

**bread
of blessing,
cup of
hope**

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Prayers at the
Communion Table

by Michael E. Dixon



CHALICE
PRESS

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Introduction

Before other worshipers have gathered, dedicated people have prepared the elements and set them in their place at the Lord's Table. The bread and cup now remind the worshipers of an invitation from their Christ and God to come and eat, come and drink, come and be in communion. It is a special place, a special time. It is part memory and part hope, part refreshment and part challenge, part routine and part mystery. Each person gathered, around the table or in the pews, is not just a spectator, but a participant in a drama enacted in symbol and deed, word and thought.

When the invitation is extended, a hymn sung, and the words of institution spoken, that special place is full of silent prayer—some joyous and celebrative, some quiet, some—from the depths of pain—aided by the Spirit “with sighs too deep for words” (Romans 8:26). In the midst of that quiet symphony of prayer come the

spoken prayers—the expressed prayers of the community of faith. What a responsibility, what a privilege, to be one of those called upon to pray at the Lord's Table!

Bread of Blessing, Cup of Hope is offered as an aid, a sourcebook, for those given that responsibility and privilege. The prayers here can serve as models, promptings, or clues to give a leader input in preparation of his or her prayers. If they stimulate your thoughts, sharpen your insights, and focus your attention, they will serve their purposes.

How should one use this book? One helpful way would be to choose a set of prayers for reading in private meditation before each Sunday's service, whether one is to pray publicly in that service or not. Use the prayers in preparation of the heart as well as the tongue. Read with a pen in hand. Underline. Write your own variations in the margins. Question. When you have chosen a prayer, read it prayerfully, then pray in your own words. Be still and quiet awhile. Then write your own prayer.

How should you choose a particular prayer? There are several options:

* Use whichever prayer speaks to you meaningfully at a given point.

* Use the references to the seasons of the church year, if your service of worship follows those patterns. Many congregations use the seasons of the church year as a way to provide balance and flow to their worship life. If yours is one, it shouldn't be too difficult to find which Sundays of the church year are your Sundays to serve.

* Use the scriptural index on the last pages of this book. Do any of the scripture passages that are being read in the service appear there? Look up the prayers with those references, using the number on the upper-right corner of each page.

Finally, as you use this book, you might want to know what elements shaped its format and thought. Here are some of those elements.

* *A belief that the service of worship should have wholeness and integrity, and that each element of the service should have both interrelatedness and integrity.* Communion prayers shouldn't try to be pastoral prayers, but they can carry forth the predominant themes of the service. They can help set the communion service into the context of what has come before and what comes after.

* *An attempt to be responsive to the flow of the church year.* Although a prayer is labeled "Second Sunday of Lent," it can be used at other times when it might seem appropriate. Each

prayer is informed by the scripture readings assigned for that particular Sunday by the New Common Lectionary. Each prayer also is informed by the general themes of a given season of the church year.

* Related to that, *an affirmation that the language of prayer begins in scripture*. The story in the Bible and our stories, God's revealed grace and actions, and our needs—all find a meeting point in scripture and prayer.

* *An attempt to be sensitive to contemporary language and theology, while staying within the great traditions of the church*. We are part of a total human community and need to be sensitive to all our brothers and sisters in Christ. In practice, this means these prayers won't refer to "man," "mankind," or "brotherhood" in the generic sense. In theology, this means that God is beyond human distinctions of male and female, as God is beyond all metaphors we use in speaking of God. Yet because God is beyond definition, metaphors are all we have. In these prayers, I most often address God simply as God, and use a wide variety of metaphors, almost all of them biblical. Context has determined their use—thus a few male-specific references will be found, as they best fit a given context.

Through the years of my life—as a child, youth, student, pastor, and elder in a local congregation, I have come to the Lord’s Table and heard many prayers there—some simple in word and idea, and others more finely stated. Yet common to all the prayers was one important thing—the devotion, love, and spirituality of those who prayed them. These believers, ranging from those who never finished grade school to those who have earned doctorates, have taught me that it isn’t the wording of the prayers that matters as much as the love for Jesus Christ and the church that was expressed as the words were spoken. To these people who have blessed the bread and cup, and blessed my life, I dedicate this book.

For Personal Preparation

My sisters and brothers in Christ are gathering to worship you, dear God. By your gracious calling I will be helping them worship by serving at your table. In some ways this frightens me because I don't always feel worthy for your service. Help calm me and center me. Center my heart and focus my mind. Guide my words and actions, that glory may be yours. Let me trust not in my own abilities, but in your grace, for that is always sufficient. I pray to you, my God, through Christ, my Savior. Amen.

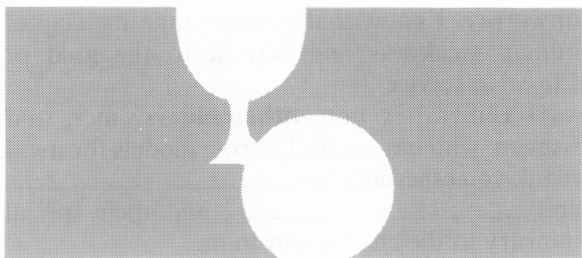
For Personal Preparation

God, you have called me to a significant responsibility in the life of our church. Help me fulfill the role and functions of eldership in such a way that you will say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Although I often feel personally unworthy, I know that you can take the clay of human weakness and turn it to the gold of Christian service.

I remember now other elders, men and women, who have served as role models for me. I thank you especially for _____, and _____, and their special ministry to the church and to me.

Guide my life in the way of faithfulness, as you guided theirs, that the prayers I give at the table may be the natural extensions of the prayers I live in my daily life. I pray in the name of Jesus the Christ, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life for me. Amen.

A Service of Communion



**For Use in Hospitals,
Nursing Homes, and
Private Homes**

CALL TO WORSHIP: Although we cannot attend a worship service in our church building today, we can still affirm that we are a part of our community of faith, that we are bonded together in Christian love and prayers with all our family of faith, and that wherever two or three are gathered together, Christ is with us. This service of communion we are about to share is a witness that God is here, that Christ is here, that the church is here. Come, let us worship God in the beauty of holiness.

Let us now hear the words of a psalm. (*The elder may read the following selection or one from the list following this service.*) I will sing of thy steadfast love, O Lord, for ever; with my mouth I will proclaim thy faithfulness to all generations. For thy steadfast love was established for ever, thy faithfulness is firm as the heavens (*Psalm 89:1-2*).

Let us join our hearts in prayer: As we worship you here today, dear God, we thank you for the love we have received through Jesus Christ, a love symbolized so beautifully by this bread and cup. Let it remind us of Jesus Christ, that he lived and died and rose again and, through your Spirit, lives in us today. Let this bread and cup remind us of the church, for we

share not alone but as members one of another. Let this communion be a sign of the hope and promise we have of new life in the kingdom of God. As we share these elements, we remember in prayer . . . (*here, the elder may offer the names of others with special needs, the pastor, or other church leaders*). We pray now that _____ (*name of the person or persons being served*) here will know our love and concern and that (he/she/they) will feel your healing, helping presence. Hear our prayer in Jesus' name. Amen.

Let us hear the words of institution: Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (*Matthew 26:26-27*). (*Now the bread and the cup may be served.*)

God be with you. I will keep you in my prayers this week, and I ask that you keep me in yours. Now may the peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

Additional Psalms That Can Be Read

Psalm 8

Psalm 23

Psalm 27:1, 4-5, 13-14

Psalm 42:1-5

Psalm 62:1-2

Psalm 67

Psalm 84:1-4

Psalm 91:1-2

Psalm 100

Psalm 116:1-7

Psalm 139:1-6

Psalm 147:1-3

Additional Words of Institution

Mark 14:22-25

John 6:35

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

First Sunday of Advent

For the Bread

In our yesterdays, O God, you watched us and protected us while we were helpless infants. In our todays, amidst the frantic confusion of a busy time in a hectic land, you are the still center of silence and strength. In our tomorrows, you are the only true source of hope and the destination of all our wanderings. At this table we pause to reflect upon the Christ who was, who is, and who evermore shall be. With this bread, we proclaim that our hope is in the meek and self-giving love of Christ, one willing to be broken in body and spirit that we might find wholeness and health. Amen.



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For the Cup

As we stand at the beginning of the Advent season, O God of hope, we pray for your guidance that we might be aware—our spirits alert, our lives ready for your Word to be born in us again. Let this cup remind us that you were willing to drink from the cup of weak humanity to share the burdens we all must carry, to bleed with us in our hurting places. Help us as we drink of it to become more dedicated to encourage, support, and love one another as you have loved us. In the coming Lord's name we pray. Amen.

