppressed (Isaiah 61:1), and in Zechariah's vision from God (chapter 4).

As we have seen in the section on baptism, and will see in this section on confirmation, the sacramental rites of the early church to the present have recognized the laying on of hands as a symbol by which God's Holy Spirit is conveyed upon those who have just been baptized. The origin of that symbol is from Scripture in both the Old and New Testaments. We will discuss this more in depth in questions four and five of this section as we explore the outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace found in the current sacramental rite of confirmation in the Episcopal Church.

3. What are the origins and evolution of Confirmation?

Confirmation began as the laying on of hands by a bishop to receive strength from the Holy Spirit as part of the early church's initiation rite for those who had gone through the process of the catechumenate, but evolved into a separate rite as the church grew in numbers.

Edward Yarnold identifies five elements in the early Church that can be associated with what is now known as Confirmation. They are taken from Paul in 2 Corinthians 1:21-22: (1) confirmation or strengthening, (2) anointing or commissioning, (3) the seal, (4) the giving of the Holy Spirit, and, (5) the Spirit's guarantee. He adds a sixth element – the

laying on of hands, which was referred to by Innocent I because of the connection with Acts 8:18.¹¹⁴

Ambrose, preaching to neophytes in the fourth century, describes the invocation of the Holy Spirit in confirmation as infusing the seven fundamental virtues of the Spirit: wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge, piety, and holy fear. They are received when the baptized are sealed, which brings the baptism to its perfect fulfillment. These virtues can be compared to the six virtues of the Spirit found in Isaiah 11:2-3, with the exception of the addition of piety to the list.¹¹⁵

With the Church's legalization by the Emperor Constantine in the fourth century, it became established as an institution, making it increasingly difficult, if not impossible, for the bishop to preside over the baptisms of everyone, as he had with smaller groups at the Easter Vigil service of the early church. Presbyters (priests) could now preside at baptisms in the place of the bishop. The chrism used that had been blessed by a bishop represented his presence in the ritual action in his absence. The custom came to receive the laying on of hands by the bishop at a later date. This confirming of the previous rite of baptism would separate the early Church's initiation that had included baptism, laying on of hands, and communion all in a single rite. The sacramental rite of confirmation evolved from this change. However, Ruth Meyers writes: "due to the difficulty of travel and the negligence of bishops and parents, the rite did not function nearly as well outside

¹¹⁴ Yarnold, 31.

¹¹⁵ Ambrose, *Sermons on the Sacraments*, III.8-10, and footnote 22, as cited in Yarnold, 125.

of Rome.”¹¹⁶ There were those who had been baptized who were never confirmed. A general lack of interest in the rite would follow.

By the Middle Ages, there was such a general disregard for the rite, Archbishop Peckham in England found it necessary to issue a canon (church law) that required confirmation before one could receive communion. This would become the “confirmation rubric” in both English and American prayer books. It was intended to encourage parents to ascertain that their children received the rite of confirmation.¹¹⁷

The Reformation on the continent of Europe would have various affects on how the sacramental rite of confirmation was viewed, which are too broad a scope for this study. But, important in how it played a part in Martin Luther’s reformed church was how he viewed confirmation. He did not believe that it was a sacrament, but rather a tool for teaching children in the form of a catechism to strengthen their faith.¹¹⁸

In England, Cranmer would also use a catechism for instruction before confirmation. The English prayer book (1549) stated that one had to be confirmed to receive communion.¹¹⁹ In order to be confirmed, it was also necessary to learn the Creed

¹¹⁶ Ruth Meyers, *Continuing the Reformation: Re-Visioning Baptism in the Episcopal Church* (New York, NY: Church Publishing, 1997), 3.

¹¹⁷ Stevick, 29, and Meyers, 4.

¹¹⁸ Monkres and Ostermiller, 15-17.

¹¹⁹ *The First and Second Prayer Books of Edward VI*, 251. See the discussion of the evolution of the “confirmation rubric” above.

(articles of faith), The Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments, along with questions in the short catechism found at the beginning of the rite.¹²⁰

The settlers in the new world of America often were not confirmed because there were no bishops to perform the rite. The war between England and the colonies had severed relationships with English bishops who could consecrate new bishops.¹²¹

In the American church, the norm for confirmation would follow the English prayer book in that it was a sacramental rite that some understood to be the completion of baptism that resulted in conferring the right to receive communion. That was the scenario in the Book of Common Prayer 1928 when the revisions for the current prayer book began to be discussed.¹²²

4. What is the outward and visible sign of confirmation?

The outward and visible sign of confirmation is the laying on of hands by the bishop.

As was discussed above in the section on baptism, in the early church practices, the laying on of hands by a bishop conferred the Holy Spirit to a person newly baptized. Aidan Kavanagh writes that “this is how their baptism is publicly sealed, perfected,

¹²⁰ *The First and Second Prayer Books of Edward VI*, 247 and 404.

¹²¹ See the discussion on this in the evolution of the Holy Eucharist on pages 59-60.

¹²² *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church; According to the Use of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America; Together with the Psalter or Psalms of David* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1928), 299.

consummated – not by adding something to it which it lacked, but by introducing them, now fully equipped, into its exercise.”¹²³

As also previously noted, “The imposition of hands is the traditional sign of the dedication of an offering to God and a gesture of blessing.”¹²⁴ As the bishop lays hands upon us in the rite of confirmation, we become an offering to God and we are empowered to offer (commission) ourselves to the world in God’s name through his Son, Jesus Christ.

5. What is the inward and spiritual grace of confirmation?

*The inward and spiritual grace of confirmation is receiving strength from the Holy Spirit.*¹²⁵

In the current prayer book’s rite of confirmation, the bishop lays hands on the person being confirmed and says these words: “Strengthen, O Lord, your servant [name] with your Holy Spirit; empower him [her] for your service; and sustain him [her] all the days of his [her] life.” Another option is the following: “Defend, O Lord, your servant [name] with your heavenly grace, that he [she] may continue yours for ever, and daily increase in your Holy Spirit more and more, until he [she] comes to your everlasting kingdom.”¹²⁶ In

¹²³ Aidan Kavanagh, *Confirmation: Origins and Reform* (New York, NY: Pueblo Publishing Company, Inc., 1988), 51.

¹²⁴ Yarnold, 6.

¹²⁵ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 860.

¹²⁶ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 418.

both prayers, the bishop prays for the continuing presence of the Holy Spirit to be within us our entire lives as we go about the work of God in all that we think, say, and do.

6. In what part of the Confirmation liturgy do we affirm our responsibility to the Church?

We affirm our responsibility to the Church in the baptismal covenant found in both the rite of baptism¹²⁷ and the rite of confirmation.¹²⁸

When the bishop comes for his or her visitation, if there are no candidates for baptism, “the rite of Confirmation, Reception, and the Reaffirmation of Baptismal Vows is administered.”¹²⁹ The Baptismal Covenant, that is also found in the Rite of Baptism, is not only vows for those being confirmed, received, or reaffirmed, but it is also an opportunity for all to renew their baptismal vows. As was discussed in the section on baptism, the vows are about affirming our belief in God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – as well as vowing to further the mission of the Church through worship, fellowship, and prayer, caring for others as we respect the dignity of all people, and striving for justice and peace for all in the world around us.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 299.

¹²⁸ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 413.

¹²⁹ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 412.

¹³⁰ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 416-417.

7. Why is instruction in the faith important for those who receive the sacrament of confirmation?

In order to take ownership in our lives as followers of Christ and make a mature affirmation of faith, we need to have an avenue to understand what that ownership entails.

The previous discussion in the section on baptism, introduced us to the catechumenate, a three-year period of preparation for initiation into the early church that included study, prayer, and a dedication to a new way of life. The zeal of the first Christians and those who were seeking initiation (catechumens) was fueled by the fact that this conversion experience was to be taken very seriously. It was a privilege, as well as a profound responsibility, to be allowed to participate in the catechumenate. It would not be a casual, short term preview into this new way of life, but rather, a soul searching experience that demanded their whole being. That can be evidenced in Yarnold's collection of baptismal homilies from the fourth century that were the means by which bishops educated the catechumens as to what they needed to know to become a part of this nascent Christian faith.¹³¹

We have already discussed how the legalization of the church in the fourth century made the idea of being a Christian very popular. As a result, the intentional preparation for sacramental rites of baptism, confirmation, and communion became lax

¹³¹ Note: This collection of fourth century baptismal homilies preached to those during and after initiation is highly recommended reading for all who strive to understand the power of the sacramental Church in its early formative years and how it can empower us now. Although, much has been included in this paper from Yarnold's book on the teachings of ceremonies of initiation in the fourth century, his entire work of editing these baptismal homilies is a valuable tool to understanding how the first Christians perceived their lives as members of the body of Christ.

and fell by the wayside. The intimate experience that had once been a part of the teachings of the early church was lost in a sea of new members joining the church.

We also looked at how the Reformation would reinstate instruction in the ways of the church through the use of catechisms for youth who were preparing for confirmation. These instructional methods were less than life changing as they were administered in a more academic setting.

On the English front, Thomas Cranmer's short catechism in his first and second prayer books (1549 and 1552) would be the forerunner of catechisms in subsequent English and American prayer books to the present day. In summary, the norm became short courses for young people, usually around twelve years of age, in preparation for confirmation. They came to be known as "confirmation classes" and were in most cases, the final formal education about a life of faith for many.

Our current Book of Common Prayer 1979 contains an "Outline of Faith – commonly called the Catechism" which gives short, basic answers to questions of faith. Although, this is a start, there is a great need to go beyond an introductory explanation of our practices if we truly desire to have an understanding of our faith as viewed through the lens of the Episcopal Church and its traditions.

Peter Monkres and Kenneth Ostermiller in their book, *The Rite of Confirmation*, suggest that we should continually confirm our faith at every stage of our lives:

Children can confirm their faith as they develop a conscious relationship with God and prepare to receive Holy Communion in a more intentional way. Youth can confirm their faith as they test their beliefs, develop a Christian identity, explore the meaning of relationships, affirm their membership in the body of Christ, or chose to express their spiritual convictions in the world. Younger adults can confirm their faith as they consider the vocation to which God is calling them or explore how the Spirit is shaping their witness in the world. Adults can confirm their faith as they seek to develop a Christian lifestyle or deepen their spiritual

life. Finally, elders can confirm their faith as they experience the deepest questions of meaning and the purpose of life.¹³²

They also suggest that “the rite of confirmation can regain its place in the church if it is understood as marking moments of faith-strengthening along the path of discipleship.”¹³³

How we address the concerns of people informs us as to what instruction is needed for every stage of life as we continually confirm what it means to be disciples of Christ.

8. Who administers confirmation in our tradition and why is that his or her role?

The bishop administers confirmation in the Episcopal tradition because he or she is believed to be in direct apostolic succession from Christ’s apostles, who through their association with Jesus, were the first defenders of the faith.

As we have already discussed, the normal practice in the early church was for a bishop to preside over the rite of initiation. The handing down of the faith was a serious responsibility, not taken lightly. Besides presiding at the rite, bishops also taught those preparing for initiation about the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and Holy Communion.¹³⁴

Armentrout and Slocum write that “the apostolic succession is said to be a ‘sign, though not a guarantee’ of the church’s basic continuity with the apostles and their time.”¹³⁵ In its ordination rite, The Book of Common Prayer 1979 define the roles of

¹³² Monkres and Ostermiller, 50-51.

¹³³ Monkres and Ostermiller, 81.

¹³⁴ Yarnold, ix.

¹³⁵ Armentrout and Slocum, 25.

bishops as those “who carry on the apostolic work of leading, supervising, and uniting the church.”¹³⁶ A Scriptural reference that has been used to support the role of the bishop in confirmation is found in Acts 8:14-17 where Peter and John lay hands on the Samaritans who have been baptized, but have not yet received the Holy Spirit. Although there is no concrete proof, Christian tradition tells us that Peter was the first Bishop of Rome. It is based on Jesus’ words recorded in the Gospel of Matthew: “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18).

In recent years, other denominations have contended that if full initiation into the church is attained through the rite of baptism, then whoever presides should be able to confirm, as well. The Episcopal Church has explored the idea of allowing priests to perform confirmations, but the bishop is still the only minister with the authority to perform this sacramental rite. For many Episcopalians, his laying hands on them represents a personal, pastoral experience shared with their bishop.

Today, the rite of confirmation is one of the memorable experiences of our Christian sacramental rituals, even though it has been separated from the single rite of initiation in the early church. It is not simply a rite of passage, or a means for receiving communion, but rather, it is an outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual grace that gives us the power to continue to instill the Holy Spirit in us, whether we are the ones being confirmed or those who renew our promises to God as we support others in their mature affirmation of faith. If we do this with conviction, we cannot help but reflect upon what our own membership in the Body of Christ means to us and how we live that out in our journeys of faith.

¹³⁶ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 510.

Holy Eucharist

*And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, our selves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto thee; humbly beseeching thee that we, and all others who shall be partakers of this Holy Communion, may worthily receive the most precious Body and Blood of thy Son Jesus Christ, be filled with thy grace and heavenly benediction, and made one body with him, that he may dwell in us and we in him.*¹³⁷

Eucharistic Prayer I, Rite I

1. What is the Holy Eucharist?

*The Book of Common Prayer 1979 defines the Holy Eucharist as “the sacrament commanded by Christ for the continual remembrance of his life, death, and resurrection, until his coming again.”*¹³⁸

The Eucharist is our weekly reminder of the one time act of baptism that we receive to become fully initiated members of Christ’s body, the church. In the fourth century, Theodore of Mopsuestia wrote about the Eucharist in one of his instructional sermons to the newly baptized:

In this world we owe our existence to two things, birth and nourishment; we derive our existence from our birth, but in order to continue in existence we need nourishment, and without it birth is inevitably followed by decay. . . .But since we are born now at baptism symbolically and by signs, we need also to receive under the same symbols nourishment which is in keeping with the new life we receive at baptism, and which will enable us to preserve this life.¹³⁹

Our “Outline of Faith” in the prayer book states that “the benefits we receive [from the eucharist] are the forgiveness of our sins, the strengthening of our union with Christ, and one another, and the foretaste of the heavenly banquet which is our nourishment in

¹³⁷ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 336.

¹³⁸ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 859.

¹³⁹ Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Baptismal Homily*, IV.4-5, as cited in Yarnold, 213.

eternal life.”¹⁴⁰ It also states that “the Holy Eucharist is called the Lord’s Supper, and Holy Communion; it is also known as the Divine Liturgy, the Mass, and the Great Offering.”¹⁴¹

2. Where is the Holy Eucharist referenced in Scripture?

What eventually would become the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist is found in the institution of the Lord’s Supper in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and in 1 Corinthians. It is also found in Luke’s account of the Road to Emmaus resurrection story. In Matthew 26:20-29, Mark 14:22-25, and Luke 22:14-19, Jesus commands his disciples to consume bread and wine as his body and blood in remembrance of him. Paul also records this command of Jesus in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, which is the earliest surviving account of the Last Supper. It is possible that he received this information about the Eucharist from Peter, whom he had visited and learned about the practices of this new Christian following.¹⁴²

In Luke’s resurrection account (24:13-25), Jesus meets two disciples on the road to Emmaus. At first, they do not recognize him, but later at the table when he takes, blesses, breaks, and gives them bread, their eyes are opened as to who he is. Although, this meal was not the event of the Last Supper, it provides us with a biblical reference for another time when Jesus shared bread with his disciples and they, in turn, recognized him

¹⁴⁰ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 859-860.

¹⁴¹ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 859.

¹⁴² See Jones, et al., for further discussion, 194-195.

for who he was.¹⁴³ As is the case with the sacraments of the church, we do not want to limit God's conveyance of grace to only a few means. J. Neil Alexander writes:

God may enter our lives at will, when we least expect it, perhaps when we least desire it. Knowing and being loved by God comes always with an element of surprise. But what the church knows – and practices faithfully – is that God's serendipitous presence may be sought in prayer, discovered in word and sacrament, and celebrated, quite literally, time and again, in the days and weeks, in the seasons and years, each precious moment of which is a holy gift.¹⁴⁴

3. What are the outward and visible signs of the Holy Eucharist?

The outward and visible signs of the Holy Eucharist are bread and wine.

Richard Schmidt writes: "God enters our world and our hearts through unlikely material things, like human flesh and blood, represented by a crust of bread and a sip of wine."¹⁴⁵

Jesus used ordinary table food and drink to represent his body and blood at the Last Supper. It was a means by which he asked his disciples to remember him. But it also a means by which all those who receive the sacrament of his body and blood are called to remember him. Gil Duchov writes: "He prepared a sacred meal for his disciples in all generations."¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ See question 5, page 55, for Crockett's view that other meals shared by Jesus could have been considered the origins of eucharistic meals, as well.

¹⁴⁴ J. Neil Alexander, *Celebrating Liturgical Time: Days, Weeks, and Seasons* (New York, NY: Church Publishing, 2014), 151.

¹⁴⁵ Richard H. Schmidt, *Glorious Companions: Five Centuries of Anglican Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), xix.

¹⁴⁶ Gil Duchov, *The Saving Passion: Lenten Devotions* (Fenton, MO: Creative Communications, 2019), Thursday, First Week of Lent.

4. What is the inward and spiritual grace of the Holy Eucharist?

*The inward and spiritual grace of the Holy Eucharist is the Body and Blood of Christ given to his people, and received by faith.*¹⁴⁷

In order to be prepared to receive this inward and spiritual grace, the prayer book states that we should “examine our lives, repent of our sins, and be in love and charity with all people.”¹⁴⁸ This reflects what Paul writes to the Corinthians: “Whoever, therefore eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves” (1Corinthians 11:27-29). Paul had a high theology of the importance of being prepared to receive the Body and Blood of Christ, as did the church in the first century. The *Didache* requires those receiving the bread and wine to confess their sins and be at peace with others: “On the Lord’s day of the Lord, come together, break bread, and give thanks, having first confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure. . . . But let none who has a quarrel with his companion join with you until they have reconciled, that your sacrifice may not be defiled.”¹⁴⁹ This is reminiscent of Matthew’s words about reconciliation with others before coming to the altar of the Lord (Matthew 5:23-24).

¹⁴⁷ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 859.

¹⁴⁸ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 860.

¹⁴⁹ *Didache*, chapter 14, as cited in R. C. D. Jasper, and G. J. Cuming, eds., *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed* (Collegetown, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990), 24.

5. What are the origins of the Holy Eucharist in the early church?

The Holy Eucharist has its ritual roots in the Last Supper of Jesus and his disciples, as was recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and in 1 Corinthians. This supper would have reflected the practices of devout Jews during the events of the annual Passover.

Dom Gregory Dix, in his epic book, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, writes that “it is evident that the Last Supper was a Jewish ‘religious meal’ of some kind” that reflected traditions of formal Jewish meal practices of the first century of which Jesus would have been aware. He describes the type of Jewish religious formal meal that would have been associated with the Last Supper as a *chaburah*, a gathering of friends for “purposes of special devotions and charity, existing within the ordinary Jewish congregations.”¹⁵⁰ It was usually a weekly meal in which religious topics were discussed that were of importance to the group.¹⁵¹

Paul Bradshaw and Maxwell Johnson write that according to the Jewish historian, Philo, a priest was always present among the gatherings. He would stretch out his hands and bless the bread and new wine.¹⁵² They also write that according to the first systematic collection of rabbinic judgments, known as the Mishnah, “nothing was to be eaten

¹⁵⁰ Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (Glasgow: The University Press, 1954), 50.

¹⁵¹ Dix, 50-51.

¹⁵² Philo, 1QS 6.3-8, as cited in Paul F. Bradshaw and Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Eucharistic Liturgies* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 4.

without God having first been blessed for it.”¹⁵³ The blessing, or *Berakah* in Hebrew, is reported by the Jewish historian, Josephus, as a grace that was said before and after meals in thanksgiving for the food that God had given them.¹⁵⁴

William Crockett writes that Jewish meals “are eaten in the context of thanksgiving for [God’s] gifts given in creation and in Israel’s history. This context of thanksgiving is expressed in the table blessings.”¹⁵⁵ Jesus blessed the meal at the Last Supper before giving it to his disciples.

The annual Passover celebration included a formal Jewish meal. What originated as a fertility ritual for flocks, had become for the Israelites “a remembrance of their deliverance by God from slavery in Egypt.”¹⁵⁶ This celebration is the background for the Last Supper. According to William Crockett, although Scripture records the Last Supper as the first Eucharistic meal instituted by Jesus, theologians have expanded their views that other meals where Jesus was present could be considered origins of eucharistic meals.¹⁵⁷ Numerous examples are found in the Gospels, including feeding the masses and eating with those who are not deemed acceptable by society.

¹⁵³ Mishnah, Tractate *Berakoth* 6.1-3, as cited in Bradshaw and Johnson, 5.

¹⁵⁴ Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.8.5, as cited in Bradshaw and Johnson, 6. See also, Dix 51-52.

¹⁵⁵ William Crockett, *Eucharist: Symbol of Transformation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990), 1.

¹⁵⁶ Bradshaw and Johnson, 8.

¹⁵⁷ Crockett, 1-2.

The early church continued those meals at the private homes of believers, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles (2:46-47) and also in the early writings of how the first Christians celebrated their faith through meal gatherings.¹⁵⁸ At the time of the *Didache* (first century), prayers associated with meals are mentioned, but a gradual disengagement of the eucharist from the meal was already beginning to occur.¹⁵⁹ The practice of the Eucharist is described in the *Didache* as the Thanksgiving. In it, a prayer is said that invokes the importance of spreading the nascent church to the entire world: “Even as this broken bread was scattered over the hills, and was gathered together and became one, so let Your Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Your kingdom.”¹⁶⁰ The missional nature of the early church was already established.

In the mid-second century, Justin Martyr, gave two accounts of the eucharist, one following a baptism and the other a regular Sunday service. The two descriptions together outline the order of service at that time. It begins with readings from the Old and New Testaments, along with a sermon. Then, common prayer is followed by the kiss of peace. The bread and the cup filled with wine and water are brought forward to the presider. The eucharistic prayer is said ending with amen. The eucharist is distributed by deacons to those present and absent. A collection is then taken up.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Crockett, 2. See also, Bradshaw and Johnson, 1.

¹⁵⁹ Crockett, 2. See also, Bradshaw and Johnson, 1.

¹⁶⁰ *Didache*, chapter 9, as cited in *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed*, ed. R.C.D. Jasper and G.J. Cuming (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 3rd revised edition, 1990), 23.

¹⁶¹ Justin, *1 Apology*, 65 and 67; as cited in *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed*, ed., R.C.D. Jasper and G.J. Cuming (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 3rd revised edition, 1990), 25-26.

It is important to note that Justin believed that the eucharist was a communal act with the amen at the end of the eucharistic prayer representing the participation and consent of everyone.¹⁶²

The Apostolic Tradition, discussed in the section on baptism, provides us further information in that it describes the order of eucharistic worship. It has helped to inform us about how our current eucharistic liturgy in the Book of Common Prayer 1979 evolved.

Jasper and Cuming write that it contained the following elements:

1. The prayers
2. The kiss of peace
3. The offertory (in baptism, with milk and honey, and water)
4. The anaphora [eucharistic prayer] (including blessings of produce)
5. Discourse by the bishop, “giving a reason for all these things”
6. The fraction [breaking of the bread]
7. The distribution¹⁶³

Through all of these early documents, it is evident that “the eucharist was at the heart of the life of the church.”¹⁶⁴

6. How did the practice of the Holy Eucharist evolve after the era of the early church?

The practice of the eucharist evolved from that of the community of the baptized gathering to celebrate their faith into a more formal rite as the church became institutionalized and grew substantially in number.

¹⁶² K. W. Noakes, “From the Apostolic Fathers to Irenaeus,” ed. Jones et al., 212.

¹⁶³ Jasper and Cuming, 31.

¹⁶⁴ Noakes, ed., Jones et al., 210.

The intimacy and passion of those who had originally worshipped in homes was gradually replaced with an institution that began the formation of rules and regulations, and set patterns of worship, along with a more established hierarchy of leadership. Geoffrey Wainwright explains that “the Church now borrowed from the civil magistracy: the basilican building, the clothes, the processions, the lights, the incense.”¹⁶⁵

Bradshaw and Johnson write that as early as the late fourth century, there was a decline in actually partaking of the sacrament because people felt that they were unworthy. Instead, they would receive what was referred to as a “spiritual communion” by their attendance at the eucharist without actually receiving the sacrament. Attending services without receiving communion would increase in the centuries to come.¹⁶⁶

With the sacerdotal (pertaining to priests and their duties) nature of the eucharist diminishing any real participation by the laity, what had been important to the first Christians and how they worshiped had changed dramatically. In fact, Bradshaw and Johnson note that “the priest was now understood to receive communion on behalf of the people.”¹⁶⁷ The laity had become casual observers of the sacramental rite of Holy Eucharist, instead of being active participants, as they were in the early church.

Bradshaw and Johnson also write that one result of these shifts in liturgical practice was that the laity were no longer involved in bringing gifts of bread and wine from home. By the ninth century, unleavened bread prepared in monastic houses began to

¹⁶⁵ Geoffrey Wainwright, “The Periods of Liturgical History,” ed. Jones, et al., 63.

¹⁶⁶ Bradshaw and Johnson, 210.

¹⁶⁷ Bradshaw and Johnson, 211.

replace the ordinary bread of the people because it was believed that it mimicked the bread which would have been used by Jesus.¹⁶⁸

By the twelfth century, the cup was no longer being administered with the belief that if a person received the bread, it was as if both had been received. The theory of concomitance developed that stated that “because a body cannot exist without its blood, Christ’s blood was present concomitantly as soon as the bread was consecrated and hence communicants who received the bread alone still received the whole Christ.”¹⁶⁹

Another stumbling block that moved the laity further away from being a part of the eucharist arose in the eighth century in Gaul. The words of the prayer over the offerings were considered so sacred that the clergy started reciting them in a low voice to the point that within one hundred years, the norm everywhere was to recite them in complete silence.¹⁷⁰ By the end of the Middle Ages, the laity had no real role in the eucharist and they were mostly saying their own prayers while the rite was celebrated by the clergy.¹⁷¹

The manner in which the church had strayed from its original intentions in liturgical worship opened the doors for the Reformation in continental Europe. England would also be a part of the ensuing changes. Henry VIII appointed Thomas Cranmer as

¹⁶⁸ Bradshaw and Johnson, 212.

¹⁶⁹ Bradshaw and Johnson, 213.

¹⁷⁰ Bradshaw and Johnson, 213.

¹⁷¹ Bradshaw and Johnson, 214.

Archbishop of Canterbury.¹⁷² With Henry VIII's renunciation of papal authority in 1534, Cranmer was in a position to affect liturgical and doctrinal change in the practices of the Church in England. His accomplishments included his role as the chief architect of the first two prayer books (1549 and 1552). In these, significant changes took effect, including changing the language of the liturgy from the Roman Latin to the vernacular, a reformed lectionary along with increased reading of the Bible in services, the revival of preaching, the revival of the congregation having a part in the service, the restoration of the cup to the laity, an increase in the number of times one must receive communion in a year, and the revision of liturgies.¹⁷³ Cranmer sought to make worship an experience where, after centuries of disregard for the laity, everyone could participate as they had done in the early church. But his desire for all to receive communion every Sunday fell on deaf ears. The service of Morning Prayer with its emphasis on the return of reading Scripture would be the norm.

Subsequent English prayer books followed until the Book of Common Prayer 1662 revision. This book would travel around the world as the British Empire expanded its holdings. Although it is the official Prayer Book of the Church of England, in the twentieth century more modernized forms of worship have been allowed to exist alongside it, such as the *Alternative Service Book 1980* and *Common Worship (2000)*.

¹⁷² Note: In our day, the Archbishop of Canterbury is the spiritual figurehead in the Anglican Communion, of which the Episcopal Church is a part.

¹⁷³ R. T. Beckwith, "Thomas Cranmer and the Prayer Book," ed. Jones, et al., 105. See also *The First and Second Prayer Books of Edward VI* for the texts of the 1549 and 1552 Prayer Books.

With England's holdings in the colonies in North America, the Book of Common Prayer and the traditions of the Church of England would cross the pond to be the established church of the first settlers. George Hodges writes that "the first prayers prayed in English on this continent were in Prayer-book words."¹⁷⁴ He also notes that after an English expedition landed off the coast of Maine on Monhegan Island in 1607, a service was held that was the first "of which there is a definite record."¹⁷⁵

After the American Revolution, the colonies' independence from England presented a need to form a new church, separate from the Church of England, because it required its clergy to profess an oath of allegiance to the monarchy. But, there was work to do before a new church could be formed. The church had suffered greatly during the war of independence because clergy were divided as to their allegiances between England and the new world. Also, there were no bishops in America to consecrate bishops or ordain new clergy. The sacramental rite of confirmation was as neglected in America as it had been in England. The first American bishop would strive to revive it in the American church by addressing his first clergy convocation as to its importance.¹⁷⁶

In 1783, a group of clergy meeting in secrecy, met with Samuel Seabury, at that time a priest from Connecticut, to ask him to find a way to obtain consecration as America's first bishop. Ultimately, his manner of doing that was to appeal to the bishops

¹⁷⁴ George Hodges, *Three Hundred Years of the Episcopal Church in America* (Philadelphia, PA: George W. Jacobs and Company, 1906), 15.

¹⁷⁵ Hodges, 16-17.

¹⁷⁶ Robert Prichard, *A History of the Episcopal Church* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1999), 89.

in Scotland who were known as non-jurors, those who had refused to pledge their allegiance to the English crown. They agreed to consecrate him if he would persuade the soon to be established American church to use the Scottish Eucharistic Prayer of 1764 that was similar in nature to the one found in the 1549 prayer book.¹⁷⁷ Rite I, Prayer I in our current Book of Common Prayer 1979 is the closest version of our Eucharistic prayers to the Scottish version that Seabury brought back to the American Church.¹⁷⁸

In an effort to unite the members of the American church into a national church, the first General Convention in 1789 adopted a constitution and a set of canon laws.¹⁷⁹ The name of this new church would be the Episcopal Church because the word “episcopal” denotes that it is under the jurisdiction of bishops. A revised version of the 1662 English prayer book would also be ratified at the convention.¹⁸⁰ Throughout the growth of the Episcopal Church from 1789 to 1979, the eucharist continued to take a back seat to the more popular service of Morning Prayer as the principal service for Sunday morning worship.¹⁸¹ During this era of the church, the prayer books of 1892 and 1928 would follow with minimal revisions until the modern day Liturgical Movement inspired revisions for the Book of Common Prayer 1979 that we use today.

¹⁷⁷ Hodges, 79-83.

¹⁷⁸ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 333.

¹⁷⁹ “History of the Episcopal Church,” The Episcopal Church, accessed January 28, 2019, <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/history-american-church>.

¹⁸⁰ Hatchett, 22.

¹⁸¹ Ladd, 24.

The impetus for a new liturgical movement in the twentieth century took roots with a request from five young Roman Catholic men when they arrived at Maria Laach Monastery in Germany, Holy Week, 1914. According to William Palmer Ladd, they “asked for some instruction on the Mass, which they said they had been attending all their lives without any real understanding of its meaning.”¹⁸² There would be others with similar questions. The monastery grew into a theological retreat center for lay people searching for answers to the church’s sacramental and liturgical practices, and why they mattered in their journeys of faith.

Ladd, in his book on liturgical reform completed in 1941 contended that for any positive renewal to occur, people have to understand why the Eucharist is central to our faith. According to Ladd, this centrality includes the importance of the experience of corporate worship, the fact that the eucharist draws our minds back to Christ’s life, death, and resurrection, the importance of seeing human welfare in the midst of our eucharistic experience, the eucharist as a family Christian meal, and as a missionary sacrament.¹⁸³

He believed that the situation of the early church was not much different from his own time in that “the church faced a hostile world, but it knew its own mind, it made itself understood by the plain man, it did not scatter its energies, and it hammered away with its gospel until paganism surrendered.”¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² Ladd, 23.

¹⁸³ Ladd, 50-51.

¹⁸⁴ Ladd, 50.

Ladd's ideas would be an early forerunner for liturgical renewal efforts in the Episcopal Church that would begin in 1950 and continue into the 1970's. The work accomplished during this period revised the rites of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist by returning to the practices of the early church to find theological relevance in their use today.¹⁸⁵ The current prayer book is the result of these revisions. Ladd's concept of the centrality of the eucharist is certainly present in it. The eucharist has been returned to the original intentions of those first followers of Christ. It is once again the principal Sunday worship service of the church that is a continual weekly witness to our baptisms, and the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, until he returns. The mystery of how it can be life changing for us all is found in the continuing spiritual nourishment we receive from the eucharist.

7. What does the Episcopal Church believe about the transformation of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ?

The eucharistic prayers and the Outline of Faith in the Book of Common Prayer 1979 state the real presence of Christ in the sacrament of the Eucharist; the body and blood of Christ is received by faith.

An example of this can be found in Eucharistic Prayer A. The celebrant (bishop or priest) sanctifies the bread and wine with these words: "Sanctify them by your Holy Spirit to be for your people the Body and Blood of your Son, the holy food and drink of new and unending life in him."¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ See footnote 56 for further discussion of the *Prayer Book Studies*.

¹⁸⁶ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 363. See also 335, 342, 371, 375, 403, and 405.

In our “Outline of Faith,” the question is asked, “What is the inward and spiritual grace given in the Eucharist? The answer is: “The inward and spiritual grace in the Holy Communion is the Body and Blood of Christ given to his people, and received by faith.”¹⁸⁷

Thomas Cranmer did not believe in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, but did believe that “he is in them that worthily eat and drink the bread and wine.”¹⁸⁸ For Cranmer, receiving the Body and Blood of Christ was by one’s faith, not by one’s mouth.¹⁸⁹ The early church believed that what is received in Holy Communion is the body and blood of Christ.¹⁹⁰ Distinctions about the elements being changed did not begin to surface until the fourth century.¹⁹¹ This was most likely because at that time the church was institutionalized and theological study became more advanced.

Many protestant churches today believe that the eucharist is simply a mere remembrance of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. In the Episcopal tradition, whether or not one believes that the bread and wine are the real presence in the sense of a physical change, or a spiritual enlightenment upon reception, our eucharistic prayer reminds us

¹⁸⁷ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 859.

¹⁸⁸ Cranmer, ed. Cox, 52.

¹⁸⁹ Class notes, *Liturgical Renewal Movements in Anglicanism*, Advanced Degree Program, the School of Theology, Sewanee, TN, 2017.

¹⁹⁰ R. J. Halliburton, “The Patristic Theology of the Eucharist”, ed. Jones, et al., 249.

¹⁹¹ Halliburton, ed. Jones, et al, 249.

that Christ is present to give us that “new and unending life in him.”¹⁹² And, we are called to be sanctified “that we may faithfully receive this Holy Sacrament, and serve [God] in unity, constancy, and peace.”¹⁹³ The Episcopal tradition does not have a definitive doctrine of the real presence, but rather it allows those who worthily receive “the most precious body and blood of thy Son Jesus Christ”¹⁹⁴ to decide for themselves how Christ is present. As is often the case with God, it is best not to try to find answers to all the questions. The mystery is a part of the profound experience of Christ’s command to eat his body and drink his blood in remembrance of all that he taught us to do.

8. Why is it important to receive the Holy Eucharist on a regular basis?

*If done with sincerity, by receiving it, we examine ourselves and make amends with God so that Christ “may dwell in us, and we in him.”*¹⁹⁵

Edward Yarnold reminds us that “one of the effects of the Eucharist is to forgive sins.”¹⁹⁶

In one of his sermons on the sacraments, Ambrose, preaching to catechumens in the fourth century, teaches them:

What is it the apostle [Paul] says about every time you receive it? ‘As oft as we receive it, we herald the death of the Lord [1 Cor. 11:26].’ If we herald his death, we herald the remission of sins. If whenever his blood is shed, it is shed for the

¹⁹² Book of Common Prayer 1979, 363.

¹⁹³ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 363.

¹⁹⁴ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 337.

¹⁹⁵ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 336.

¹⁹⁶ Yarnold, 140.

remission of sins [Matthew 26:28], I ought always to receive him so that he may always forgive sins. Since I am always sinning, I always need the medicine.¹⁹⁷

In our world today, we often put the idea of daily sin away in a place where it is convenient to ignore. If it is not a substantial sin, it can be relegated to something that “everyone does.” Sin is sin, no matter how large or small. When we address on a regular basis the ways in which we separate ourselves from God, we are less likely to commit those sins that our humanness puts before us. Also, we have a benchmark where we have let go of those things in the past that are not of God, as we move forward to those that are. All that we do in the Eucharistic service before receiving Holy Communion is intended to open our minds to how we come before God, preparing “ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto [God].”¹⁹⁸

Another effect of regular reception of the Holy Eucharist is to use the body and blood of Christ for strength as ministers in the mission of the Church. The post communion prayers toward the end of the Eucharist state this well in that we thank God for the privilege of receiving Christ’s Body and Blood, as we also ask God to send those who have received them out into the world in service to God through Christ.¹⁹⁹

9. How does reception of the Holy Eucharist affect the mission of the Church?

¹⁹⁷ Ambrose, *Sermons on the Sacrament (De Sacramentis)*, sermon iv, as cited in Yarnold, 140.

¹⁹⁸ Book of Common Prayer 1979, The Holy Eucharist, Rite One, Eucharistic Prayer I, 336.

¹⁹⁹ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 365-366.

If we truly believe that we are receiving the body and blood of Christ, then each time we receive that body and blood, Christ is in us as we go back out into the world to do the work that he has commanded us to do.

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul reminds us that if Christ is in us, then we are a temple for his body and blood and should lead our lives as such (1 Corinthians 3:16).

When we take that responsibility seriously, we show others what Christ can look like in a world that often could care less. We might never know when our actions will have a positive effect on someone else, but we are called by Christ to keep on doing those things that bring the kingdom of God into our midst. The 1995 gathering of representatives of the Anglican Communion for liturgical renewal supports this idea in their Dublin Report:

Celebrating the eucharist involves both reaffirming the baptismal commitment to die to self and be raised to newness in life, and embodying the vision of the kingdom in searching for justice, reconciliation and peace in the community. The Spirit who calls us into one body in Christ equips and sends us out to live this divine life.²⁰⁰

Eucharistic Prayer C (Rite II) in the 1979 prayer book further supports this idea in that it ties our personal experience of receiving the eucharist with the experiences of the whole world:

Open our eyes to see your hand at work in the world about us. Deliver us from the presumption of coming to this Table for solace only, and not for strength; for pardon only, and not for renewal. Let the grace of this Holy Communion make us one body, one spirit in Christ, that we may worthily serve the world in his name.²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ David R. Holeton, ed., *Our Thanks and Praise: The Eucharist in Anglicanism Today*, Fifth International Anglican Liturgical Consultation, "The Dublin Report" (Toronto, Ontario: Anglican Book Centre, 1998), 262.

²⁰¹ Book of Common Prayer 1979, Eucharistic Prayer C, 372.

10. How does the liturgy in the service of the Holy Eucharist work to enable us to take the Church back out into the world?

Participants in the service of the Holy Eucharist glorify God, hear and explore the Word of God, profess their faith in the doctrines of the church, pray for themselves, the church and the world, confess their sins, exchange the peace, and receive the body and blood of Christ to become strengthened to go back out and share Christ with the world.

The eucharistic liturgy begins with a procession down the aisle of the church that is meant to move us from the outside world of the profane to the sacred space of the profound.²⁰² Alexander Schmemmann reminds us that if we do not leave anything behind, it is hard to get somewhere else.²⁰³ Our worship time should be void of those things that get in the way of glorifying God.

The procession is accompanied by an opening hymn. Don Saliers writes that “music in Christian worship is an embodied form of praying.”²⁰⁴ The crucifer leads with the Cross, followed by two torch bearers. These candles, that were originally used to provide light for the reading of the Gospel, represent the light of Christ in the world today. The torch bearers may be followed by a choir. Then follow the eucharistic ministers, the deacon (if present), and the priest who ends the procession. If a bishop is

²⁰² Also, for a description of the liturgy of the Eucharist as a sacramental journey or procession that begins when one leaves home, in that one is on one’s way to be transformed into the Church of God, see Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1973), 27.

²⁰³ Schmemmann, 28.

²⁰⁴ Saliers, “The Integrity of Sung Prayer,” in *Worship*, 55:4 (July 1981), 290-303, as cited in Weil, 83.

present, he or she is the last in the procession. Depending on the church and the liturgical season, there may be other liturgical ministers in the procession. The bishop or priest is the celebrant of the eucharistic service. As the service progresses, everything done in the eucharistic liturgy is meant to build up our ability to be sacramental people when we return to the world of the profane at the end of the service. The participants are not only the clergy, but also worship leaders, musicians, and the congregation, as each contributes in their own way to the service. Everyone is intended to “celebrate” this service. How one plays his or her part could have a significant effect on whether or not worship has any meaning or is just another Sunday service that has been added to the church’s register.²⁰⁵

The idea of many roles being played by different people is biblically based. Paul writes that there are many members, but only one body. The members of that body have many gifts that are meant to work together for the betterment of the body (1 Corinthians 12:4-31 and Ephesians 4:4-16). The corporate nature of our worship services helps to ensure that no one will be isolated. We are all in this together. We are a community of faith, present for each other, that is a family that nurtures us.

The first part of the service is known as “The Word of God.” The celebrant begins with an opening acclamation that is followed by a prayer called the Collect for Purity. This collect, with words taken from Psalm 51, asks God to “cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit.”²⁰⁶ Again, we are called to put side all that is not of God. A song of praise follows and then a prayer known as the Collect of the Day

²⁰⁵ Don Saliers, *Liturgy and Moral Imagination* class notes, Advanced Degree Program, The School of Theology, Sewanee, TN, 2015.

²⁰⁶ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 355.

is read by the celebrant. This is a prayer specific to the liturgical season and the lectionary (biblical readings) for the day. Originally in this prayer, the celebrant was “collecting” the prayers of the entire congregation into one prayer, hence the name “collect.”²⁰⁷

A three year lectionary is used in the Episcopal Church that provides the readings of Old Testament, Psalm, New Testament, and Gospel. In year A, the Gospel of Matthew is read, with readings from the Gospel of Mark in Year B, and the Gospel of Luke in Year C. The Gospel of John is interspersed throughout the three years during certain liturgical seasons such as Christmas, Lent, and Easter. The lectionary is set up so that a substantial amount of the Old Testament is read, while most of the New Testament is read during this three year period.²⁰⁸ By weekly attendance of Sunday services, one can read a large portion of the Bible in three years.²⁰⁹ Because the Old Testament is the recording of the people of God before Jesus’ birth, it is deemed important to read in order to have a more complete understanding of the whole story of the salvation history of God.

A lector (reader chosen from the congregation) reads the Old Testament lesson. The psalm for the day is then read or sung either in unison or responsively. The psalms are often more somber in content than the other readings because they reflect the lamentations of the people of God and their tribulations in Old Testament times. Don

²⁰⁷ Leonel L. Mitchell, *Praying Shapes Believing* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1985), 134.

²⁰⁸ Marion J. Hatchett, *Commentary on the American Prayer Book* (New York, NY: Harper/Collins Publishers, 1995), 326.

²⁰⁹ Note: The Daily Office lectionary used in the rites of Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer is set up so that a large portion of the Bible can be read in two years.

Saliers writes that we have to be truthful when we approach the psalms: “What happens when we all have a steady diet of routine thanksgiving, and find ourselves covering over the hurt, the confusion, and the struggle to face other aspects of our personal and communal lives in the presence of God?”²¹⁰ He also reminds us that “the revelatory act of prayer, liturgical [in church] or devotional [in private], is diminished when no laments are ever raised.”²¹¹

The psalm is followed by the New Testament lesson. A hymn is then sung before the Gospel. Many of the hymns in the 1982 Hymnal of the Episcopal Church have verses that are paraphrases of Scripture. The first verse, the familiar one that most people can sing by heart, is often followed by subsequent verses that tie into the theme of the Gospel or one of the other readings. Music, like the collect and the readings, helps to pull together the underlying liturgical theme for the day. When done properly, all the components unify the idea that is being expressed for any given Sunday making the experience of the participants that much more powerful. It is important that we pay attention to how these components work together.

After the hymn preceding the Gospel, the crucifer and torch bearers will proceed from the sanctuary (area behind the altar rail) down the aisle to the nave (seating area of the congregation) with the celebrant (or deacon, if present) following to read the Gospel. He or she may make a sign of the cross on the printed text at the proclamation of the Gospel, as well as a small sign of the cross with the thumb on the forehead, lips, and

²¹⁰ Don E. Saliers, *Worship Come to Its Senses* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 50.

²¹¹ Saliers, 121.

heart before reading the Gospel. The congregation may also make these signs. These crossings represent that we “pray that the Gospel be imprinted in the mind, spoken with the lips, and loved with the heart.”²¹²

After the Gospel, a sermon is preached. It is an opportunity for the preacher to relate the Scriptural readings to how they are relevant in our world today.

After the sermon, all present proclaim the Nicene Creed, which Leonel Mitchell describes as the “corporate affirmation of faith and allegiance to the Lord and the Church.”²¹³

The Prayers of the People follow, led by a lay person. There are six forms of the prayers in the prayer book, but they may be adapted so as to be suitable to the occasion.

Whichever form or adaptation is used, the following petitions must be included:

1. the Universal Church, its members, and its mission
2. the Nation and all in authority
3. the welfare of the world
4. the concerns of the local community
5. those who suffer and those in any trouble
6. the departed (with commemoration of a saint when appropriate)²¹⁴

The intention of the Prayers of the People is to offer intercession not only for those whom we know, but for the entire world. Don Saliers writes: “Without prayers for others, our worship cannot possibly discern the fullness of how God is to be remembered. Whatever we say about the ‘presence’ of God in the liturgy of word and sacrament cannot be

²¹² Malloy, 109.

²¹³ Mitchell, 137.

²¹⁴ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 383.

disassociated from the neighbor in need and the social disfigurements of our age.”²¹⁵ The Prayers of the People have been a part of the liturgy since at least the second century.²¹⁶

The confession of sin follows. Mitchell explains that it is a corporate prayer in that “sin is seldom an individual undertaking, and in the general confession we acknowledge not only our individual sin but our solidarity in corporate sinfulness.”²¹⁷ Our confession is a self examination of our sins, as well as forgiving others, so that we may be reconciled before we come to the Table to receive the body and blood of Christ.²¹⁸

The celebrant offers the peace to all present with the words, “The peace of the Lord be always with you.” The people reply, “And also with you.” The Prayer Book notes that “then the ministers and people may greet one another in the name of the Lord.”²¹⁹ The sharing of the peace is intended to be a sign of reconciliation with others before receiving communion. As was previously discussed, Matthew’s Gospel (5:23-4) tells us that we are to be reconciled with each other before we come to the altar.²²⁰ The peace completes the first part of the service known as The Word of God.

²¹⁵ Don E. Saliers, *Worship as Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 131-132.

²¹⁶ Marion J. Hatchett, 334.

²¹⁷ Leonel L. Mitchell, *Praying Shapes Believing* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1985), 139.

²¹⁸ See “An Exhortation,” *Book of Common Prayer* (1979), 316-317, for further discussion of preparing ourselves for reception of Holy Communion.

²¹⁹ *Book of Common Prayer* 1979, 360.

²²⁰ See “Offertory Sentences,” *Book of Common Prayer* (1976), 376.

The second part of the eucharistic service is The Holy Communion. It begins with the Offertory. The Book of Common Prayer states that “representatives of the congregation bring the people’s offerings of bread and wine, and money or other gifts, to the deacon or celebrant. The people stand while the offerings are presented and placed on the Altar.”²²¹ Charles Price and Louis Weil explain the Offertory well:

It is a representative gift of the baptized and forgiven people of God. In placing on the altar money and bread and wine, the congregation offers *itself* and *its world*. Money represents the work of the congregation. We give part of what we make. . . . Symbolically, we offer bread to become the body of Christ. But the underlying reality of the action is that we offer our lives, individually and corporately, to become his body in this world.²²²

Money, when presented at the altar, becomes sanctified for the holy use of the mission of the church. Price and Weil also point out that the act of bringing bread and wine to the Table includes those who grew it and those who transported it, as well as those offering it. In essence, the world of which it is a part is offered.²²³

The celebrant (or deacon, if present) prepares the Table. The word “eucharist” means thanksgiving, therefore the name at the beginning of the eucharistic prayer is “The Great Thanksgiving.” The discussion that follows will be based on Rite II, Eucharistic Prayer A.²²⁴ There are three other versions (B, C, and D), plus two additional forms for this prayer. There are also two Eucharistic prayers that reflect the language of older

²²¹ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 361.

²²² Charles P. Price and Louis Weil, *Liturgy for Living* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2000), 137.

²²³ Price and Weil, 137.

²²⁴ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 361.

versions used prior to the current prayer book. They are Rite One, Prayers I and II. They are included in our prayer book as alternative rites. All eight prayers exhibit the same basic parts as can be found in the eucharistic prayer of the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus.²²⁵

The celebrant begins the eucharistic prayer with a dialogue known as the *Sursum corda*. In these words, the celebrant invites the congregation to “lift up your hearts.”²²⁶ It is biblically supported by Colossians 3:1-3: “So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” The implication is a spiritual death and new life in Christ. Cyril of Jerusalem wrote in the fourth century:

For at that most awesome moment we must indeed raise our hearts high to God, not keep them intent on the earth and on earthly matters. So the priest is virtually commanding you all at that moment to lay aside the cares of this life, your domestic worries, and to keep your heart in heaven on God who loves men.²²⁷

Cyril reminds us that as we respond, “we lift them to the Lord,” our feelings should reflect what we are proclaiming:

By these words of assent you declare you are at one with him. Now no one should stand there saying with his lips, ‘We have lifted them to the Lord’, while in his mind he is preoccupied with worldly thoughts. We must be mindful of God at all times, but if human weakness makes this impossible we should try especially hard at this time.²²⁸

²²⁵ Price and Weil, 137.

²²⁶ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 361.

²²⁷ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogic Catecheses*, 5.4, as cited in Yarnold, 89.

²²⁸ Cyril of Jerusalem, 5.4., as cited in Yarnold, 89.

Once again, we are presented with the idea that we are to leave everything behind and focus on God!

The early Christians lived in a world that was dominated by the rules of the pagan Roman Empire. The words of the *Sursum corda* called them not only to let go of their personal concerns, but also those words must have been a comfort to them in a society where they experienced uncertainty and fear on a daily basis. In our Post Christian world today, we also have concerns beyond our own control that could be left behind as we focus on glorifying God. We can lift our thoughts to a higher place where God is with the hopes that we will continue to do this after we leave our worship service, even in the midst of those who do not choose to follow God.

The Proper Preface follows, said by the celebrant. It is a prayer that is tailored to the specific occasion of any given Sunday. A reference is made that the proper preface is now said, but because there are several from which to choose, they are found on pages 377-382 of the prayer book and are worth taking a look at to see how they reflect the theme of the day. They are profound in their language of our relationship with God.

Then, an introduction to the Sanctus is said by the celebrant: “Therefore we praise you, joining our voices with Angels and Archangels and all the company of heaven, who for ever sing this hymn to proclaim the glory of [God’s] name.”²²⁹ In this, we praise God not only with those present, but with all believers throughout time. It is comforting because it reminds us that through this eucharistic service, we are in communion with all whom we have loved who are no longer physically present with us.²³⁰ We are also in

²²⁹ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 362.

²³⁰ See previous discussion about baptism on All Saints’ Day, question 1, page 15.

communion with everyone around the world who sings this hymn of praise, in effect, the whole church. The communion of all the faithful is a powerful image of the presence of the kingdom of God right here on earth.

The Sanctus is then sung or said. It has its roots in both the Old and New Testaments. The first part, “Holy, holy, holy Lord...” is found in Isaiah 6:3 and in Revelation 4:8. The second part, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest...” is found in the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem.²³¹ It is also reminiscent of Psalm 118:26. As we sing this hymn, there is a sense that we are blessed, as well, when we make up our own minds to come to others in the name of the Lord.

The Institution Narrative recalls Jesus’ command to his disciples to eat his body and drink his blood in remembrance of him. As previously noted, it is a sacred meal that Jesus prepares for all generations, not just the original disciples.²³² The celebrant then invokes the Holy Spirit to sanctify the bread and wine to become the Body and Blood of Christ. A petition is made to sanctify those receiving the sacrament so that they may use it to serve God. This sanctification of the people reflects the vows we make at baptism to bring “unity, constancy, and peace”²³³ to our world and is yet another way that we experience the missional aspect of the church through the eucharist.

²³¹ See Matthew 21:9, Mark 11:9-10, Luke 19:38, and John 12:13.

²³² See footnote 136.

²³³ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 363.

The eucharistic prayer ends with the Great Amen, symbolizing the participation and consent of all the people present. The amen at the end of the eucharistic prayer is printed in the prayer book in capital letters to denote the importance of this response from all present. Ambrose wrote in one of his sermons on the sacraments: “So the answer ‘Amen’ you give is no idle word. For you are confessing in spirit that you receive the body of Christ...What your lips confess let your heart hold fast.”²³⁴ The celebrant then invites all to join him or her in the Lord’s Prayer.

The celebrant then breaks the bread. It is biblical in that Jesus revealed himself to the disciples when he broke the bread in Luke 24:13-35, the story of the Road to Emmaus. The breaking of bread is also mentioned in Acts 2:42 and 46 in regard to the early Christians partaking in the Eucharist.²³⁵ Mitchell writes: “Christians have seen in the breaking of the bread a symbol of the breaking of the Lord’s body on the cross and of their own need to be broken in order both to share in the life of Christ and to share that life with others.”²³⁶ The Communion is then distributed.

The basic components of all eucharistic prayers is described by liturgical theologian Dom Gregory Dix as a four-action shape: (1) during the Offertory, the bread and wine are taken to the table, (2) the celebrant says a prayer over the bread and wine

²³⁴ Ambrose, *Sermons on the Sacraments (De Sacramentis)*, sermon iv, as cited in Yarnold, 138.

²³⁵ Mitchell, 175.

²³⁶ Mitchell, 175-176. See also, Justin Martyr in question 5, page 58, concerning the amen.

blessing them, (3) the bread is broken during the Fraction, and, (4) during the communion the bread and wine are distributed.²³⁷

The Post Communion Prayer follows, thanking God for accepting us as living members of Christ and for receiving him through his body and blood. There are two options for use. Both prayers are mission oriented, as well as showing grateful thanks, in that this appreciation leads us to go out into the world to love and serve God as we share the mission of the Church with others.

The celebrant blesses the people and a closing hymn is sung as the crucifer, choir, eucharistic ministers, and the clergy process back down the aisle of the church. The Cross goes with the crucifer to signify that Christ is not left behind in church, but rather, we are taking him back out into the world with us. If a deacon is present, he or she dismisses the people. This is most appropriate in that one of the roles of the deacon, according to the ordination rites found in the prayer book, is “to interpret to the church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world.”²³⁸ If no deacon is present, the celebrant dismisses them. The dismissal ties what has been done in church to Christian living as it is a call to live out our baptismal and eucharistic lives in our daily lives.²³⁹

The service of Holy Eucharist includes both the Word of God and the Holy Communion. Leonel Mitchell reminds us that they go hand-in hand in that the sacraments of the church are celebrated in the context of the liturgy of the Word, and it is through the

²³⁷ Dix, 48.

²³⁸ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 543.

²³⁹ Mitchell, 182.

reading of the Gospel that the first Christians spoke about Christ's presence in the eucharist.²⁴⁰ Tad Guzie writes: "We must be what we have eaten. We already are the body of Christ, but we must *become* that body still more so. We have to be bread for others, just as Jesus is bread given for us."²⁴¹

Conclusion

Writing about rites of passage in his classic study of cultural celebrations, Arnold van Gennep stated that "so great is the incompatibility between the profane and the sacred worlds that a [person] cannot pass from one to the other without going through an intermediate stage."²⁴² The first Christians understood this as they went through the three-year catechumenate study. His words certainly apply to the need for us all to find some kind of Christian formation in our lives, in fact, to continually seek it! To go through our sacramental rites of Christian passage without learning why they are so important to us and how life changing they can be is to leave out that intermediate stage. We lose the power to be effective ministers of Christ when we just go through the motions. Gennep calls that transitional stage the liminal stage.²⁴³ It is the time when we are in-between who we used to be and who we have the potential to be as those who bring Christ to the world. Those who have already been blessed through full initiation in

²⁴⁰ Mitchell, 131.

²⁴¹ Tad Guzie, *The Book of Sacramental Basics* (Paulist Press, Mahwah, NJ, 1981), 35.

²⁴² Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, Translated by Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), 1.

²⁴³ Gennep, 21.

the church need the means to share their faith with others who have not yet had that opportunity. Our understanding of how the sacraments affect our own lives gives us the power to help others find out what it means to lead a life that is an outward and visible sign of God's inward and spiritual grace. If we do not strive to understand how sacramental rites empower us, then we cannot help others to be empowered by them. As a fellow class mate of mine once noted, "If we don't give people the vehicle to live inside our sacramental rites, why would we expect them to live a certain way?"²⁴⁴ Through our baptisms and our continued remembrance of Christ through the eucharist, Christian lives can become vocational, whether we are lay or ordained ministers of the church. But they have to have meaning in how and why we celebrate the sacramental rites in our own communities of faith in order to share them with the larger world around us.

Those who are searching for a church home are looking for a place that is relevant and purposeful for the twenty-first century in which we live today. That relevance and purpose is certainly necessary also for those of us who already are blessed by such a place.

This project has been a constant reinforcement from its inception to its completion of how important the sacramental rites of the Episcopal Church have been to me throughout my life and how they formed me in the process of ordination into our particular tradition of faith. The wealth of information explored to complete this project has given me new insights into how I can share our sacramental life with others, both those searching for a community of faith, as well as those who are already a part of our

²⁴⁴ Patrick Edwards, classmate from *Ritualizing Relationships*, Advanced Degree Program, The School of Theology, Sewanee, TN, June 2015.

traditions. The classroom experience in the School of Theology's Advanced Degree Program and the class papers leading up to and including this project have strongly reinforced my belief that a sacramental church has relevance in the twenty-first century world in which we live. The in-depth research involved throughout the program has led me to become reacquainted with many other aspects of our faith. It has strengthened my ability to teach others about our sacramental faith in a more interesting and compelling manner. It has also resulted in others showing a deeper interest in adult formation classes that I offer as they search for why a sacramental church is important to them. I will continue to delve into how a sacramental life of striving to be an outward and visible sign of inward and grace moves us closer and closer to the life changing experience that Christ offers us. Working on this project has been a constant reminder of my original intention to explore how I can reach people in the world who do yearn for a deep relationship with Christ, but may not already have a church home. Hopefully, this catechetical approach will open the hearts, minds, and souls of those who use it for study not only to find a means of the life giving experience of Christ through sacraments, but also how they are means by which Christ provides nourishment for our continued life.

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