

Article 12. The Lord's Supper¹

We believe that the Lord's Supper is a sign by which the church thankfully remembers the new covenant which Jesus established by his death. In this communion meal, the members of the church renew our covenant with God and with each other. As one body, we participate in the life of Jesus Christ given for the redemption of humankind. Thus we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.¹

The Lord's Supper points to Jesus Christ, whose body was given for us and whose shed blood established the new covenant.² In sharing the bread and cup, each believer remembers the death of Jesus and God's act of deliverance in raising Jesus from the dead. As we relive this event with a common meal, we give thanks for all God's acts of deliverance in the past and present, for the forgiveness of sins, and for God's continuing grace in our lives.

The supper re-presents the presence of the risen Christ in the church. As we partake of the communion of the bread and cup, the gathered body of believers shares in the body and blood of Christ³ and recognizes again that its life is sustained by Christ, the bread of life.

Remembering how Jesus laid down his life for his friends, we his followers recommit ourselves to the way of the cross. Confessing our sins to one another and receiving forgiveness, we are to come as one body to the table of the Lord. There we renew our baptismal covenant with God and with each other and recognize our unity with all believers everywhere in all times.

All are invited to the Lord's table who have been baptized into the community of faith, are living at peace with God and with their brothers and sisters in the faith, and are willing to be accountable in their congregation.

Celebrating the Lord's Supper in this manner, the church looks forward in joy and hope to the feast of the redeemed with Christ in the age to come.⁴

1 Cor. 11:26. Jer. 31:31-34; 1 Cor. 11:24-25. 1 Cor. 10:16. Luke 22:15-20, 28-30.

COMMENTARY

1. On the night that he was betrayed, Jesus and his disciples gathered to eat the Passover meal. This annual celebration called to remembrance God's great act of delivering the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt (Exod. 12). Jesus' Last Supper signaled that he was leading his followers in a new exodus out of bondage and into salvation. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, God has rescued believers from sin and evil and brought them into a new covenant. The new people of God created through this covenant is continuous with the people of the old covenant, whom God rescued from bondage in Egypt. The people of the new covenant includes all who have confessed Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

2. The bread of the Lord's Supper is a sign of Christ's body, and the cup is a sign of the new covenant in his blood (Luke 22:19-20). As Christians eat the bread and drink the cup, they experience Christ's presence in their midst. The Lord's Supper both represents Christ and is a way in which Christ is present again ("re-present") in the body of believers. In this meal, the church renews its covenant to be the body of Christ in the world and to live the life of Christ on behalf of others. The communion meal is a sign of the unity of believers with one another as the church (1 Cor. 10:17). As branches are part of the vine, so believers are to be united with each other in Christ. Believers are to come to the Lord's table in a worthy manner, without factions among them (1 Cor. 11:17-22, 27-34). Churches are encouraged to find ways to promote reconciliation and to prepare members for communion.

The believers' covenant with one another includes the pledge of love for brothers and sisters, of mutual accountability, of confession and forgiveness of sins, and of the sharing of material and spiritual resources as there is need. Such love and sharing reaches around the world as the church recognizes its global unity. This joyful, yet solemn fellowship in the Lord's Supper is a foretaste of the fuller joy to come when all believers will feast with Christ in the reign of God (Rev. 19:9; compare Isa. 25:6-8).

3. Like baptism, the Lord's Supper is a sign, representing both God's action and covenant faithfulness in delivering us from sin and death, and representing the action of those who recommit to faithfulness in covenant with God. Because the church's response to God's salvation through Jesus includes thankfulness, the Lord's Supper has sometimes been called "eucharist," which means "thanksgiving." And because the Lord's Supper represents an event in which Jesus invited the community of his disciples to share the cup and the bread in fellowship with him and with each other around the same table, it is sometimes called "communion."

4. The practice of the early church was to celebrate the Lord's Supper frequently, every Lord's day or even daily (Acts 2:46). The Anabaptists in the sixteenth century also shared the Lord's Supper often as a sign of their renewed covenant with God and each other. Our churches are encouraged to celebrate the Lord's Supper frequently, so that they may participate in the rich meanings of this event for the worship and life of the church.