



Introducing *the Lord's Supper*

**What it means to be a communicant
member of the Church**

By way of preparation, please take time to read this booklet carefully.

Look up the Bible verses and study the questions from the Shorter Catechism.

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The Lord's Supper

How it began

The Lord's Supper was established by Christ. Just before the crucifixion Jesus met with His disciples in the upper room to celebrate the Passover. During the meal He broke bread and shared it with them, explaining that this would remind them of His own body broken for them on the cross. He then offered them wine to drink, to remind them of His blood shed to wash away their sins.

This shedding of blood also sealed a new covenant or commitment between God and all followers of Christ. The following Bible verses record how the Lord's Supper began: Matthew 26:26, Luke 22:17, 1 Corinthians 11:23.

The Jewish Passover was the forerunner of the Lord's Supper. In it the Jews remembered how their lives had been saved because the blood of a lamb had been sprinkled on the doorposts of their houses (Exodus 12).

In the Lord's Supper Christians remember how they have been saved because the blood of Christ has been sprinkled for them. There is therefore a strong link between the Passover and the Lord's Supper (1 Peter 1:18-21).

Christians continue to celebrate the Lord's Supper regularly because Jesus Himself has commanded it. In the Lord's Supper Christ's death is remembered, His risen presence is experienced and faith and devotion to Him are renewed.

The Lord's Supper

A sacrament of the Church

A sacrament is a visual aid which illustrates and confirms the spiritual truths and promises contained in the gospel. In the sacrament of the Lord's Supper the bread represents Christ's body broken on the cross, and the wine His blood shed for the forgiveness of sin. By participating in the Lord's Supper we share by faith in the living Christ and all the benefits of His death.

A sacrament is meaningless without faith. Those who come to the Lord's Supper should have faith in Christ as the One who has died for their sins. Read questions 91, 92, 93, 96 and 97 of the Shorter Catechism in the Appendix.

The Lord's Supper

Its different names

The title 'the Lord's Supper' takes us back to the Last Supper when Christ first instructed His disciples to observe this special meal. 'the Communion service' – this title emphasises our communion or fellowship with God at the Lord's table. Those who meet at the Lord's table are called 'communicants'. Some churches use the term 'the Breaking of Bread' to describe the Lord's Supper.

The meaning *of Christ's death*

In the Lord's Supper we remember Christ's death for sinners. The Bible teaches us many wonderful things about the death of Christ and its benefits for believers. Take time to consider each of the following:

Cleansing

The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses or purifies us from every sin (1 John 1:7). This means that sins, past and present, are forgiven as we confess them to God. Christ's cleansing blood makes believers fit to come to God, fit to come to the Lord's table and fit to enter heaven (Revelation 7:14).

Sacrifice

In Old Testament times the sins of God's people were forgiven through the sacrifice of a lamb without spot or blemish. By His death, Christ, the Lamb of God, sacrificed himself once and for all to take away sin. (Hebrews 9:26). Notice that the sacrifice of Christ on the cross did not need to be repeated. It was once and for all. The Roman Catholic Church traditionally teaches that the sacrifice of Calvary is repeated each time the Mass is celebrated and that the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ.

Substitution

On the cross, Christ became the believer's substitute, He stood in their place and took the punishment due to them for their sins. (Isaiah 53:5, 1 Peter 2:24).

Redemption

In ancient times a slave could be set free when a ransom price was paid. This process was called 'Redemption'. The slave was now free to live a new life. The person who provided redemption was called the 'Redeemer'. Christ, by His death on the cross, paid the ransom price for us. Every Christian has been freed from slavery to sin and now lives a new life for Jesus Christ, their Redeemer (Ephesians 1:7, 1 Peter 1:18-19).

Justification

Justification is a legal term which refers to freedom from guilt. Through Christ's death on the cross Christians are justified or declared free from the guilt of sin. They are now right with God and will not be punished for their sins on the judgment day (Romans 5:9).

Reconciliation

This is the restoration of broken relationships. Sin has broken that personal relationship which originally existed between God and man. By His death on the cross, Christ removes our sins and reconciles us to God. A new relationship with God begins (Romans 5:10, 2 Corinthians 5:18).

Covenant

A covenant is a mutual commitment which binds two people together. For example, marriage is a covenant. When Jesus shed His blood on the cross it was to seal a new covenant between God and all believers in Christ (Luke 22:20). In the covenant, God commits Himself to a special relationship with all who love Christ. He will always be their God for this is an everlasting covenant (Hebrews 13:20).

What it means *to share in the Lord's Supper*

Preparation

We make preparations for all sorts of events in life. It is very important that we prepare ourselves for this special act of worship. Self-examination should always precede our coming to the Lord's table (1 Corinthians 11:28).

"How close am I to my Saviour Christ? What faults or failings must I confess to God?" Is there something I must put right with another person?" Questions like these should be answered truthfully before God, and His help sought before we come to the table.

Where pre-communion or preparation services are held, these should be a priority for all communicants. Your minister will outline the order and details of the Communion service so that you will be familiar with all that takes place.

The Communion service means:

Remembrance

In the Lord's Supper communicants remember Jesus and His death for their sins, "He loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20, Luke 22:19).

Thanksgiving

At the Lord's Supper communicants are filled with thanksgiving and praise for all the benefits they have received as a result of Christ's death.

Communion

Christians hold communion with God at all times. In the Lord's Supper communicants meet with Christ and Christ with them. The risen Christ, the living Lord, is really present with His people as they meet around His table (Revelation 3:20, Hebrews 10:19, 22).

Nourishment

In the Lord's Supper communicants receive nourishment for their own souls. This does not come from the bread and wine, but from Christ Himself. Jesus says, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35); (Shorter Catechism Q96).

Testimony

Through the Lord's Supper communicants give public testimony that Christ has died for their sins and that they now follow Him as Lord (Psalm 116:13-14).

Fellowship

In everyday life a family organises a meal for its members because they belong together and care for each other. The Lord's Supper is the family or fellowship meal of the Christian church. As members of the family of faith, communicants declare that they belong together and love each other (John 13:35, Acts 2:42).

Dedication

Through sharing in the Lord's Supper communicants dedicate themselves to their Saviour and Lord, recalling that Christ has purchased them with His own blood (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20).

Expectation

Sharing in the Lord's Supper is an enriching experience; for this special meal points forward to the return of Christ and to the bliss of heaven (1 Corinthians 11:2, Revelation 3:20).

Who should come to the Lord's Supper?

Sharing in the Lord's Supper is for those who have received the Lord Jesus Christ into their lives. They recognise that they are sinners in the sight of a holy and perfect God and believe that Christ has died for the forgiveness of their sins. In repentance and faith they have come to Christ for salvation, have committed their lives to Christ and recognised Him as Lord.

Some have received Christ decisively during a church service or mission, others have received Christ in the privacy of their homes. Some have come to Christ after a period of seeking and searching. Some have come to Christ in childhood, others in their teens or adult years. Whatever the circumstances, the person who comes to the Lord's table must be a person who has first come to Christ. Those who have come to Christ will not be perfect, but they will be conscious that the Lord is in their lives and that life is different with Christ. The Shorter Catechism is helpful in explaining what it means to come to Christ.

"Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, by which we receive and rest on Him alone for salvation, as He is offered to us in the gospel."

(Shorter Catechism Question 86).

Some common problems

- Some are troubled by the fact that they cannot give the day and date of their conversion to Christ. Many Christians are in this position. The important point is not the time of the event but the fact of it. The question is, "Am I trusting Christ now as my Saviour?" and "Am I now living in obedience to Christ as my Lord and Master?" "Is it evident to others that I am a follower of Christ?"
- Some who genuinely trust and follow Christ never come to the Lord's Supper because they feel unworthy. We are always unworthy, indeed if we feel worthy in ourselves to come to the Lord's Supper we should not be coming at all. We must remember that it is Christ Himself who makes us fit to come to His Supper through His dying for us. It is Christ Himself who invites those who love and trust Him to meet at His table.
- In some places young people are expected to become new communicants merely because they have reached a certain age. Such a practice is clearly wrong in the sight of God for it leads to false promises and potential hypocrisy. "It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfil it" (Ecclesiastes 5:5).
- Some have sought to come to the Lord's table in later years because they feel they must do this before the end of their lives. The age of a communicant is largely irrelevant. Admission to the Lord's Supper is on the basis of a personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Admission to the Lord's Supper

The kirk session shall admit to the Lord's Supper only those who have been baptised, who make a profession of faith in the Lord Jesus, and whose character is consistent with such a profession (Code of the Presbyterian Church).

After a period of instruction, new communicants are admitted to the Lord's table on profession of faith in Christ. They are introduced to the kirk session and formally received into full membership of the church, usually at a pre-communion service.

The communicant's card, published by the Presbyterian Church, sets out the following confession and vows:

My confession

I have received Jesus Christ to be my Saviour and the Lord of my Life (John 1:12).

My vows

Since Jesus Christ the Eternal Son of God dwells in me by the Holy Spirit I shall endeavour with His help:

- To be open to His will for my life
- To live in fellowship with Him through daily prayer and Bible study
- To obey Him and honour Him in my daily life and to witness for Him by what I say and how I live
- To be regular in attendance at worship and at the Lord's table
- To be active in the life and work of my own church, to be loyal to its leadership and to support it financially and in every other way I can to play my full part in His mission to the world.

It is essential that those who come to the Lord's table understand exactly what the Lord's Supper means and what is required of those who share in it. The Shorter Catechism is a useful guide.

“The right way to receive the Lord's Supper is to examine whether we discern the Lord's body, whether our faith feeds on Him, and whether we have repentance, love, and a new obedience – so that we may not come in the wrong way and eat and drink judgement on ourselves.” (Q97).

Notes

1 Corinthians 11:23-34 should be studied with this chapter.

Anyone who is not sure what it means to come to Christ should be encouraged to speak with their Minister or a mature Christian or to attend a course which explains faith in Christ such as 'Alpha' or 'Christianity Explored'.

Living *the life*

Sharing in the Lord's Supper is of great importance, but it is only one part of the Christian life. A profession of faith must be accompanied by obedience to Christ in every area of life. The Christian life can only be lived out with the help of Jesus Himself, who says, "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:4, 5).

Continual dependence on God is essential for every Christian. "I can do everything through Him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13).

Living the life means:

- **A new presence**

Christ promises to be in us and with us always. (John 1:12, Matthew 28:20).

- **A new power**

The Holy Spirit lives in every Christian to give them power to live the life (Acts 1: Romans 8:11). The Holy Spirit also works in each Christian, changing and shaping their lives to make them more like Jesus Himself. The Bible calls this process 'Sanctification' (Peter 1:2, 2 Corinthians 3:16-18).

- **A new relationship with the Lord**

"Our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). Our relationship with God is maintained through regular prayer and Bible reading. Public worship, meetings for prayer and the Lord's Supper also develop our relationship with God.

- **A new allegiance and loyalty**

The Christian must not be ashamed to confess Christ and be known as a follower of Christ in the world (Romans 10:9). Our allegiance to Christ may mean the loss of some friends, but God will give us many more in their place (Mark 10:29-30).

- **A new conflict to be faced**

The world around the Christian will often be hostile and unsympathetic (1 John 2:15). The devil will at times tempt or attack the Christian (Ephesians 6:10-18). Indwelling sin will also trouble the Christian in this life (Romans 7:21-25). Christ alone gives victory in this conflict.

- **A new body to belong to**

Each Christian is a full member of the church, the body of Christ! God has given each Christian gifts and abilities to use in the service of Christ's church (Romans 12:5).

- **A new security to enjoy**

At times 'living the life' will be difficult, but Christ has promised to keep each one who comes to Him and trusts in Him (John 10:27-28, Jude 24).

- **A new home to look forward to**

Christ by His death and resurrection has made it possible for believers to enter heaven, the Father's house, their eternal home (John 14:1-6, 2 Corinthians 5:8).

Belonging *to the Church*

The meaning of the church

‘Church’ means ‘congregation’ or ‘assembly’. In the Bible ‘church’ never refers to a building, but always to a company of people who are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Although there are many Christian denominations, there is only one church made up of all true followers of Christ. The Lord Jesus is the sole King and Head of the church. (Ephesians 5:23).

The different titles of the church

Titles given to the church include:

‘The flock of God’ – this speaks of God’s care for His people

‘The family of God’ – this emphasises our belonging together as brothers and sisters in Christ

‘The body of Christ’ – this teaches us that church members have different tasks and functions, just like the different parts of the human body

‘God’s building’, ‘Christ’s bride’, ‘Light of the world’ and ‘Pillar and foundation of the truth’ are other titles of the church.

The life of the church

Church life centres on worship and praise, preaching and teaching, prayer and Bible study. Evangelism, social witness, and mission to the world are also key activities of the church (Acts 2:42). Church members have a duty to be loyal to the life and work of their own congregation and to support it financially through realistic giving. As new communicants grow in their faith they take a more active part in the work of their church. Communicants also have voting rights in the congregation. The leaflet, *What is a Church Member?* is recommended for further study.

The Presbyterian Church

‘Presbyterian’ is a word derived from *Presbyter* a New Testament Greek word for ‘Elder’. The Presbyterian Church is therefore a church which is ruled and cared for by a body of elders or presbyters. The minister, who is sometimes known as the teaching elder, is supported by the congregation in full-time church work. Local churches are grouped together in a body known as the presbytery. Once a year the whole Church meets in a conference known as the General Assembly.

The Presbyterian Church traces its origins to Christ and the apostles. The Reformation of the 16th century brought the church back to biblical standards of faith and life. The influence of the Reformation and the principles of Presbyterianism made a great impact on Scotland. It was Scottish planters who established the first Presbyterian churches in Ireland in the 17th century. Today the Presbyterian Church has over 500 congregations in Ireland. Through its councils and committees, the General Assembly guides the overall work and witness of the Church at home and overseas.

Communicant members should not only be involved in the life of their own congregation, but should also have an interest in the wider work of the Presbyterian Church.

All this and much more is involved in belonging to the Church.

Appendix

The Shorter Catechism

Q91 How do the sacraments become effective means of salvation?

A. The sacraments become effective means of salvation, not because of any special power in them or in the people who administer them, but rather by the blessing of Christ and the working of His Spirit in those who receive them by faith.

Q92 What is a sacrament?

A. A sacrament is a holy regulation established by Christ, in which Christ and the benefits of the new covenant are represented, sealed and applied to believers by physical signs.

Q93 Which are the sacraments of the New Testament?

A. The sacraments of the New Testament are baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Q96 What is the Lord's Supper?

A. The Lord's Supper is a sacrament in which bread and wine are given and received as Christ directed to proclaim His death. Those who receive the Lord's Supper in the right way share in His body and blood with all His benefits, not physically but by faith, and become spiritually stronger and grow in grace.

Q97 What is the right way to receive the Lord's Supper?

A. The right way to receive the Lord's Supper is to examine whether we discern the Lord's body, whether our faith feeds on Him, and whether we have repentance, love, and a new obedience – so that we may not come in the wrong way and eat and drink judgement on ourselves.

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Sharing in the Lord's Supper on profession of faith in Christ is an important step for anyone.

This booklet, together with instruction from your minister, will help you understand what it means to be a communicant member of the Presbyterian Church.



Assembly Buildings, 2-10 Fisherwick Place, Belfast BT1 6DW
Tel: +44 (0)28 9032 2284 Email: info@presbyterianireland.org

www.presbyterianireland.org