

Creative Communion

Engaging the whole church in a journey of faith

Includes
six all-age
workshops



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Introduction

An encounter with the living God

It happened during a meeting of the worship committee. A group of church leaders was reviewing the Lent and Easter services and a lively conversation was taking place. Length of sermons, choice of hymns, the Palm Sunday procession, how the children had been involved, even the flowers in the Easter garden were discussed. Only the vicar remained silent. He sat with his head slightly bowed, listening carefully as each point was raised and taken apart. Eventually, Dora, the secretary, observed, 'You are being very quiet, Alex. What are you thinking?' Alex looked up. 'I think there are only two questions and we are in danger of missing them,' he replied. 'First, why are we doing this, and second, did each person present have an opportunity to worship and enjoy the presence of the living Christ?'

This book attempts to address these two questions by discovering creative ways in which people of all ages and stages of faith can meet and be touched by God through the service that Jesus himself left to his Church: the Eucharist or Holy Communion.

The last thirty years

The Church of England, as well as the other mainstream denominations, has been through 30 years of major liturgical change, before which the Book of Common Prayer of 1662 had remained supreme for three centuries. *The Alternative Service Book* (1980) was the first and biggest turning point, but the changes since then—the influence of the

charismatic movement, new liturgies in other denominations and a response to various social and cultural changes—have been equally dramatic. In the last decade, the Revised Common Lectionary, various alternative texts and then *Common Worship* (2000) have broadened the use of scripture and allowed infinite variety to suit every situation. Word processing and desktop publishing have produced changes as radical as the invention of the printing press over 500 years ago.

Our duty and our joy

Liturgy, however, is more than words. In fact, the word means ‘the work of the people’, which shows us that fundamentally it is not about the given text. Because of the nature of the people and cultures in which we find ourselves, we now have a wonderfully rich diversity of resources to draw on, which are appropriate to our own situation. If liturgy is the work of the people, then worship is our primary calling and ultimate purpose. Whether we want to worship or not, this is how we have been designed as human beings. It can be expressed in one phrase from the Preface to the Eucharistic Prayer: ‘it is our duty and our joy...’ The sense of duty that used to take people to church is no longer enough. Worship is expected to be alive and relevant so that the worshipper has a sense of the presence of God and engages with him individually and as part of a Christian community. Therefore, Communion is not the work and sole domain of the priest, but of the whole priesthood of believers growing and journeying with God. The role of the priest or minister is to preside over this community celebration. Duty and joy go hand in hand.

Infinite variety

Today’s liturgy can be seen as a framework rather than a straitjacket. Some parishes have been celebrating the Eucharist in an imaginative

style, with special music, simplified texts and all-age groups fully involved, for two generations. The General Synod's decision in 1997 to allow children to receive Holy Communion before Confirmation in certain circumstances¹ encouraged many Anglican churches to re-evaluate their liturgy and try to see it through the eyes of a child, with the stress on the experience of the presence of God in his word and sacrament as much as on teaching about him. There are many other parishes, however, where the eucharistic worship has not been reviewed for at least 20 years and a few where the words and actions of the Book of Common Prayer remain unaltered.

A few churches still celebrate Holy Communion only as an early morning service for adult communicants. In many other churches it is the main service, but is designed as if only committed adult Christians are ever going to be present; children and occasional attenders are expected to join in as best they can.

A common pattern of such churches is to have a non-eucharistic service once a month, often called the 'Family Service'. These services are often highly imaginative, with music, drama and visual aids designed to encourage active participation. This creativity does not always extend to the weekly Eucharist, however. It is often presented in a way that conceals the sense of the presence of God rather than revealing it, and does little to engage with a congregation of mixed ages and backgrounds.

Worshipping creatively

This book attempts to find ways of enabling the power of the Eucharist to speak to people of all ages and backgrounds more clearly, and to help us to work and worship creatively within whatever tradition or situation we find ourselves. It is in three sections:

- ✦ Part One looks briefly at the structure of the Eucharist and the various resources that can develop and enhance the worship. It

also explores the opportunities and challenges of making the Eucharist a truly inclusive event, and the mission opportunities that can spring from it.

- ★ Part Two is a series of six free-standing workshops, which explore different sections of the Eucharist creatively. Each one provides space for teaching, discussion and then a series of activities that can be included in future services or form the basis of occasional special services.
- ★ Part Three ('Food, glorious food') is a programme intended for children and young people who have not yet been prepared for confirmation. Some of them may have been admitted to Holy Communion, while others will have attended the service on occasions. It is designed to help them to become familiar with the elements of the service, what it means in today's world and the practicalities of living out a Christian life at home, at school and with family and friends.

As the celebration of the Eucharist is the central act of worship for the majority of Christians, developing an understanding of it is an essential part of each person's spiritual journey. It is hoped that these programmes will help each person to worship as part of a community where all ages and stages of understanding are integrated and valued but also challenged and fed, whatever their age or spiritual experience.

Use of language

This book has been written principally from an Anglican perspective, but it is hoped that Christians in other denominations will find it of use in their exploration of any corporate worship including the service of Holy Communion. Most churches are moving closer together in their style of worship, with use of colour, music and signs and symbols that would have been unimaginable in some traditions

30 years ago. Misunderstanding often arises, however, from the terminology used, in that it is seen to be a sign of a particular tradition and thereby becomes exclusive.

The following glossary may be of use.

- ★ **Altar:** Used generally, but some traditions prefer to use the term 'Communion table'.
- ★ **Body of Christ:** The people of God, especially in the context of service.
- ★ **Child:** Any person up to the age of about twelve years. 'Youngsters' or 'young people' implies a broader age span, maybe up to mid-teens.
- ★ **Church:** When a capital 'C' is used, the word refers to the universal Church or a whole denomination, such as the Methodist Church. When lower case is used, it refers to the local church as a Christian community or a building.
- ★ **Clergy:** An ordained person. 'Priest' or 'minister' is also used.
- ★ **Congregation:** The lay people belonging to a church community.
- ★ **Eucharist or eucharistic worship:** Eucharist means 'thanksgiving'. Along with Holy Communion, it is the name given to any service where bread and wine are blessed, broken and shared.
- ★ **Liturgy and liturgical:** Any public service, especially in its design and delivery. It is not necessarily eucharistic, but covers any public act of worship.
- ★ **President:** The person who has overall oversight of the worship. In Anglican churches, this is an ordained priest. In some other denominations there may be an appointed lay president.
- ★ **Service:** More formal than 'act of worship'. For example, 'the main service is a Eucharist'; 'the meeting started with an act of worship'.
- ★ **Worshipping community:** A slightly broader term than 'congregation', used largely in a pastoral context.



———— Part One ————

Living the story



The shape of the Eucharist

'Hurry up, the meal is ready and on the table!'

Many families don't eat together much nowadays. Maybe you are part of a family in which eating and sitting together is an integral part of your day, but maybe it's just not possible, so using trays in front of the television or eating at different times is the only way you can make homelife work.

Nevertheless, eating together is important. Across most of the continent of Europe, time is 'squandered' in the day, eating and drinking and sharing as a family. As Christians, we need to reclaim the lost art of eating together and make it part of what it means to be growing up as a Christian. This lost art was often encapsulated in 'Sunday lunch', which was something of an institution for many families—and could be revived if the focus is around a Sunday morning Eucharist. We recognize, however, that there is an ever-increasing number of exciting ventures where churches are developing services of Holy Communion on different days and at different times. We are excited and affirmed by this new move of the Holy Spirit, but the most important thing is that we get together to eat. Let's do it on a day that is convenient for everyone!

The reason for this is that at the heart of our Christian faith is a meal. It can be a simple or elaborate celebration on any day of the week, but it is still a shared meal.

What follows is an elementary theology of the Eucharist, which we hope will be lived out through the workshops and sessions in this book so that Holy Communion with God in church will be food for our spiritual journeys—whatever our age or stage of faith. This

chapter is designed to be used in a variety of ways: as a sermon to the whole church to explain the Eucharist to all ages or as a narrative to help work through the service.



‘Oh, you can’t do Holy Communion with children. It’s too wordy, too long!’

This has often been said in countless churches, but we should refute it strongly. The Eucharist is a drama in which we are not only caught up but are also active participants. As baptized Christians, we all have an equal place at the table by the grace of God. Nothing is more important.

The Eucharist is a lived story. It is love in action, and it is a symbolic four-course meal for which we need to get ready.

Preparation: the gathering

There is nothing more frustrating than calling everyone to sit down at a meal table. Some come straight away and some delay. They are doing something, or outside, or on the phone, or just finishing a game on the PlayStation. We are reminded that we all come from different places, backgrounds and experiences when we sit around the table. We are not automata, programmed to sit at a particular time; nor are we institutionalized to do exactly the same thing at exactly the same time.

When we gather for Holy Communion, we need to recognize that we are all different. Therefore, care and attention need to be given to sharing what has been happening during the day, and preparing to eat. This can best be done by sharing stories of whether we have had good or bad days, or what has happened since we last met. It is an amazing thing to consider that every time we meet to eat together, we have become different people since the

last time, because of the encounters we have had and the things we have learnt.

Confession as part of preparation

Part of the gathering is getting ready to eat, and a key part of this important routine is to wash our hands. Washing hands is about making ourselves clean to eat, preparing ourselves so that we can enjoy the meal together as much as possible. It is also about respecting the food we are going to eat, not wanting it to be spoilt by anything we might already have on our hands.

Washing hands is about saying sorry to God. This act of penitence is appropriate every time we gather to worship, and perhaps our churches need to provide opportunities for handwashing if they don't already do so. Saying sorry to God is the confessional rite of the church. In terms of the Eucharist, it is part of our preparation. Being absolved from our sins is as important as recognizing that we need to be physically clean before we eat.

Now we can celebrate! We sing (in the Eucharist, this is the place for the 'Gloria', which simply means 'songs of praise') of all that God is and what he has done for us, and we share his story and our story. This is what we do at the meal table. This storytelling is rooted in Jewish Passover tradition.

A four-course meal

The Eucharist is a four-course meal. The Eucharist meal has two substantial and equally important courses and two which, while not so substantial, are no less important to the whole.

The first course: The ministry of the word

The first course is when we feed on God's word together. (I often wonder whether we shouldn't put a knife and fork on the lectern as a sign that the Bible is food for us.) Care needs to be taken over how much of the Bible we read. Lectionary readings are often too long, which means we have so much on our plates that it's hard to digest or distinguish the different tastes.

We should also read the word carefully and find different ways of engaging with it. Many people, including children, learn most through doing and seeing, so visual ways of sharing the word need to be developed. After all, we don't sit down at a meal to learn how it was cooked, but to enjoy the food and to be nourished by it. In the same way, we don't come to church just to learn; we come to worship. So, while learning is vital, we learn through our worship as God reveals himself to us. In this book we have outlined a number of creative ways to help the whole worshipping community both to get a balanced diet and to consume it well.

The second course: the peace

The sharing of the peace is the pivotal point of the Eucharist. In the same way that we encounter the living Jesus in his word, we encounter the living God in each other. A former parish Reader's prayer went like this: 'I pray that today the little bit of God in me would recognize the little bit of God in everyone I meet, and that they would recognize the little bit of God in me.' It's simple, yet profound, and it goes to the heart of the peace.

This is the point in the Communion service where our focus shifts from one place—the encounter with Jesus in the word—to the altar and the bread and wine. Due care and attention need to be given to the sharing of the peace, to prevent it from turning into some sort of social interlude in the proceedings—a time when collection money is found or, worse, when the children are told to

be quiet as they come into church. The peace is about sharing, so, if the children do come back into the church at this point, it is a good time to share what the young people have been doing, rather than leaving it to the end of the service. This is a good way to involve them as part of their sharing of the peace.

If we are to be a community of faith of all ages, the peace recognizes us as such. The sharing of the peace is the time when we truly offer our gifts and ourselves, and no offertory is complete without children as they are an integral part of the offering of the people of God. If the children are not gathered at this point, then the people of God are not complete.

The third course: the ministry of the sacrament

The ministry of the sacrament is the point where we gather and break bread. We share together in the same way that we have done through the other two courses, but we are also breaking open Jesus to share him. The priest or minister will stand with his or her hands outstretched, praying and inviting people to join in the feast. We can all join in this prayer; it is the big ‘thank you’ prayer of the church. Perhaps we could all put our hands out to pray, or all gather around the altar, or in other ways share in this prayer of thanksgiving for all that God has done for us.

It is worth saying here that many people struggle or have differing views over the presence of Jesus in the bread and wine—ranging from the belief that the bread and wine become the actual body and blood of Christ, through to the belief that they are just bread and wine. This is the question over the ‘real presence of Jesus’. While wishing to respect individual convictions, for the purpose of this book it is important, whatever our view, to recognize that somehow Jesus is present. After all, we have never met anyone who has a doctrine of the ‘real absence of Jesus’! As Richard Giles puts it in *How to be an Anglican*, ‘The great thing about the sacraments is that Jesus always shows up!’² So let us rejoice in our diversity and

celebrate the presence of Jesus in whatever way is comfortable and appropriate to us.

He is host, and guest, and the meal itself!

The fourth course: eat in or take away?

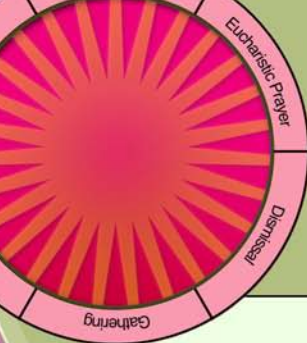
When I was young, I was taught to be polite and always say, ‘Thank you for my tea. Please may I get down from the table?’ I was usually requesting permission to leave so that the adults could get on with their talking, which was boring to me! But at the heart of the request was a plea to go.

The Catholic tradition of the church refers to Holy Communion as the ‘Mass’. This word is rooted in the Latin *missa*: ‘being sent’. We are the sent people of God and we have permission to go, but, because we are going from a table, we are full of that food. In Holy Communion, we take our food to feed a hungry and broken world. That is why the dismissal in the Eucharist is more than just permission to leave the table: it is permission to feed the world. It’s not an escape clause; it’s an engagement clause. To carry the food analogy further, we are an eat-in and a takeaway establishment! We are the carry-out bags that Christ uses to feed a hungry and needy world.

We need to explore in our worship how we can do that—not just gathering for food, but going to feed.

The Eucharist is a meal with four courses; a meal full of all the nourishment we need to live as Christians; a meal where we feast and celebrate the love of God who is present through the Bible, through each other and through bread and wine.

Welcome to the love feast!



This book explores creative ways to enable people of all ages and stages of faith to meet and be touched by God through Holy Communion.

The material provides three practical and distinctive elements:

- ✚ Background information for ministers and all those responsible for eucharistic worship
- ✚ Six workshops to enable the worshipping community to come together to examine their corporate approach to eucharistic worship
- ✚ A six-session course for young communicants, designed as a follow-on to BRF's 'Welcome to the Lord's Table'

The book begins by looking at the pattern of the Eucharist and the various resources that can develop and enhance the worship. This is followed by six workshops, designed to help churches to explore different sections of the Eucharist creatively. Each workshop is designed so that people of all ages, including children, can take part.

The final section, 'Food, glorious food!', comprises a six-session course for young communicants, centred upon eating a meal together. The food chosen has a link with the theme of the session and a section of the Eucharist. Both the all-age workshops and children's programme follow the shape of the Eucharist: Gathering, Penitence, Gospel, Offering, Eucharistic Prayer and Dismissal.



An imprint of **brf**

978-1-84101-533-0

UK £7.99



9 781841 015330

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Illustration: Linda Bronson/illustrationweb.com Design: Louise Blackmore

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