



Connect with Your Faith

Leader's Guide

Week 5

Topic Week 5: What are sacraments and what do they mean for us?

There are two sacraments recognized by the United Methodist Church: Communion and Baptism. It might be helpful for those who have not experienced communion to see a plate with bread and a chalice with juice. Speak how it is a celebration of God's love for us in the person of Jesus Christ. Ask one of the staff to help you prepare this if meeting in person.

Additionally, for baptism it might be helpful to visit the baptismal pool at the front of the church or to see a bowl on a table with water in it or to even see the baptismal font in the sanctuary.

Before Class: Study these teaching points covered in the teaching video. Notice the time for both the teaching video and testimony video and plan the use of your time accordingly to allow for good discussion.

Speaker: McCray West

Script ****

There are two sacraments within the United Methodist Church - baptism and Holy Communion. Other faith traditions recognize additional sacraments, including Extreme Unction (last rites), Marriage, Ordination, reconciliation, and confirmation.

The Methodist Church celebrates baptism and communion as the two primary sacraments Jesus instituted for his disciples. In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus commissions his disciples to go and make disciples, asking them to baptize those they are discipling in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In Mark 14:22-24, when Jesus was sharing in his final Passover meal with his disciples, he explained the significance of his imminent crucifixion using the bread and wine. God's grace has been extended to us in these two sacraments. In baptism we are covered by God's grace that has been at work in us before we even recognized the work of grace in our life. In the sacrament of communion, we see the full extent of God's grace on display. Jesus gave up his life for ours. He took on our punishment and bore all our sin on the cross.

In the sacrament of baptism, the grace we are celebrating and experiencing is the Prevenient Grace of God. The word prevenient simply means "to come before," and refers to the grace God shows us before we ever make a move towards him. Before we even make a

decision to give our lives to Christ, God has moved toward us with His grace. It is His grace that convicts and draws us to Him, and it is this grace we celebrate at baptism. In addition to expressing our profound gratitude, baptism also signifies our Christian initiation into the life and fellowship of the church. In our baptismal vows we promise to reject all that is evil, to repent of our sin and to accept the freedom God gives us to resist these things. We also confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It is a public confession of our Christian beliefs. Parents who are bringing an infant or young child for baptism promise to raise the child in Christ's holy Church until the day they can accept God's grace for themselves. As a congregation, we play a part in each baptism. We are called to nurture one another in faith and in the life of the church. It is a commitment to actively participating in the spiritual well-being of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

The sacrament of baptism is seen in the Methodist Church as the rite of initiation into the life and fellowship of the church. The Methodist Church allows for three different modes of baptism: sprinkling, pouring and immersion. The amount of water used for one's baptism does not matter, and the mode one selects is a matter of personal preference. Typically, infants are baptized via sprinkling or a sign of the cross made on the forehead with water, recognizing the Triune nature of God as one is baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Baptism is something we experience once in our life. We recognize the work of God in the life of the person regardless of their age or understanding. We believe in the grace of God to cover us our entire life, therefore being baptized once is sufficient. The Nicene Creed, a statement of faith used by the Methodist Church, states, "We believe in one baptism for the remission of sin." Although the Methodist Church believes in only one baptism, people can re-experience their baptism through a reaffirmation of faith or a recommitting to one's relationship with Christ. Remembrance baptisms are another way for people to express their commitment or re-commitment to Christ. While the individual is not being re-baptized, their decision for a remembrance baptism is a way for one to publicly confess their re-commitment to Christ.

In the sacrament of Holy Communion, we are celebrating the grace given to us through the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God, in Christ, established the sacrament of communion. At the altar table we meet and remember what it is Christ did for us. The elements of communion, the bread or juice and bread, remind us of the enormous sacrifice Jesus Christ made for all people. After receiving the elements, we are empowered anew by God's Holy Spirit to go out and live our lives in witness to what God has done in us and for us.

Communion is something we participate in together as a body of Christ, joining in fellowship with one another and experiencing the meal together as a family. Within the Methodist Church the sacrament of Holy Communion is open to all people. The term used is "Open Table," which simply means this meal is available to any and all people who earnestly repent of their sin and seek to live in peace with one another. An open table means it is the responsibility of the individual partaking in communion, rather than the church, to make his heart right before God. Paul tells us that, "everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup." Through prayerful examination we prepare our hearts and minds to approach the throne of God with gratitude, repentance, and humility.

Holy Communion is seen in the Methodist Church as a rite of nurture. Where we experience baptism only once in our life, we have the joy of experiencing God's grace again and again through communion. Holy Communion is a time for us to remember God's grace in our life and to celebrate the active working of God's grace in us each day. Churches celebrate the sacrament of Holy Communion in varying frequencies. Some celebrate it at each Sunday service. Some celebrate communion once per month. Regardless of the frequency, we have the opportunity to experience God's grace each time we come to the table.

End Script****

Tough questions prep:

Do I have to have my infant/young child baptized or can I wait? Answer: You can certainly wait to have your children baptized. The Methodist Church believes in infant baptism as supported by scripture where households were baptized, but we also believe in God's grace being in the lives of all people, regardless of age or understanding. If a parent would rather wait for their child to get older, I would suggest they have them wait until confirmation and at that time their child can be baptized.

Is immersion a better method of baptism, meaning more water is better? Answer: Baptism is what God is doing in us, not what we are doing for God. The amount of water does not matter, God's grace is the same in our lives whether we are being sprinkled with water or immersed in water.

What if I am not a member of the church, can I have my child baptized or can we participate in communion? Answer: Yes, you can definitely have your child baptized even if you are not a member. However, as a church we enter into covenant with you to help you raise your child in the local church. If you are not members or are not regularly attending our church it becomes harder for us to provide the spiritual support, you and your family would need. In terms of communion, we do celebrate an open table which means any and all are welcome to come and experience God's grace.

At what age would my child be confirmed? Answer: We hold confirmation for children who are early middle school age. The children are generally in their 6th grade year, although we have had children in 7th and 8th and even sometimes in high school.

Who is able to baptize my child? Answer: Only those who are an appointed Elder and local pastor in the United Methodist Church have the ability to baptize your child. You can decide which Elder or local pastor you would like and that can be determined when you have a discussion with one of our Associate Pastors.

Could someone who is not an Elder be present for my child's baptism? Answer: Yes, you can have another pastor present (e.g. Deacon's, Student Pastor) to hold the baptismal bowl, or to be present in the immersion pool to help assist.

Do you have gluten free elements for communion? Answer: Yes, we have a gluten free option at all of our communion stations. The person needing it would alert the communion server at the time they prepare to take the elements. We offer a separate chalice for juice so there is no cross-contamination.

When is communion offered? Answer: At our traditional service at 9:30 we offer communion at the close of every service. At our modern service at 11:00, we offer communion once per sermon series.

Key Scriptures to Review Prior:

Matthew 28:18-20

Matthew 3:13-17

Acts 8:26-40

Exodus 12 (Context for Passover meal)

Matthew 26:26-28

Mark 14:22-24

Luke 22:15-20

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Class Timeline:

	Estimated time
1. Introductions	15 min
2. Teaching Video	McCray West, 6 min
3. Discussion Questions	20 min
4. Testimonial Video	Jay Karnan, 2 min
5. Takeaways	10 min
6. Prayer	1 min
7. Invitation for next week	1 min

1.Introduce the content and video for this class (in your own words):

Sacraments are often described as “sacred moments,” moments where we experience the Triune nature of God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These moments are meant to be experienced in community with other people. We experience God’s grace in our life personally, but in these moments, we have the joy of doing so with one another.

There are two sacraments practiced in the United Methodist Church - baptism and communion. Communion is sometimes referred to as The Eucharist, The Lord’s Supper, Holy Communion, the Divine Liturgy or Divine Service and also the Mass. Each faith tradition or denomination has a different name for and view of communion. For the purposes of this

session we will explore the sacraments from the United Methodist faith tradition. No one denomination is necessarily right or wrong in their view, as the Bible does not provide many details on how to practice these, but it is important to understand that different faith traditions vary in interpreting the sacraments.

Within scripture Jesus ordained, or made holy, the sacraments of baptism and communion for his followers. He asked his disciples to, “do this in remembrance of me” when speaking of the Lord’s Supper and regarding baptism, we are told to, “go and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit”. Baptism and communion are mandates from Christ for all Christians, and this is why all Christian denominations recognize these two sacraments.

Within the United Methodist Church, we view the two sacraments as a “means of grace” from God, meaning the grace of God is made real in our life through the bread, juice, and water. Baptism provides for us the experience of God’s prevenient grace and communion allows Christians to continually experience the grace of God each time we participate in this holy meal. They are a promise and a reminder that God is with us at all times and that God’s grace is always available for us to experience in community with one another.

Let’s watch this video below and learn more.

2. Play the teaching video. (McCray West, 6 mins.)

3. Discussion questions:

1. What have the sacraments meant in your life? How have you celebrated them in the past?
2. Have you ever thought about the sacraments as a way to experience God’s grace? Has your understanding changed regarding the sacraments? Please explain.
3. What do you think it means when Jesus says, “Do this in remembrance of me”? Is it simply a remembrance or does it have greater meaning?
4. Why do you think it was important for Jesus to ask his disciples to engage in these sacraments?

4. Play the short personal testimony video. (Jay Karnan, 2 mins.)

5. Closing / takeaways in your own words:

The sacraments are a means of experiencing God’s Grace.

There are two primary sacraments in the Methodist Church; baptism and Holy Communion.

When we experience the sacrament of baptism it is God at work in us through the Holy Spirit. We are not doing the work; it is God who works within us.

Baptism is the rite of initiation into the church and communion is the rite of nurture (how God nurtures our faith through the grace we experience in the meal).

When we celebrate communion, we remember God's love and grace as experienced in the Triune nature of God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We must prepare our hearts through prayer to receive communion.

6. Close in prayer Use the PRAY model as we teach them to pray:

P = praise – praise God for who he is and what he has done. Use attributes to describe Him.

R = Repent – remind them of their sin and need for a Savior

A = Ask – petition your request for this group to our Father in Heaven including any concerns about the sacraments

Y = Yield – Submit to God's will with words that remind them to trust Him t

PRAISE	Matthew 6:9	"Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.'"
REPENT	Matthew 6:12	"And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."
ASK	Matthew 6:11&13	"Give us this day our daily bread." "And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]"
YIELD	Matthew 6:10	"Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven."

7. Invite them back next week to learn about . . .

Next week is our last week of this session, week 6, where we will discuss "How do I fit?" Hope you will join us!