

ARTICLE-LENGTH SUMMARY OF  
CELEBRATING COMMUNION:  
WHY YOUTH AREN'T HUNGERING TO COME TO THE LORD'S TABLE

By  
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**Research Topic**

On any given day when a Presbyterian Church (USA) congregation comes together to engage in worship, the celebration of the Lord's Supper may be an integral part of the service. It is also possible that the adolescents are coming to the table with little enthusiasm for what they expect to be commonplace and routine. This view was expressed to me in a previous, unpublished research project that I conducted related to youth and worship for a doctoral course.<sup>1</sup>

Given that many church-attending Christian youth find the sacrament of the Lord's Supper irrelevant and lifeless, this project investigated the reasons for this disconnect with church teachings and understanding of the celebration, and proposed imaginative and contextual liturgical strategies, grounded in narrative theology, that will help youth to passionately engage in experiencing the presence of the risen Christ through this sacrament.

**Research Participants**

The Presbytery's Youth Council (PYC) is a group of high school youth who have applied and been recommended by their churches to serve on this presbytery committee. Its task is to develop a vision for Central Florida Presbytery's ministry with adolescents in middle and high school. They develop ideas for four events for middle and high school youth that they will lead in

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<sup>1</sup> Cheryl Carson, "Final Research Project," (project submitted for Advanced Study in Faith and Human Development, Columbia Theological Seminary, Summer 2015).

the coming year. The Lord's Supper has traditionally been observed at the final event of the year during closing worship in an outdoor pavilion. It is critical for the PYC members to understand the reasons for observing the sacrament and to offer it in liturgically appropriate and meaningful ways for the youth who will be receiving communion.

## **Research Contexts**

### **Central Florida Presbytery**

Central Florida Presbytery is a mid-council of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), with 63 churches, two new church developments (one Hungarian, one predominantly Anglo), three 1001 new worshipping communities (one Korean, one Hispanic and one predominantly Anglo), and two racial-ethnic fellowships<sup>2</sup> (one Brazilian and one Hispanic) within its bounds.

The geographic region includes ten counties in the east central Florida area. Central Florida Presbytery communities range from rural to metropolitan and feature specialized resort and tourism areas. The presbytery also has great diversity of culture, race, and economy..

### **Central Florida Presbytery Youth Council**

The research was conducted with the Presbytery's Youth Council—a group of 18 high school youth who served during the 2016-17 school year. They were selected based on their devotion to Christ, leadership abilities, and participation in their local PC(USA) churches.

Of the 18 adolescents on the PYC, 16 participated in the research project. They ranged in age from 15 to 18. A slight majority of the youth had completed their junior and senior years and

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<sup>2</sup> This term is a designation of the Presbyterian Church (USA) for non-white communities of faith that have not yet been chartered as congregations. The term is archaic in that it does not recognize anglo congregations as also being "racial-ethnic."

the remainder had completed their sophomore and freshman years. Ten of the research participants were female and six were male. Fifteen of the adolescents were Caucasian and one was Asian.

While the youth on the PYC are not diverse racially, they are diverse in their experiences of church. The council members represented ten churches, of varying sizes, within the presbytery. Four were members of large churches (over 500 members), seven of mid-sized congregations (200-499 members); and five from small congregations (199 or fewer members) including one from a new church development that is expecting to charter in January, 2019.

### **Theological and Theoretical Framework**

Despite a wealth of research on youth ministry, Reformed theology and the Lord's Supper, and Narrative Theology, I was unable to find any research that directly addressed youth and their experience of celebrating communion. Because of that lack of research specific to youth and the Lord's Supper, I built a framework for the project around the themes adolescence; youth and passion; brain research and its liturgical implications; narrative theology; and the eucharist in the Reformed Tradition—some of which are touched on below.

### **Fostering the Adolescent Search for Self**

The thesis of this project addressed only high school youth and their experiences of communion. Adolescence is the time of transition between childhood and adulthood. This phase of life is now divided into three stages, early (ages 11-14); middle (ages 15-17); and late (ages 18-22).<sup>3</sup> The focus of this research is largely on the perceptions of middle adolescents regarding the Lord's Supper, though some of the research subjects were in the lower age range of late adolescence.

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<sup>3</sup> Susan Ainsley McCarter, "Chapter 6: Adolescence" in *Dimensions of Human Behavior: The Changing Life Course*, ed. Elizabeth D. Hutchinson (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2015), 227.

During this time in a young person's life they are developing cognitively. Middle adolescents are developing the ability to think abstractly. They are able to think about things that extend beyond what can "be seen, heard, or touched. Abstract thought allows one to think about faith, love, trust, beliefs and spirituality..."<sup>4</sup>

The formation of identity is another important aspect of middle adolescence. Powell, Mulder and Griffin say that there are three questions youth are trying to answer: "Who am I? Where do I fit? What difference do I make?"<sup>5</sup> Research related to these primary questions of adolescents provide a link to how the students' desire to come to the table and their awareness of the presence of God might be impacted by their developmental yearnings for identity, belonging, and purpose .

### **Inspiring the Passion of Youth**

One of the central claims of my thesis was that youth were expressing that the sacrament was irrelevant and lifeless. In an effort to discover what might be the cause of this perception, it was necessary to explore what can stimulate, or even revive, the passion of youth in relation to the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Kenda Creasy Dean suggests that communities of faith miss the mark when they don't lift up the passion of Christ which bears, in the symbol of the cross and the table, a message that our youth are loved beyond imagination, a deep, abiding love for which they are yearning. "The Passion of Christ is good news to adolescents, not because Jesus suffers, but because Jesus *loves*

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<sup>4</sup> Clea McNeely and Jayne Blanchard, *The Teen Years Explained: A Guide to Healthy Adolescent Development* (Baltimore, MD: Center for Adolescent Health, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, 2009), 22.

<sup>5</sup> Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin, *Growing Young: 6 Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016) 95.

them with such wild, passionate hope that even death on a cross cannot stop his determination to win them.”<sup>6</sup>

In turn, the amazing love and grace they experience through Christ’s Passion bonds with the passion of adolescence. Dean describes the passion of youth as “the burning desire to be engulfed by love, to be ignited by a purpose, to radiate light because the love of another shines within us.”<sup>7</sup> As they come to the table, remembering the suffering and sacrifice of Christ, they can be enveloped in the passion of Christ and embraced by the love of the community, bringing about that sense of belonging for which they yearn as adolescents.

### **Unleashing the Power of Narrative**

I contend in my thesis that one of the most impactful methods of conveying identity, belonging, and purpose is through the use of narrative. In John Medina’s book, *Brain Rules: 12 Principles for Surviving and Thriving at Work, Home, and School*, he provides information on the basic functioning of the brain and how our understanding of it can help us in life. Medina suggests that the key to attentiveness is a topic or message (1) that stirs memory of a previous experience, (2) that is of interest, and (3) of which the person is already aware.<sup>8</sup> One of the best ways to grab attention is through emotion. Storytelling can provide the emotional connection.

Narrative has become impactful in the realm of theology since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Jerry H. Stone sums up the allure of narrative quite simply. “The best way to relate the ambiguous edges of human experience to God’s mysterious presence is through the use of story....”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Kenda Creasy Dean, *Practicing Passion: Youth and the Quest for a Passionate Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 2.

<sup>7</sup> Dean, *Practicing Passion*, xiv.

<sup>8</sup> John Medina, *Brain Rules: 12 Principles for Surviving and Thriving at Work, Home, and School, Second Edition* (Seattle, WA: Pear Press, 2014), 107-09.

<sup>9</sup> Jerry H. Stone, “Narrative Theology and Religious Education,” *Theologies of Religious Education* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1995), 255.

Anne E. Streaty Wimberly's book, *Soul Stories: African American Christian Education* has also been one of the seminal texts in this research project. She presents a model of Christian education that reclaims story-linking, a method practiced in early slave communities. "Story-linking is comprised of four primary phases: (1) engaging the everyday story, (2) engaging the Christian faith story in the Bible, (3) engaging Christian faith stories from the African American heritage, and (4) engaging in Christian ethical decision making."<sup>10</sup>

While this process is intended for African American contexts, I believe it also has considerable application for adolescent contexts. In considering the celebration of the sacrament as a pedagogical context, story-linking produces meaning-making as the narratives convey to students the tradition, meanings, and practice of communion. Examples of how narratives can be linked within the sacrament of communion can be found in Appendix D which provides a celebration of the Lord's Supper created by the students in the liturgical strategies focus group discussions.

## **Methodology**

### **Research methods**

This research project employed the use of three types of research—basic qualitative, narrative analysis, and quantitative. Two methods of data collection were used—personal interviews (see Appendix A) and focus group interviews (see Appendix B and C).

Since a thrust of my thesis was to develop communion liturgy with a narrative base, it was critical to include opportunities for youth to share stories through the interview process. As they told their stories in both data collection contexts, they were able to make connections

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<sup>10</sup> Anne E. Streaty Wimberly, *Soul Stories: African American Christian Education, Revised Edition* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005), 26.

between, the scriptural narratives, the meanings of the Lord's Supper and the day-to-day happenings in their lives.

Four quantitative questions were interwoven amongst the qualitative questions. They provided baseline statistics to quantify the views of the adolescents on their enthusiasm for the celebration of the Lord's Supper and their experiences of Christ's presence during the sacrament.

The first two focus group discussions (see Appendix B) were largely based on developing a shared narrative upon which to build the liturgy for the celebration of The Lord's Supper at an upcoming youth event. Six of the sixteen youth who had participated in the personal interviews were also able to engage in the focus group interviews on liturgical strategies. The group chose a theme around which to form their communion liturgy and utilized the order of service provided in the PC(USA)'s Directory for Worship as the structure upon which to build the service.

After analyzing the data, I realized that I had received limited information from the interviewees about the ways they had learned about the meaning and practice of the Lord's Supper. In order to gain more data, I added another focus group discussion focused strictly on the methods used to teach them about the sacrament (See Appendix C).

## **Data Gathered**

### **Findings on Passion (Enthusiasm) for Celebrating the Lord's Supper**

The research gleaned a variety of insights from the adolescents about their enthusiasm for celebrating the Lord's Supper. The results show an interesting tension between their passion for the sacrament and their boredom with the ritual.

At the center of my thesis is the assumption that adolescents are not hungering to come to the communion table because they are bored with the routineness of the sacrament. The question,

“How would you rate your enthusiasm for celebrating the Lord’s Supper?” received the following responses. Two (12.5%) respondents identified themselves as “slightly enthusiastic.” Four (25%) claimed to be “moderately enthusiastic.” Nine (56%) were “very enthusiastic,” and one (6%) said they were “extremely enthusiastic.”

On the surface of these responses, it is clear that the youth are passionate about the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. John,<sup>11</sup> who is an 18-year-old college freshman, was the one who expressed being “extremely enthusiastic. He said he chose the rating because the sacrament is sacred and something special. “It’s a way of connecting to God...I’m more of a hands-on person than just listening, so I think that’s part of why I enjoy it.”<sup>12</sup>

Sixteen-year-old high school junior, Ruth, said she was very enthusiastic about the celebration of the Lord’s Supper

There’s been a few times where I cried during communion and stuff...I just start kind of thinking about the pain and the suffering that Jesus had to go through for us to be able to have his body and his blood and everything like that. It’s just kind of—it’s like, “Wow! Somebody went through the worst thing possible for all of mankind for the rest of time.” It’s kind of emotional for me.<sup>13</sup>

Eleventh-grader, Sarah, rated her enthusiasm as “very enthusiastic because It’s really exciting and still really relevant...but at the same time it is not like, “oh my gosh this is the most incredible thing.”<sup>14</sup> This tension was not uncommon. The desire to come to the table is there, but it would be even more meaningful if it were done in a “new,” or not so routine, way.

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<sup>11</sup> Names of all the interview participants quoted in this article were changed in order to protect their identities since most were minors.

<sup>12</sup> John, personal interview by author, Rockledge, FL, June 23, 2017.

<sup>13</sup> Ruth, personal interview by author, DeLand, FL, June 28, 2017.

<sup>14</sup> Sarah, personal interview by author, Windermere, FL, June 29, 2017.



Matt, who is a 15-year-old 10<sup>th</sup> grader and one of the younger respondents, said his rating was between very and moderately enthusiastic “because I realize it’s important, and it’s necessary to take part in. But, I mean, I’ve done it a lot and it’s special but not very exciting.”<sup>15</sup>

### **Ideas for Increasing Enthusiasm (Passion)**

As part of the first two focus group discussions, I mentioned that a number of the subjects in the personal interviews had said communion was routine. I asked the groups if there was something, other than decreasing the frequency, that could be done which might make the celebration of the Lord’s Supper seem less routine.

John, an 18-year-old college freshman, suggested that it might be impactful to emphasize a different meaning and scripture each time. "There are different viewpoints from which the Lord’s Supper was seen so they can do different, from different perspectives as their standpoint. It feels to me that they do the same one every time.”<sup>16</sup>

Ruth, a sixteen-year-old junior, thought it might be helpful to have different people from the congregation “say a few words...somebody talk about their experience, somebody read an excerpt from the Bible or a verse. I don’t know something that will make it a more personal kind of thing.”<sup>17</sup>

In the course of having the youth share with me how they observe the sacrament in their churches, the discussion turned to variations in serving the congregation either by passing trays or by having the church family come forward for intinction. More than three-quarters never indicated a preference, but the remaining one-quarter of the respondents actually mentioned how much more personal intinction was for them. Rachel likes intinction because she feels it’s less

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<sup>15</sup> Matt, personal interview by author, Rockledge, FL, June 28, 2017.

<sup>16</sup> John, focus group interview by author, Rockledge, FL, July 19, 2017.

<sup>17</sup> Ruth, focus group interview by author, DeLand, FL, July 26, 2017.

passive. “I like going forward and getting it more because they individually say to you “Oh, this is the body of Christ” and then you dip in the juice, and “Oh, this is the blood of Christ” and you’re like, “Oh yeah.” I just like...it better. Maybe because like you’re actively going...It’s different than just having it passed to you.”<sup>18</sup>

### **Experience of Christ’s Presence in Communion**

During the personal interviews, I asked the subject to rate her or his experience of Christ’s presence during communion. All of the respondents reported at least some experience of Christ’s presence. Three (19%) of the subjects said they always experienced the presence of Christ. Seven (43.5%) said they very often experienced Christ’s presence and six (37.5%) said they sometimes experienced the presence of Christ during communion.

When asked how they knew Christ was present, most indicated it was a feeling. For college freshman, Rebecca, she almost always feels Christ’s presence, and it’s a feeling of peace.<sup>19</sup> For Noah, also a college freshman, he very often feels a “presence around me of forgiveness and happiness and “I’m here for you.”<sup>20</sup>

Hannah, a 17-year-old senior, said she experienced Christ’s presence sometimes. Like several other respondents, she said it may be because she’s distracted and not aware of God’s presence. “...sometimes, we do know and we can definitely feel him and we can feel his power. But other times, he’s there but we just, in that moment, we may be focused on different things, so we can’t recognize it, whichever form it’s in.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Rachel, personal interview by author, Orlando, FL, July 7, 2017.

<sup>19</sup> Rebecca, personal interview by author, Daytona Beach Shores, FL, June 28, 2017.

<sup>20</sup> Noah, personal interview by author, Palm Bay, FL, June 23, 2017.

<sup>21</sup> Hannah, personal interview by author, Winter Garden, FL, June 30, 2017.

Leah, who is a 16-year-old senior, also said that she experienced Christ's presence sometimes. "I found that I feel God's presence more in music like with other people who are just showing God's love. So in the sense of seriously reflecting and concentrating a lot during it, I don't feel anything particularly."<sup>22</sup>

Deborah, also a 16-year-old senior, feels Christ's presence in the wholeness of the body of Christ during communion. "You know it's more than you...there's moments in worship where you're like it's really personal to you. Other people aren't gonna relate to something the same way you do. But during communion, you're all doing the same thing. You know it's something that's—it's more than you. It's not a personal thing."<sup>23</sup>

### **Memorable Experiences of Communion**

As a way of identifying liturgical strategies that had meaning for the subjects, I asked them to share a story of a memorable experience of celebrating the Lord's Supper. Six of the youth mentioned celebrations of the Lord's Supper that were outside their church walls.

For Deborah, the celebration of the Lord's Supper at Triennium was the memory she shared. It was special because it was by intinction and the setting was powerful.

It was that night that we had the worship service outside and there's 5,000 teenagers out on the grass and a place that none of us has ever been to And we did communion and there was 50 people that had a cup and that had different types of bread and they were all over the place and it was just really, it was hectic at the moment but looking back on it, it was a really special thing that we were all there at the same time, doing the same thing.<sup>24</sup>

Tabitha, who is a 15-year-old 11<sup>th</sup> grader and daughter of a PC (USA) pastor, said her most memorable experiences of communion were from summer camp.

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<sup>22</sup> Leah, personal interview by author, DeLand, FL, July 5, 2017.

<sup>23</sup> Deborah, personal interview by author, Glenwood, FL, June 28, 2017.

<sup>24</sup> Deborah, personal interview by author, Glenwood, FL, June 28, 2017.

They have the lights really low. They give us a story we can relate to, like a version of the story we can relate to because we're youth...I mean smaller words. They say like "God's forgiven our sins and that's a big deal" and easy things we can understand, not like sacrament... They put us in this mindset that we're here for a reason, our sins have been forgiven for a reason. We're drowning in God's grace and to take this communion is to love him forever kind of thing.

They have everybody talk to each other...that just helps me connect having people to talk to that understand what I'm talking about when it comes to faith and they won't like think I'm weird for talking about my faith in front of them because they'll do the same thing. It's great. And you can talk about the communion and what it means to you.<sup>25</sup>

Sarah asked if it had to be a positive memory because she wanted to share a story about a time she did not feel welcome.

It was a few years ago and I went to my friend's church and she's very, very strictly Catholic...It was the complete opposite of my church basically. And I was really open to it but when they did the Lord's Supper and everything, her family told me like, "You are going to sit here. We will be back." They are like, "Don't come up, don't look around, just stay right here"...And I found that so strange and I felt so uncomfortable, like out of place. So...especially when I bring friends and there is communion or something, I always try to say, "Hey you are coming with us. This is for everybody."<sup>26</sup>

## **Learning About the Sacrament**

The ways the interviewees learned about the sacrament varied. For Deborah, learning about the sacrament happened through explicit and implicit methods. "When I was taking confirmation classes,...we touched on the subject. But I think after sitting through church,... I understood it after a while on my own."<sup>27</sup>

In the follow-up focus group discussion on how the youth learned about communion, about half had dim recollections of formal training through Sunday school, children's church, or youth group. The other half recalled learning through participation in the sacrament and by receiving instruction from their parents.

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<sup>25</sup> Tabitha, personal interview by author, Palm Bay, FL, June 23, 2017.

<sup>26</sup> Sarah, personal interview by author, Windermere, FL, June 29, 2017.

<sup>27</sup> Deborah, personal interview by author, Glenwood, FL, June 28, 2017.

## **Interpretation and Implications**

The research results show that youth generally find the celebration of the Lord's Supper routine and done so frequently to become commonplace. But at the same time, the good news is the findings disprove the assertion that these adolescents are not hungering to participate in communion with the crucified and risen Lord.

### **Implications of Passion and Presence of Christ**

In the interview questions, I chose to use the term enthusiasm rather than passion because it is a synonym I felt would be more relatable for the youth. The findings clearly show that 14 of the 16 youth self-identify as being moderately to extremely enthusiastic about celebrating the Lord's Supper. Even with the enthusiasm expressed by the majority of the group, there were still many references to achieving a higher passion level if the celebration wasn't so routine. The hunger is there and the desire for deeper communion can be increased by: (1) offering time to ready ourselves for the sacrament by encouraging the letting go of distractions, and (2) being intentionally creative with the Lord's Supper liturgy

The discussion by the focus groups indicates a complete transformation of the traditional celebration liturgy is not required, or even desired. Using the PC(USA)'s Directory for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper, including the traditional words of institution, the youth formulated their liturgical ideas

### **Pedagogical Insights and Implications**

Pedagogically, the findings delivered a variety of perceptions. Very few who began taking communion as a small child remember any kind of formal training. They attributed their learning to immersion in the communion service. Their most influential training seemed to come

from their parents—either through verbal explanations of what the sacrament meant or through modeling how to participate in the ritual itself. As a result, I concluded that teaching about the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper should:

- (1) Involve experiential learning through immersion in the corporate worship experience.
- (2) Be done in multisensory environments which enhance learning.
- (3) Include ritual which involves doing. For youth, movement in worship and the celebration of the Lord’s Supper enhances learning.
- (4) Revolve around Leonard Sweet’s EPIC (Experiential, Participatory, Image-Driven, Connected) learning. He says we need to move “from rational to experiential, from representative to participatory, from word-based to image-driven, and from individual to connecting the individual and the communal.”<sup>28</sup>
- (5) Narrative adds to meaning making. The story linking method by Anne Streaty Wimberly, described earlier in this article, is a narrative approach that is also well suited to the celebration of the Lord’s Supper incorporating the biblical story and stories from the students’ experiences.

### **Liturgical Strategies**

The focus group discussions were designed to facilitate the development of liturgical strategies that would respond to the insights provided by the youth about the way we traditionally celebrate the Lord’s Supper. The order of worship developed by the youth can be found in Appendix D.

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<sup>28</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Post-Modern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century World* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2000), xxi.

## **Closing thoughts**

There are several things that remain to be considered further. First, the discussions with the youth brought out the importance of continual re-engagement with the meanings and practice of the Lord's Supper throughout life. We often assume, incorrectly, that children, youth and adults have been participating in church their whole lives. We need to provide age-appropriate learning opportunities about the sacrament for all ages.

Second, while PC(USA) polity does not delineate an age at which children can begin to take communion, I think we should consider providing annual training and celebration for children, youth and adults who are celebrating communion for the first time. Having witnessed the memorable experiences of First Communion in the Catholic church, I believe it would be a powerful experience for our children, youth, and adults, as well.

Third, we must remember that youth are not only our future, they are our present. In their interviews, they mentioned they had learned from planning worship that it was much more complex creating and doing a worship service than they imagined. But maybe even more importantly, they said repeatedly that the most meaningful part of leading worship was to have their voices heard by the congregation.

Finally, what better to explore the three developmental hallmarks of an adolescent's life quest lifted up by Kara Powell—identity, belonging and purpose—than through the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Teens can begin to identify themselves as beloved children of God who are so special Christ gave himself to save them. They can receive a sense of belonging as they gather around the table--knowing they are invited into relationship with the risen Christ and their brothers and sisters in Christ. And they can garner a sense of their purpose as different meanings of communion are emphasized.

## Appendix A

### Personal Interview Questions

**1. Please tell me about yourself:**

Name

Age & grade in school

Tell me about your family background

**2. Please share with me your faith background:**

What church do you attend?

How long have you participated in a faith community?

Who has nurtured you in the faith by teaching you about Christ; encouraging you to go to church; or in modeling how to live a Christian life?

How would you rate your congregation's relationship with you?

Extremely close, Very close, Moderately close, Somewhat close, Not close at all

How would you rate your congregation's relationship with the youth of your church?

Extremely close, Very close, Moderately close, Somewhat close, Not close at all

**3. I'd like to hear about your experiences of worship:**

- a) Please describe how you worship in your church.
- b) What do you do, as an individual, during worship?
- c) What does the church do, as the community of faith, during worship?
- d) How have you been involved in leading worship at your church?
- e) What was most meaningful about your experience?
- f) What were some things you learned about worship through leading it?

**4. I'd like to hear about your experiences of the Lord's Supper:**

- a) When did you begin to take communion?
- b) Can you recall any of your earliest memories of taking communion?
- c) How often does your church celebrate the Lord's Supper?
- d) Please describe how the Lord's Supper is celebrated in your church.
- e) In the PCUSA, the Lord's Supper is one of two sacraments (along with Baptism). Our new directory for worship says, "The Lord's Supper (or Eucharist) is the sign and seal of our communion with the crucified and risen Lord. What does it mean to you that the Lord's Supper is a sacrament of our denomination?"



- f) Briefly summarize for me why you think we celebrate the Lord's Supper.
- g) How would you rate your enthusiasm about celebrating the Lord's Supper? (This is to gauge their level of "passion" about celebrating communion)

Extremely enthusiastic

Very enthusiastic

Moderately enthusiastic

Slightly enthusiastic

Not enthusiastic

Follow up: Why did you choose that rating?

- h) What do you do, as an individual, during the celebration of the Lord's Supper?
- i) What does the church do, as the community of faith, during the celebration of the Lord's Supper?

- j) Our new directory of worship says, "When we gather at the Lord's Supper the Spirit draws us into Christ's presence and unites with the Church in every time and place." How would you rate your experience of Christ's present during communion?

Always experience Christ's presence, Very often experience Christ's presence, Sometimes experience Christ's presence, Never experience Christ's presence

- k) How do you "know" if Christ is present during communion?
- l) Can you tell me a story about a time you were present for the celebration of the Lord's Supper that was particularly memorable? Why do you think it was so memorable?
- m) I'd like to do a word association game with you. I'll say a word and I'd like you to tell if and/or how you associate it with the celebration of the Lord's Supper.  
God, Jesus, Holy Spirit, Table, Feast, Invitation, Remember, Thanksgiving, Grace, Community of Faith, Body and Blood of Christ  
Any other words you may associate with the Lord's Supper?

**5. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your faith journey, your worship experiences, or your experiences of participation in the Lord's Supper?**

## Appendix B

### Focus Group on Liturgical Strategies

Purpose: To develop liturgy for celebration of the Lord's Supper at a Youth Event.

Begin by showing the video "Communion: A Feast of Grace." As the youth view the video, ask them to make a list of the various meanings of the celebration of the Lord's Supper highlighted in the video.

### Questions

1. I'd like to begin by making a list of all the meanings you heard mentioned.
2. Were there any surprising meanings? If so, what were they?
3. Were there any meanings you didn't understand? If so, what were they?
4. Some of you, in your personal interviews said you would be more enthusiastic about participating in the Lord's Supper if it wasn't so routine.
  - a. What do you think makes it seem routine?
  - b. And why do you think that impacts your enthusiasm?
  - c. Is there something, other than decreasing the frequency, that might be done to lessen that impact?
5. How have you been inspired during the celebration of the Lord's Supper?
6. What do you view as some of the most meaningful things that occur during the celebration of the Lord's Supper?
7. If you could change something about the way you celebrate the Lord's Supper what would it be and why?
8. John Calvin's Theology of the Eucharistic always connected the preaching of the Word with the celebration of the sacrament. That's why we always have proclamation with the celebration of communion. Let's refer back to our list of meanings. Which one would you, as a group, like to focus on for our liturgy's theme.
9. As you are aware, we will celebrate the Lord's Supper during a PYC event in the 2017-18 year. Knowing, we will work within the Directory for Worship's framework for the celebration, I'd like you to come up with the communion liturgy.
  - a. Based on the meaning the group selected, what Bible stories or scripture passages can you think of that are related to that meaning?

- b. Do any of you have a story from your life or together can you create a story that would connect this meaning with an experience a fellow student in middle or high school might have.
  - c. Are there any thoughts you have about the decoration of the Table or the space in which we would have the celebration based on the theme?
  - d. The Invitation to the Table is part of the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Based on the meaning you've chosen to focus on, how would you like to invite the youth to join in the celebration?
  - d. A prayer is offered, followed by the Lord's Prayer. Sometimes the Prayer of Great Thanksgiving is used (a copy will be provided). Would you like to use that or create your own? (a format from Book of Common Worship will be provided if they choose to write their own).
  - f. After the Words of Institution, the bread and juice are distributed. How would you like to do that? Is there anything you would like to do while the elements are being distributed—music or encouraging silent prayer?
10. Are there any other thoughts or ideas you have about creating our celebration of the Lord's Supper?

## **Appendix C**

### **Focus Group Questions on Pedagogical Influences**

1. How do you think you have learned about the Lord's Supper? Was it in a formal classroom setting? From your parents? By observing or participating in the sacrament? A combination of methods?
2. Share with me a time you can recall being taught in Sunday School or other formal setting about communion?
3. If you were in charge of teaching five or six year old children about the Lord's Supper, what would you choose to teach and in what way?
4. Do you recall learning more about communion as you got older?
5. Who should receive instruction about the Lord's Supper and how frequently?

## Appendix D

### Order of Worship for Communion during Worship at a Weekend Youth Retreat Based on Focus Group Discussions

**Theme:** Unity with God and One Another: All are Welcome at the Table

**Possible Contexts:** Continue existing tradition of communion during closing worship under the open-air pavilion or have it on the first night we arrive around a campfire

**Scripture:** Feeding of the 5,000

**Invitation to the Table:** A story or stories from the lives of the youth that could fit with the theme followed by a traditional invitation such as:

“Friends, this is the joyful feast of the people of God!  
They will come from east and west,  
And from north and south,  
And sit at table in the kingdom of God...

This is the Lord’s table.  
Our Savior invites those who trust him  
To share the feast which he has prepared.”<sup>29</sup>

Ben offered the story idea of a new kid at school who “always feels like he’s in a new world and he doesn’t know where to go...I’ve seen in our school where there’s just a group of kids that openly welcome the new kid, show him the ropes, how to get from class to class, basically made a whole new friend.”<sup>30</sup>

**The Great Thanksgiving:** Youth were not enthused by the length or formality of The Great Thanksgiving prayer. With an emphasis on thanks to the Triune God, one group suggested a call-response prayer. Another suggested a circle prayer where each person could offer prayers (aloud

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<sup>29</sup> Theology and Worship Ministry Unit, *Book of Common Worship*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 68.

<sup>30</sup> Ben, Focus Group Interview, DeLand, FL, July 26, 2017.

or silently) of thanksgiving to God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. They liked the idea of involving everyone in a way that was more personal.

**Words of Institution and Break of the Bread:** Traditional

**Method of Distribution:** Intinction because it is more intimate to go forward and receive the elements. They also wanted the servers to say to each worshipper, “The body of Christ given for you” or “The blood of Christ shed for you” as the elements are given.

**Visual Representations of Community:** One group suggested each person bring a photo of a friend or family member—or a photo of anyone or anything that symbolizes unity to them. As they come forward to receive the elements, they would lay their photo on the communion table to represent unity with the communion of saints—a community that extends even beyond those present at the event.

Matt suggested creating the cloth for the communion table based on an experience at Montreat Youth Conference. In advance of the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, each person present would put their handprint on a plain sheet of fabric. This sheet would serve as the tablecloth for the communion table and would provide a visual symbol of the unity of all present.<sup>31</sup>

**Music:** Both groups wanted to include music while the elements were being received.

One suggestion was to set a reflective mood with a single instrument like a violin.

**Reflection:** After receiving the elements, Elizabeth suggested they think about “a story, a life story of when they saw people come together.”<sup>32</sup>

**Prayer After Communion:** A prayer could be selected from a worship resource or one could be created by the group.

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<sup>31</sup> Matt, Focus Group Interview with author, Rockledge, FL, July 19, 2017.

<sup>32</sup> Elizabeth, Focus Group Interview with author, Rockledge, FL, July 19, 2017.

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