

## THE ELDER AT THE LORD'S TABLE

The elder has many responsibilities. He/she is to be a spiritual leader, and at times a teacher and minister. As recognized elders, we become persons whose faith and conduct are an example to other Christians. This is quite visible on Sundays as elders lead in the communion service.

It has been the custom in our worship for two elders, with the minister, to each week preside at the table. Communion begins as the minister gives the invitation to all followers of Christ present to share in the Lord's Supper. A hymn is sung, and the elders and deacons take their places. An elder then gives a meditation with the purpose of focusing the congregation on the meaning of the table. The words of institution are given by the minister, and an elder offers a prayer of thanksgiving to call attention to God's saving act in Jesus Christ whose effective presence is made known within the community in the act of communion. This elder will later invite the congregation to share in an act of offering, and the other elder will offer the prayer of thanksgiving and dedication for the offering of God's people.

What follows is an effort to assist elders in the preparation of meditations and prayers at the Lord's Table. These meditations and prayers may be in one's own words or it may draw upon the treasures of written thoughts and prayers offered by others and adapted to the present occasion. Whether one speaks in the moment, from memory, or from reading, the important thing is that elders speak sincerely and with faith.

A wide variety of experiences may provide material for the meditation, and there are many methods of effective delivery. However, it is important to remember the context of this time in worship:

1. Your meditation should be based on a single idea and it should end with a natural flow into the words of institution.
2. Jesus related to people by speaking of common things and taught by putting these things in a new context. The everyday experiences of life are good beginnings for elder meditations. To then bring a spiritual understanding and insight to this common event builds an effective meditation.
3. The lectionary usually provides the underlying theme our worship service. Readings are published in the newsletter, on the church website, and are available in many places on the internet such as <http://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php> Reading through the lectionary may help you prepare for worship and will often spark an idea for your words.
4. Paul writes in I Corinthians 11 about his concerns for proper observance of communion in that believers "discern the body of Christ" as they partake. The meditation is a key element in the congregation's understanding of what we do together around the Lord's Table. Helping people to better appreciate this central act of worship and to anticipate the actual receiving of the elements are the purposes of your words. We approach this responsibility with care and respect!
5. Be to the point - if for no other reason, remember that six people are standing as you speak, and going more than a couple of minutes begins to appear awkward

However one prepares to pray at the Table, the following suggestions are fitting:

1. The prayer should be brief.

2. The prayer should focus upon the celebration of the Lord's Supper. It is not a pastoral prayer. It is not the only prayer of worship. It is that prayer which is specifically intended to express our thanks to God for the sacrament in bread and wine, and for the sacrifice which Christ himself has given.
3. The prayer, although addressed to God, is spoken for the people and should be loud enough so that all may hear.
4. Whether one addresses God as "Thou" or "You" is not so important, but one should be consistent. That is, Old English and more contemporary language should not be mixed. To pray "In Jesus' name" refers to the intent and spirit of the prayer, and custom should not obligate the Christian to repeat this phrase at the end of prayer.

The prayer of Thanksgiving for the Lord's Supper might be outlined so as to include these parts:

1. The address to God.
2. The acknowledgment of God's gifts.
3. A petition that our participation in the Lord's Supper may be one of true communion.
4. A conclusion.

Here are examples of ways in which God may be addressed: Our Father; O Lord our God; Eternal and Loving God; Almighty God; Dear Lord and Father of us all; Creator, Gracious God.

Examples of God's generosity are: Thou who has given Thy Son, Jesus Christ, to be our Lord and Savior; You do not turn us away, but hear the concerns of our hearts; You have called us in fellowship on this first day of the week; You are the Creator of all that gives life.

Examples of phrases which may be used in the petition are these: Help us so to receive these emblems so as to truly understand the saving acts of Jesus our Lord; Open our hearts O Lord, to receive, not just the symbols, but the substance of our faith; Bless, O Lord, the bread and the wine which we are about to partake; Cleanse our hearts, O Lord, and let us fully appreciate what has been done for us.

Examples of conclusions are these: All this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen; And so, O Lord, unite our hearts in faith and praise; This we ask so that we may be dedicated followers of our Christ.

These prayers below could be used or adapted:

- A. *Our Father, help us to find in this simple loaf and this cup those things which will call to our remembrance the risen Lord. Give us here the spiritual food which we need for the coming week. About this Table may we feel the presence of Christ's loving power. May we forget for the time being all those things which would divert our attention from You. Help us to receive the bread and the cup with genuine gratitude. In the name of Jesus. Amen.*
- B. *In our baptism, O Lord, we vowed to walk in newness of life. Now as we eat this bread and drink from this cup, give us the courage and strength to keep the vows which we have made. Bind us together in fellowship with all who seek to follow You. Amen.*
- C. *We come with grateful hearts, Our Father, about this Table where we are surrounded*

*by so many loved ones, the living and the dead. We bow in awe before the mystery of our salvation. We give Thee thanks for Christ our Lord and his redeeming love. May this observance nourish our faith and strengthen our commitment to Jesus Christ our Lord, in whose name we pray. Amen.*

- D. Loving God, Our Father, as we handle and taste the bread and the wine which represent the body and blood of Jesus our Christ, teach us to discern his living presence and grant that our praise and worship may be more than empty form. Make us better Christians and strengthen us to choose the better way. Amen.*
- E. O Lord, our God, we acknowledge that our faults and failures are many. We are not worthy to demand Thy presence. We need pardon and peace. But we give thanks, O God, that our salvation is Thy gift. We cannot earn it. We can only receive it in gratitude. So we pray, O God, that as we receive this bread and wine our sins may be forgiven and our hearts committed to do Thy will.*
- F. We come to this Table, O Lord, as one great fellowship of love, although we do not always love You as we ought nor do we love one another as we should. Help us as we eat this bread and drink of this cup to remember that all people everywhere long to know and receive your goodness. In Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*
- G. O God, Thou who has been the God of our people in generation past, we come to this Table as those who tread upon hallowed ground. May we approach it with deepest reverence. Help us to remember the true sacrifice which Jesus Christ made that we might have life. Forgive our sins and set us steadfastly to follow Thee. In His name. Amen.*
- H. Dear Lord and Father of us all, we come to receive this bread and to drink of the cup in remembrance of Jesus Christ. Fill our hearts with such a mighty love for You and for one another that our communion may be sweet and good. May the memory of these moments linger with us through the week as we pray daily in our hearts. Amen.*
- I. Gracious, eternal God, we have often wandered far from Thee. Sometimes even when we come to this Table our thoughts are elsewhere. O God, help us to truly feel the awesomeness of that which we celebrate. Help us to receive these emblems as those who truly discern here the broken body and the shed blood of Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**The offering prayer, like the communion prayer, should be focused upon the gifts.** It, too, is a prayer of thanksgiving and it is a prayer of dedication. A similar outline may be followed for this offertory prayer as for the communion prayer. Several examples of offering prayers:

- A. To You, O Lord, we bring our gifts, acknowledging You has been more generous with us than we with you. Help us, O God, to be good stewards of all that You have given us. Take these our offerings and use them in Your service. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*
- B. O God, we have received Thy gift to us, Jesus Christ, and we seek to give to Thee, as symbols of ourselves, these offerings of money. May they be used wisely in the work of Thy Church and the ministry we share together. Amen.*

Each elder's prayers express their own personality. No one should try to imitate another. There are some who have a natural ability in public speaking and some who succeed in being creative in their prayers. Most of us should do that which is natural to us. Let no one be embarrassed if their prayers do not have the eloquence of another. God hears every prayer which comes

sincerely from the heart, which is full of faith, and which is directed to God on behalf of his people.

We work to improve our offerings of prayer, not through vanity, but because we believe that God deserves the best that we can offer.

## THE ELDER'S MINISTRY OF COMMUNION IN HOMES AND HOSPITALS

An elder is sometimes asked to minister in homes and hospitals. In our congregation, this ministry most often occurs in taking the Lord's Supper to those who are unable to attend services at the church. Here are the general responsibilities of the Elder in serving communion away from church:

1. Know when you are to serve and where you are going.
2. You may want to ask a deacon or another elder to go with you.
3. Check your list of persons to be served and check the communion kit so that you can be reasonably sure that adequate bread, juice, and cups.
4. Decide whether you will take communion with those you serve. There is no rule on this. Some feel that "communion" means not only communion with God, but also with fellow Christians -- therefore, all present should partake, even if this means that the elder and deacon partake in each home. (This will require more elements.)
5. It is the elder's responsibility to see that someone returns the communion kit. The excess juice should be disposed of, the container washed, dried, the kit cleaned of any stains and extra bread discarded.

Many elders seek help or guidance in ministering to persons in homes and hospitals. Some awkward situations do arise. Our hope is to make the service as meaningful as possible for everyone. [Here are some guidelines and suggestions:](#)

Be spiritually prepared! That is, go with the feeling that what you do is a privilege and a service to Christ and his people. Try not to look upon your ministry as a duty or a chore. Sometimes you may serve at personal sacrifice -- missing a ball game, taking more of Sunday for church responsibilities when you have but limited time for rest or recreation. There will be times when the weather is beautiful and you'd rather do something else, and time when the weather is awful and you really would like to be at home.

One thing which helps our spiritual preparation is the realization that shut-ins often look forward to communion and to the visit that goes with it. Remember that we are all mortal and may in time become the one to be served.

Remember that the Lord's Supper is at the heart of our Christian faith. It is a symbol of God's great love expressed in the self-giving of Jesus Christ - God in human form. Remember, too, that the Lord's Supper is a communion, that is, fellowship within the family of God. To feed the hungry and thirsty, people who are often lonely, may be the finest thing you do all month.

However difficult you may find it to pray -- pray within as you prepare for each visit. Your prayer may be something like this:

*God, I need your love as much as anyone. Yet here is one who is sick, or aged, or lonely. Help me to be a channel through which your love may flow through my life to theirs. Amen.*

Your visit will usually be expected, but sometimes you may need to explain who you are and why you have come. The simple approach is best:

*"I'm \_\_\_\_\_, an elder of South Grand Lake Christian Church (and this is \_\_\_\_\_ one of our deacons). I/we've come to serve communion to \_\_\_\_\_. May we do that now?"*

If you find the person in a community area in a nursing facility, you might ask if they would like to move to a more private setting.

You must be the judge of the situation in terms of how much pre-communion visiting should occur, how to deal with TV, other visitors, interruptions, etc. Generally, knowing the other calls you have, seeing how the person seems to feel, you can judge your time. Your visit should not be a quick "delivery" of the communion and a good-bye, but, however long or short, an occasion for truly showing concern for the one you visit. If you are unacquainted, share something of yourselves and seek to learn something of the one you are serving. Here are some "openers":

"I know you miss being able to attend church regularly..."

"Tell us about yourself. What family do you have?"

"I remember you from...."

You must steer the conversation in such a way as to naturally move, if possible, to the service of communion. Sometimes this isn't easy. One way is to move to open the kit and prepare it for serving the communion.

The service should be simple, but not perfunctory. Here is a suggested "Order of Service" and some leads into each part:

### **Scripture**

"Let me read a few verses from the Bible as we prepare for communion..."

Some scriptures (or selections from) which might be read: Psalm 23; Matthew 5:1-9; Matthew 6:25-34; Matthew 26:26-29; John 1:1-14; John 6:35-40; John 14:18-27; Romans 12:9-16; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; 1 Corinthians 13; Philippians 2:1-11.

### **Comments**

The scripture can be followed by a very brief comment about the scripture and the Lord's Supper. For example, following the 23rd Psalm, you might say: "Christ is our shepherd and his goodness and mercy do follow us all the days of our lives. As we serve this bread and wine we remember that it represents his body and blood given for us in love."

### **Prayer**

This is a communion prayer much like one you would give in church. It should include a special prayer of blessing for the person being served.

### **Serving the Bread and Cup** (If a deacon is with you, let them do the serving.)

You may want to recite the words "This is my body..." "This is my blood..." as the bread and wine are served.

After the communion service you may want to visit or go immediately. When you go you may want to simply say "It's a joy to visit with you. We will remember you and hope to come again. If the church can be of help to you, don't hesitate to call us."

Sometimes the person being served wants to make an offering. Assure them that your coming does not require that they make an offering. Use your own judgment about bringing it to the church for them

Other situations which arise include serving communion when there are others present, when in a crowded hospital room, and when the person may be indisposed or confused. In all these situations you have to make choices as to how to proceed. Do what you think is best. If you have sufficient bread and wine a guest can be invited to share in the communion - our services are open to all who seek to follow Christ.

If the person is not having a good day, you should use your judgment in serving. Generally if it is evident that a person is confused or doesn't understand it may be best to simply visit, offer a prayer (if it seems appropriate) and depart.

It is important to leave a note where the patient is sleeping, semi-conscious or confused. They may never know of your visit, but the note will say to their families that the Church has remembered them. If you are going after worship, take a church bulletin with you - everyone likes to know what is going on in their church, even if they can't be present.

The visits are usually rewarding and uplifting. If you do leave feeling awkward, remember that the greatest gift you have brought is your presence and your presence has represented Christ and the church more effectively than any words which were said or unsaid.

Provisional document 7/12