

Why Do We Have Only Two Sacraments When Some Churches Have Seven?



Session 1



Matthew 28:16-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Session Objective






Participants will explore the Reformed belief that a sacrament is only that which was commanded of us by Christ.

Faith Statement

... so do we acknowledge and confess that now in the time of the gospel we have two chief sacraments, which alone were instituted by the Lord Jesus and commanded to be used by all who will be counted members of his body, that is, Baptism and the Supper or Table of the Lord Jesus, also called the Communion of His Body and Blood.

—Scots Confession (3.21)

Session Overview

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 Engage	Option A: Resting with the Question
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Enhancements

Family Connections
Church Connections
Web Connections



For instructions to download Web Resources and the coffeehouse version, see page 1.

Spiritual Reflection for Leaders

Take a deep breath. Remember how the Spirit is already present with you. Read Matthew 28:16–20 and 1 Corinthians 11:23–26. In these passages, Jesus commands his followers to baptize people and to remember him through a meal of bread and wine.

Think about all the times you have participated in or witnessed a baptism. Now think about the times you have shared bread and wine or juice with other believers in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Write, dialogue with another adult leader, or ponder in your own heart about the following questions:

- In what ways have celebrations of baptism and the Lord's Supper differed in your experiences? In what ways have they been the same?
- What specific elements in your celebrations of the sacraments throughout your life stand out as being particularly memorable?
- If someone asked you, "What is a sacrament?" how would you respond?

Give thanks for this time with God. Offer a prayer for each participant in your group, asking that he or she would celebrate how wonderful it is to be a follower of Christ who takes part in sacramental celebrations.



Understanding the Scripture

Jesus was baptized with water and he ate and drank with his disciples, instituting a new meaning for common elements of a symbolic meal. In Matthew 28:16–20 and 1 Corinthians 11:23–26, we read that Jesus commanded that his disciples also take part in these actions.

The Gospel writer Matthew wrote his story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection around A.D. 80 to instruct the community of Jewish-Christian disciples who were struggling to start over. After the Jerusalem temple was destroyed, they found themselves in a new location without the temple that had been the center of their worship practices. This Gospel helped the exiled community redefine its identity and shape a faithful way of life together in the midst of a diverse Jewish community while surrounded by the Roman imperial way of life that glorified power, status, and greed.

In Matthew 28:16–20, Jesus announces his authority after the resurrection, an authority demonstrated even over life and death. He commissions his disciples to form a worldwide community centered on what he taught them. Jesus tells the gathered community that baptism will be the sign that ushers disciples into the community and identifies them as his followers.

At his last meal with his disciples (Matthew 26:17–35), Jesus instructed his followers to eat the bread and drink of the cup, remembering him and the new covenant now sealed in his blood. Decades before any of the Gospels were written, the apostle Paul summarized Jesus’ teaching about this meal with the words from 1 Corinthians 11:23–26. These words have become the words of institution said as Christians take part in this communion meal, just as Jesus did. Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians about A.D. 54 from Ephesus. The letter was written to the church in Corinth in response to their questions about worship and community life.



Understanding the Faith Statement

The Scots Confession originated in Scotland, one of the centers of Reformed thought since the 1500s, during a turbulent turning point in that country’s history. After the Treaty of Edinburgh ended the civil war between the English and the Scots, the Scottish Parliament asked the clergy to draft a new confession of faith for the new Protestant nation. Six ministers, including John Knox, wrote the Scot’s Confession to describe and proclaim God’s providential care, which they so recently witnessed, and which Scripture assured them would continue throughout history. The Scot’s Confession followed Scripture’s guidance to create the marks of the true church: “ ‘the true preaching of the Word of God,’ ‘the right administration of the sacraments of Christ Jesus,’ and ‘ecclesiastical discipline . . . whereby vice is repressed and virtue nourished.’ ”¹ This confession declares that sacraments are the actions instituted by Jesus and commanded to be used by all, the two acts he himself participated in that are recorded in the Scriptures: baptism and the Lord’s Supper.



Teaching Today’s Question

This session takes us back to the scriptural roots of our polity and worship by explaining that we take part in baptism and the Lord’s Supper because Jesus commanded us to. In participants’ questions about the number of sacraments among churches, they are entering a conversation that has been happening since the Protestant Reformation that considers the definition of *sacrament*, how many sacraments need to be observed, and how to practice them.

As you lead this session, push the participants to wade into the waters of the conversation about sacraments by unpacking the Scriptures in terms of how the sacraments help us encounter God today. Provide opportunities for participants to share their experiences with one another. Hearing one another’s stories helps them realize they are part of the larger community’s attempt to understand and live the way of Jesus Christ.

1. *Book of Confessions* (Louisville: Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church [U.S.A.], 2007), p. 10.



Enter

Option A: Show and Tell

Before the session, invite one or more adults from your congregation to talk with your group about a meaningful baptism or Lord's Supper experience. Ask the guest(s) to bring an object that symbolizes the experience, such as a baptismal certificate, a photograph, or a memento.

Give the adult guest(s) an opportunity to tell the participants about a meaningful baptism or Lord's Supper experience and to show the object that symbolizes the experience. Invite group members to ask questions about the experience(s).

Option B: Artistic Approach

large bowl, pitcher of water, loaf of bread, chalice, grape juice, watercolor paper, watercolors, paintbrushes, cups of water

Before the session, arrange the bowl, bread, and chalice creatively in the center of a table. Pour water into the bowl and grape juice into the chalice.

Give each participant a sheet of watercolor paper and a paintbrush. Make the watercolors and cups of water available. Have participants paint pictures that interpret the arrangement on the table. As they paint, ask them to think about a time when they encountered these elements in worship and what the experience felt like, tasted like, smelled like, and sounded like. When all are finished, give participants an opportunity to present their paintings to the rest of the group.



Engage

Option A: Resting with the Question

Lead the participants in a conversation that engages the question for this session, "Why do we have only two sacraments when some churches have seven?"

Encourage participants to ask and discuss their own questions that relate to this question or use the following questions to guide the discussion:



- What is the definition of *sacrament*?
- Why do different churches celebrate baptism and communion differently?
- What do the differences teach us about what a sacrament is?

Pray the opening prayer.

Opening Prayer

Spirit of wonder and symbol, God of elements and actions, we gather together today to ask questions and to discover together the faith you give us. Open our ears and hearts, our eyes and souls, that we may understand even a bit more of the mystery of your presence with us in the sacraments and celebrate the different ways we experience your grace. Amen.

Option B: Remembering with Symbols

Small bowl of water, cup of grape juice, loaf of bread

Gather participants in a circle. Pass the bowl of water, cup of grape juice, and loaf of bread around the circle. As the items are passed, encourage participants to eat a piece of the bread, smell the juice in the cup, or splash in the water. At some point, call out "Stop!" and have the people holding each item recall a memory about experiencing the sacrament represented by that symbol.

After several people have had a chance to recall an experience, lead a conversation based on the session question, "Why do we have only two sacraments when some churches have seven?" Encourage participants to ask and discuss their own questions that relate to this question or use the following questions to guide the discussion:



- What is the definition of *sacrament*?
- Why do different churches celebrate baptism and communion differently?
- What do the differences teach us about what a sacrament is?

Pray the opening prayer.



Explore

A Moving Conversation

Bibles, newsprint, marker, copies of "Session 1 Faith Statement" (Web Resource 1a) (optional)

Write the following on a sheet of newsprint:

A sacrament is "an outward sign instituted by God to convey an inward or spiritual grace. Sacraments are liturgical practices of churches. Roman Catholicism recognizes seven sacraments; Protestants two."²

Do not post the newsprint until later in the activity.

2. Donald K. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), p. 245.

Have participants sit in two lines of equal length, facing one another about a foot apart, so that all participants have a person sitting directly across from them. Participants will discuss one of the questions in this section with the person across from them. After each question is discussed, the participants will switch partners; everyone in one of the lines is to move one chair to the right. (The person sitting in the seat farthest on the right must move to the empty seat on the left side of the line.)

Read aloud the faith statement found on page 3, or have participants read the faith statement from distributed copies of "Session 1 Faith Statement" (Web Resource 1a). Explain that the writers of this faith statement were differentiating themselves from the Roman Catholic Church's observance of seven sacraments (baptism, the Lord's Supper, reconciliation, confirmation, marriage, holy orders/ordination, and anointing of the sick). Have participants explore the following questions in pairs:



- What does this faith statement teach us about the Protestant understanding of sacraments?
- (Have participants switch partners.) What might have led the writers of this faith statement to limit the number of sacraments to two?

Make sure each participant has a Bible, and read together Matthew 28:16–20. Have participants switch partners and discuss:



- What is the purpose behind the actions commanded by Jesus in this passage?
- (Have participants switch partners.) In what specific ways does our congregation follow this command?

Read together 1 Corinthians 11:23–26. Have participants switch partners and discuss:



- What is the purpose behind the actions commanded by Jesus in this passage?
- (Have participants switch partners.) In what specific ways does our congregation follow this command?

Have each pair develop and say aloud a brief definition of *sacrament* based on what has been discussed so far in this session. When all have presented their definitions, post the prepared sheet of newsprint and read the definition of *sacrament* written on it. Have participants gather in a circle and explore the following questions together:



- In what ways were our definitions of *sacrament* similar to the posted definition? How were they different?
- According to the faith statement and the posted definition, why do most Protestants (including Presbyterians) observe only two sacraments? (*These sacraments include only those things Jesus specifically commanded.*)



Express

Option A: Marketing Campaign



Newsprint, markers

Form groups of three or four. Give each group a sheet of newsprint and markers. Have each group create and present a marketing campaign that educates church members about the reasoning behind having two sacraments instead of seven. Have each group create a design for a billboard on a sheet of newsprint and a jingle to a familiar tune such as “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star.”

Consider posting the billboard designs in a prominent location in your church building.

Option B: Act It Out!



Digital camera (*optional*)

Form groups of two or three. Have each group create and present a skit that depicts someone visiting your congregation’s worship service for the first time when the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper are celebrated. The visitor asks why these are the only two sacraments being celebrated, and other members of the group must respond to the visitor’s question. If possible, record the skits and post them on your congregation’s website.



Exit

Option A: Circle Time

Gather the participants in a circle. Give them an opportunity to name one thing that they learned in the session. Then have participants name one word that describes how they feel about the Sacrament of Baptism and another word that describes how they feel about the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. Pray the closing prayer.

Closing Prayer

Holy God, who points us to sacred times and refreshes and nourishes us in the sacraments, we give you deep thanks for the special Spirit of grace that comes to us as we follow in your footsteps. We thank you for this time together today to be reminded of your instructions and to walk in the stream of our church history. Send us out to be your holy people who seek the holy moments of life and return to your care in the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Amen.

Option B: Prayer Writing

Paper, pens

Form groups of two or three. Give each group a sheet of paper and a pen. Have half of the groups list words that describe the Sacrament of Baptism, and have the other half of the groups list words that describe the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. When all are finished, have each group write a closing prayer based on the list of words.

Gather in a circle. Give each group an opportunity to read their prayer to the rest of the group.



Enhancements

Other Ways to Connect with the Session

Family Connections

"Family Connections" (Web Resource) has a set of discussion questions that families can talk about after each of the four sessions in this course. Provide each family with a copy of this resource.

Church Connections

With your pastor or worship committee, spend some time examining the "Directory of Worship" from the *Book of Order*. Explore these sections together:

- Sacraments: W-1.1004; W-1.3024; W-1.3033; W-3.3601
- Baptism: W-2.3000 (whole section); W-3.3502; W-3.3602–08; W-4.2001
- Lord's Supper: W-2.4000 (whole section); W-3.3609–19; W-4.2002

Web Connections

Go to gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/worship/sacraments (or search pcusa.org for "sacraments") to learn more about sacraments in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Consider leaving a comment on one of the pages to begin (or continue) a conversation about the sacraments.