



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)



Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- 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?



Explore

Read Matthew 28:16–20, and ask:

- What is the purpose behind the actions commanded by Jesus in this passage?
- In what specific ways does our congregation follow this command?

Read 1 Corinthians 11:23–26, and ask:

- What is the purpose behind the actions commanded by Jesus in this passage?
- In what specific ways does our congregation follow this command?

Read the faith statement, and ask: What might have led the writers of this faith statement to limit the number of sacraments to two?



Express

Use the following questions to help the participants express what they've learned:

- Based on the discussion in Explore, what is a sacrament?
- In what specific ways do you connect with the sacraments?
- How would you respond if someone asked you, "Why do we have only two sacraments when some churches have seven?"



Exit

Offer a prayer for each person in the group, and close by saying the Lord's Prayer together.





What's the Big Deal about the Sacraments?



Session 2

1 Corinthians 10:16–17; Ephesians 4:4–6

Session Objective

Participants will come to understand that sacraments are ways we symbolically express that we are one with one another and one with Christ.

Faith Statement

Question 52. What do you affirm when you speak of “the communion of saints”?

All those who live in union with Christ, whether on earth or with God in heaven, are “saints.” Our communion with Christ makes us members one of another. The ties that bind us in Christ are deeper than any other human relationship.

Question 53. How do you enter into communion with Christ and so with one another?

By the power of the Holy Spirit as it works through Word and Sacrament. The Scriptures acknowledge two sacraments as instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ—baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

— Study Catechism: Confirmation Version



Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- What is a sacrament?
- Why do we participate in the sacraments of the Lord’s Supper and baptism?
- In what specific ways do the sacraments of the Lord’s Supper and baptism affect your spiritual life and your understanding of discipleship?
- What one memory of the Lord’s Supper or a baptism sticks out in your mind



Explore

Read 1 Corinthians 10:16–17 and Ephesians 4:4–6.

Explore the following questions:

- How does being bathed in the same water or sharing the same meal unite us as one?
- How do we participate in Christ with these actions?
- As a faith community, why is it important to participate in these important moments regularly?
- Why would the writer of these two Scripture passages want a church to be a single, focused group? How might that make the community more mature? Why would maturity as Christians matter?
- Why is it important that the sacraments use elements of our daily lives such as bread, juice, and water?



Express

Use the following questions to help the participants express what they’ve learned:

- How does participating in the sacraments connect you to people who are near and far away, to those you know, and to those you’ve never met?
- How does knowing you are baptized or witnessing a baptism help you feel connected to other Christians and to God?
- In what ways does participating in the Lord’s Supper help you feel connected to Jesus and to the body of Christ?
- How would you respond if someone asked you, “What’s the big deal about the sacraments?”



Exit

Invite the group members to reach across a circle or table to join hands with different people. Have them shake hands to see the ways everyone is connected to one another. While connected, close in prayer.





Why Do We Get Baptized as Babies Instead of Waiting until We're Old Enough to Decide for Ourselves?



Session 3

Acts 2:37–42

Session Objective

Participants will explore infant baptism in relation to a believer's baptism. Participants will learn that they are a part of the congregation's commitment to raise a child in the faith.

Faith Statement

Question 166. Unto whom is Baptism to be administered?

Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible church, and so strangers from the covenant of promise, till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him; but infants descending from parents, either both or but one of them, professing faith in Christ, and obedience to him, are, in that respect, within the covenant, and are to be baptized.

—Larger Catechism (7.276)

Both believers and their children are included in God's covenant love. Children of believers are to be baptized without undue delay, but without undue haste. Baptism, whether administered to those who profess their faith or to those presented for Baptism as children, is one and the same Sacrament. The Baptism of children witnesses to the truth that God's love claims people before they are able to respond in faith.

—Book of Order (W-2.3.008a–b)



Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- What is the purpose of baptism?
- How does the purpose of baptism affect your understanding of who can be baptized?
- What responsibilities come with participating in a baptism?



Explore

Read Acts 2:37–42, and explore the following questions:

- In verse 37, who does "they" refer to? What did they hear that cut them "to the heart"?
- For what reason did Peter tell the crowd to be baptized?
- In verse 39, for whom was the promise made?
- What is this Scripture passage's response to today's session question?

Read this session's faith statements, and explore the following questions:

- What do these statements tell us about a believer's (adult) baptism? What do these excerpts tell us about infant baptism?

- How does baptism witness "to the truth that God's love claims people before they are able to respond in faith"?
- In what ways do these statements connect with Acts 2:37–42?



Express

Use the following questions to help the participants express what they've learned:

- What are the major theological similarities and differences between baptizing an infant and baptizing an adult?
- How would you respond if someone asked you, "Why do we get baptized as babies instead of waiting until we're old enough to decide for ourselves?"



Exit

Give one another a baptismal blessing, speaking each person's name: "[Name], you are a child of God, sealed by the Holy Spirit." Close in prayer, thanking God for the blessing and promise of baptism and the ability to grow in faith.





During the Lord's Supper, Are We Really Sharing Jesus' Body and Blood?



Session 4

Mark 14:22-25; 1 Corinthians 11:17-22

Session Objective

Participants will explore what it means to symbolically share in the body and blood of Christ according to the Reformed faith.

Faith Statement

The outward elements in this sacrament, duly set apart to the uses ordained by Christ, have such relation to him crucified, as that truly, yet sacramentally only, they are sometimes called by the name of the things they represent, to wit, the body and blood of Christ; albeit, in substance and nature, they still remain truly, and only, bread and wine, as they were before.

—Westminster Confession of Faith (6.165)



Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- When we celebrate the Lord's Supper, why do we use only bread and grape juice (or wine) instead of a full meal?
- Why do we celebrate the Lord's Supper as often as we do?
- In what ways do you experience Jesus' presence during the Lord's Supper?
- During the Lord's Supper, are we really sharing Jesus' body and blood? Why or why not?



Explore

Read Mark 14:22-25 and 1 Corinthians 11:17-22, and explore the following questions:

- What is happening in each of these Scripture passages?
- What mood or attitude is being communicated by each Scripture passage?
- What did the Gospel writer and Paul want to communicate to us about communion in these scenes?
- What can we learn about the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper from these two Scripture passages?
- How do these Scripture passages respond to this session's question?



Express

Use the following questions to help the participants express what they've learned:

- Based on what you've learned in this session and in this study, what is the purpose of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper?
- Why is it important to understand the meaning and purpose of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper?
- How would you respond if someone asked you, "During the Lord's Supper, are we really sharing Jesus' body and blood?"



Exit

Pray for Jesus' spirit of unity and reconciliation to bind the group together in mission and hope for the world.

