

# OPEN FORUM

Many thanks for the July/August issue devoted to holy communion. What a helpful contribution to the church! I have already reprinted Bishop Willimon's article for distribution in the church newsletter. I especially appreciate Dr. Westerfield Tucker's plea for faithfulness to our authorized rites and to our basic order of Word and Table in *The Book of Worship*.

In connection with her plea, I have observed a growing tendency in Emmaus gatherings to invite lay directors to preside jointly with clergy at the Lord's Table and to lead the Great Thanksgiving from the opening dialogue down through the acts of salvation in Jesus Christ, relegating the words of institution and the invocation of the Holy Spirit to the clergy. The rationale given is that the clergy need only to "consecrate the elements," while the laity do all the rest. I believe that this practice is a significant departure from United Methodist sacramental theology and practice and from our theology of ordination. I invite comments from the connection on this practice.

## **John Wright**

Corpus Christi, TX

I serve a three point parish. I preach in 2 services using lay folks in the other service. I support serving communion every week, but we ordained clergy are not all serving one point urban charges. Does this mean you also support laity serving communion?

Young folks who are committed to serving God must also jump through all the hoops. Without hoops we would ordain Jim Jones (of grape juice and death fame). Hoops are not a block to commitment but a way to grow and decide the level of our commitment.

## **Phil Morris**

Washington County, KS

I was disappointed to see the Reverend Barbara Green's revisionist article included in the July/August issue. She recommends downplaying the remembrance of Christ's death in the celebration of the Eucharist. Paul clearly tells us that the purpose of Holy Communion is to "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." (1 Corinthians 11:26) We need to educate parishioners who have trouble with this concept rather than accommodate them!

## **Garry Ruff**

Moss Point, MS

As chair of the committee that produced the General Conference study of Holy Communion, I was delighted to receive the issue focusing on This Holy Mystery: A UM Understanding of Holy Communion. This diverse collection of articles provides both encouragement and challenge to our pastors and lay leaders who seek a more faithful theology and practice of the Eucharist. I have led workshops on This Holy Mystery in several Annual Conferences, and I continue to be gratified at the response of United Methodists from across our diverse denomination. My only quibble is that I wish one of the articles had been written by a United Methodist in Africa, where the study document has been very well-received.

I have occasionally said, "We won't really know if this study has done any good for our church for at least 25 years." Nevertheless, I must now admit, two years after adoption of this teaching document, the initial signs are very encouraging. "Thank you" to all who contributed to this issue.

## **L. Edward Phillips**

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I appreciated the July/August CR issue on how to celebrate the Eucharist more frequently and more deeply, but none of the writers addressed the central meaning of the Lord's Supper: the scandalous hospitality Jesus shared with sinners and outcasts.

Clergy may fear that frequent communion will become a meaningless ritual, but for many congregations, it already is. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. observed four decades ago that the most segregated hour in America is 11:00 a.m. on Sunday morning. We have made some progress since then, but his observation is still all too true.

Our Savior ate with self-righteous religious folk and penitent prostitutes, with tax collectors who collaborated with Roman occupiers and with rebellious Zealots. Some congregations fully represent "the Church that Christ has opened to people of all nations, ages, and races," but many dishonor the teaching of our Master by giving those who are different a cold shoulder. Or I should say, they extend a chilly welcome to those who manage to get into their non-accessible sanctuary. Or muster the courage to approach a flock of Christians who may not accept someone who is black/Hispanic/visually-impaired/gay/whatever.

An exercise I recommend for all Confirmation groups and membership classes is to ask, "Who don't you want to sit near in worship next Sunday?"—and then remind them these are exactly the folks God wants them to join in the fellowship of sinners and communion of saints. If we want to deepen our Eucharistic worship, if we really care at all about introducing people to Jesus, we must follow more faithfully the Lord who prayed that we might all be one.

## **Thomas W. Goodhue**

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Thanks for devoting an issue to "The Feast"! Might I suggest one way to move in the direction of richer, fuller, celebration and meaning would be for us who lead to simply learn the liturgy? Years ago, in seminary, John Westerhof asked, "Don't you think, if this is a sacrament, and you're going to observe it on a regular basis, don't you think you ought to know it?" What a difference it makes when the words and prayers are offered from memory with confidence and familiarity. It says, "This matters!" Monotone reading, or, worse yet, stumbling through the liturgy as if you've never seen it before, says the opposite.

**Jo Ann Mann**  
Elgin, SC

I read with great interest the latest edition on the Eucharist in the "Circuit Rider." Having received a doctorate from Catholic University of America in liturgical studies, basing my dissertation on the topic of "How to Move a Local United Methodist Congregation to More Frequent Eucharistic Celebrations," I was gladdened to see such an emphasis. From my work and research, I have found that the greatest "methodology" or motivator for moving a congregation to accept more frequent celebrations is the pastor him/her self. He or she must be the greatest advocate for weekly celebrations. The reason why many of our congregations have not moved toward weekly celebrations have not been resistance from those in the pew but from those in the pulpit. Congregations I have found are hungering for a real experience with Christ, and are waiting for pastors to say "we are going to celebrate communion every Sunday."

The congregation I served readily received weekly celebrations. Why? I found three reasons: 1. our people have a trust in the real presence of Christ at the table, 2. our celebrations are done with dramatic expectation that Christ comes to us in a very real way through the sacrament, and 3. because I, as their pastor, believe and have preached that word and table is the norm for Christian worship, and have been an undying advocate for that norm.

So many of our clergy lack a deep liturgical spirituality. They simply do not know how to worship. I couldn't agree with Dan Benedict more that the power of gesture is lost on Methodist clergy. We are too verbal. At Catholic University there are classes on liturgical gesturing and how it conveys power. Perhaps some of those courses should be apart of our United Methodist seminaries, or at least some drama classes. But most of all our church needs elders to have the courage to say, we will "do this."

**David E Thayer**  
Annapolis, MD

### More Letters!

To read more letters responding to the July/August 2006 issue on Holy Communion, go to [www.circuitrider.com](http://www.circuitrider.com). In the September/October issue, select Open Forum.

### Correction

On page 26 of the July/August issue, the 8th line on the Great Thanksgiving should read: "...you created every person in **your** image" (bold added.) CR regrets the error.

# CIRCUIT RIDER

## Reviews

*CIRCUIT RIDER Reviews* is a service to our readers. In each issue, several books selected by Book Review Editor Kenneth Carter are reviewed by several of your clergy colleagues. Listed below are the titles of books reviewed in the Sept./Oct. 2006 issue (electronic edition only).



**Book Review Editor**

**Kenneth H. Carter Jr. is pastor of Providence United Methodist Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. He is the author of *A Way of Life in the World: Spiritual Practices for United Methodists* (Abingdon Press, 2004).**

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Included with each review is a link to Cokesbury.com where you can buy most books at a **special 30% discount** off the suggested retail price **until October 15, 2006**. Books reviewed in future issues will also be offered at the special discount for a limited time following first publication.

### Books reviewed in this issue:

*Courageous Past-Bold Future: The Journey Toward Full Clergy Rights for Women in the United Methodist Church* by Patricia J. Thompson

*Leaving the Church: A Memoir of Faith* by Barbara Brown Taylor

*The Left Hand of God: Taking Back Our Country from the Religious Right* by Michael Lerner

*Preaching the Gospel Without Easy Answers* by Robert Cummings Neville

*Simple Truths: On Values, Civility and Our Common Good* by Stephen Bauman



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CIRCUIT RIDER MAGAZINE [www.circuitrider.com](http://www.circuitrider.com)

Just finished reading the July/August *Circuit Rider*. Excellent articles on The Mystery and Practice of Holy Communion. However, no writer mentioned why the sacrament was observed quarterly. It was because only elders could officiate and most of the circuit riders were unordained.

When I was ordained a deacon in a sister Methodist denomination, I could not officiate or consecrate the elements but had to call for an elder or my district superintendent. I believe this was true at one time in the UMC. My last pastorate, Newark First UMC, had incorporated monthly observances during my predecessor's pastorate and I continued the practice. Now retired, I am serving a church quarter-time with monthly communion. Although I would welcome weekly observances, I'll try to move slowly in this rural, traditional church. By the way, I believe that John Wesley took communion daily when possible.

I agree with the letter by E.D. Robertson regarding the complexity of our church in the ministerial candidacy program. It's no wonder that many younger candidates are going to other denominations. Thankfully, my own conference at its recent sessions ordained several in their 20's and 30's which represented a real turnabout.

**Elton O. Smith, Jr.**  
North Chili, New York

The July/August 2006 issue on "The Feast" encouraged us to think about the many dimensions of the Eucharist. Today, in a shrinking world, as different faiths encounter each other with increasing frequency, the eschatological dimension of the Table comes increasingly to the forefront.

The Eucharist is a Christian expression of the banquet of God for the whole human family of God, and that larger vision has roots in various passages of Scripture.

The Eucharist has roots in the liberation meal of the Passover, and in all peoples described in Isaiah 25. Its eschatological dimension is suggested in the image of the Banquet of God in the age to come, described in Matthew 8:11 and Luke 13:29, where guests from the four points of the compass – literally from everywhere – shall come and sit down

together at God's Table. It is hinted at in Luke 22: 18, where Jesus tells us that the next time he partakes of the cup will be in the Kingdom of God. The size of the "guest list" is suggested by Jesus' words that he has "other sheep that are not of this fold" (John 10:16).

The Eucharistic Table presents us, in its eschatological dimension, with a vision of the inclusive Table fellowship for the whole human family of God, and in so doing moves us beyond understanding it as a meal just for the followers of Jesus, challenging us to celebrate a vision which is a foretaste of that which is to come.

Instead of setting a Table only for the Christian part of the family of God, the larger vision suggests that perhaps we should also invite to the sacred Table, to participate in the sacrament of Holy Communion, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus...in short, the whole human family of God.

The sacrament of Holy Communion offers us multiple paradigms as we appropriate its meaning. Why not embrace a larger vision for the future, rather than a smaller identity from the past? Would that not be a challenging vision for our times?

**Bruce A. Pehrson**  
Cochituate, MA

In Professor Stamm's article, "No More Place Among Us" (July/August 2006) he stated that the possibility of excommunication from the United Methodist Church exists, "but serious qualifications should be stated." Theologically, what exactly do we do when we excommunicate people? When a person is excommunicated, does the efficacy of that action extend to the Christian Church or limited to the United Methodist Church? How does excommunication affect the person's baptism? Does excommunication revoke their membership and/or their baptism?

Yes, we can decide who officiates over the Eucharistic liturgy, but can we decide who receives it? Actually, we can restrict or prevent the participation of members in the liturgy and leadership of local churches and keep them off boards, committees, councils and committees. But when it comes to church membership and the Holy Communion, which was instituted by Christ, we are limited.

When Jesus said in Matthew 18:17 we should treat people who refuse to repent as "tax collectors," did he mean treat them as New Testament communities treated tax collectors, or as Jesus himself treated tax collectors? We ought to remember that although the Wesleys and their friends organized the UMC, our Church was actually founded by Jesus Christ.

We should learn from Jesus: Maintain the standards and teachings, and proclaim them without compromise. Those who are convinced of their value will strive to achieve them. Those who are convicted by them, like the rich young ruler or Judas, will walk away.

Regarding the Holy Communion, Paul made a point we should ponder when he told the Corinthians that when they received the Holy Communion in a way that dishonors the Lord, they "bring judgment" on themselves (I Corinthians 11: 26-34).

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I was born in a Church that was established by a European Missionary Society. Hence it carried various denominational ethos and traditions of its members - viz., Presbyterians, Lutherans, Congregationalists, Moravians. They were reflected in its theology, church government and sacraments. As a result of this mixture, we had the Lord's Supper only three or four times in a year, with a separate 'preparation' service earlier. I was told that in the earlier days those who attended this preparation service were given a 'chit' and only on the presentation of that slip of paper at the altar was the Lord's Supper offered to them! In fact one of the punishments for those who violated the church discipline was 'excommunication' – denial of the Lord's Supper. Only on the true repentance of the 'sinner' (by the approval of the board of elders) was this privilege restored to them.

Only an ordained Pastor could celebrate the Lord's Supper; and in rural areas the deacon could dispense the elements already consecrated by a pastor or do so with special license. The recipient was to

be a mature 'confirmed' member of the church (the mystery of the LS had been explained as part of Catechism) and of good standing. The Lord's Supper was administered to the sick and the dying, and it was believed that the recipient would merit a special grace.

When I participated at the Mission Festival of Basel Mission, in Switzerland, I was thrilled when I was asked to assist in the Lord's Supper at the church that was associated with John Calvin!

When our church became part of the Church of South India (CSI), there was a transformation. When I was ordained as the Presbyterian of the CSI, I was assigned to serve in an honorary capacity at the Cathedral of the diocese, which earlier held an Anglican (Episcopal) tradition. As such, it had Holy Communion every day; and on Sundays it was part of the order of service. It was celebrated with solemnity, rituals, and pageantry. I liked that celebration and as a prominent Church of the city, every Sunday we had four to five hundred people; so four priests assisted in dispensing the elements.

However, my friend who was then Presbyterian-in-Charge did not like its tradition of limiting the Eucharistic celebration only to the Episcopally ordained Priests. Because of the 'Pledge' given during the formation of the CSI, only priests who stood in the order of 'Apostolic succession' could celebrate in the ex-Anglican churches. It was denied to some prominent pastors who had a different 'ordination' earlier. That bar even excluded the Principal of a local Theological College who was a great ecumenical world church leader and happened to be the Deputy Moderator of the World Council of Churches.

During the same time I was serving as regional secretary of the Bible Society of India. As the Holy Bible served all the churches, all the denominational churches welcomed me. I once even had the privilege of celebrating 'Holy Corbana' (with all the gorgeous vestments and rituals) at Mar Thoma Church, which claims its ancient Christian heritage from St. Thomas, a disciple of Jesus. In the Orthodox churches, I observed that though Holy Communion was observed as part of liturgy every Sunday, only a few people came forward to receive the bread and wine. I was told that Adventists Church includes 'foot washing' as part of

the Lord's Supper; and other evangelical churches did not allow 'non-saved or born again' people to take part in the Heavenly Feast.

The most memorable Holy Communion I conducted was at the Vatican in one of the Catacomb churches. As one of the participants of the International Association of Mission Studies, I assisted a Roman Catholic bishop from Africa, to extend Eucharistic hospitality without any distinction of color, gender or denominational barriers. **I was greatly impressed on that occasion that Holy Communion is not a dividing but a uniting celebration of God's people!**

When I was sent as missionary to Jamaica, my contact was established with Congregational and Presbyterian churches. Here the church celebrated the Lord's Supper once a month (maybe due to shortage of ministers); and also, I saw a new phenomenon. The elements were administered to the 'elders' (officials) of the church first, who then took the bread and the wine to the people in the pew. Secondly, I saw the honesty of the Christians. Still influenced by the old slavery culture, many men and women lived together outside of marriage. Because it was "living in sin," they rarely came forward to receive Communion, though they were dedicated to the cause of the church. In some churches as a symbolic gesture, they even closed the doors of the church when the Communion service took place.

When I came to the USA, my association with the UMC opened a new dimension in my ministry. First, I admired its 'Love Feast' celebration, which I wished we could have used as an alternate in Jamaica. For I used to feel sad that many faithful left without tasting the Holy Feast in their lifetime due to the circumstances I explained earlier. The second reason was welcoming even the children to the feast of the Lord. In India, though sometimes the children accompanied their parents to the altar, when they knelt they would cross their arms, indicating they were not 'confirmed,' which indicated that we should not dispense the elements but only bless them. In the USA when Sunday school children marched to the Lord's Table, I was overwhelmed. I used a special liturgy which we prepared at Jamaica, with the formula- 'you know Jesus---, who loves you and gives himself for you; so take and eat,' which one of my

American colleagues gave me.

Our open invitation policy overwhelmed me. For though I moved with the Roman Catholic Church during my lifetime, I was denied Holy Communion. Recently, I was delightfully surprised when a priest offered me ecumenical hospitality in an inter-faith marriage.

I was happy to note that in the UMC memorial service, Holy Communion is administered. Recently at a funeral where the family wanted HC (because the deceased was a RC member), I was in a dilemma. Neither a RC priest could do so, as he felt it conflicts with our theology and traditions.

There was another problem I encountered. After the second Vatican Council the RC church had a new transformation in its theology and worship. The indigenous culture and language became part of its celebration and worship. While some accepted it, others frowned upon it. For they feared it carried a syncretistic cultural mix (in the Indian context Hinduism); and the opponent felt not only that it was unholy but also a betrayal of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

All these various Eucharistic practices made me ponder deeply. So, when I was doing my doctoral studies at a RC Theological Seminary, I presented a paper on 'Ecumenical Eucharist Hospitality.' I believe that in the celebration of Holy Communion, it is the Lord—the one who gave himself—who is the final Giver. He is also the chief celebrant not the priest or the pastor—whatever the ordination he or she might have received. It is neither the mystery nor the theology of the church that matters most to the recipient. It is their own faith that makes them worthy for the divine grace of God. And the climax of all is the hope of the eternal banquet in the Kingdom of God, which is indeed the Holy Communion with our Lord and all the saints! In that context I feel that the prayer of the 'Humble Access' (which we use in CSI liturgy regularly before Communion), is core to the Feast of the Kingdom of God.

### **H M Duke**

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