

THE
DISCIPLESHIP
PLACE

Practicing Wesleyan-Holiness
Spiritual Formation



SESSION 16

The Sacramental Means of Grace

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The Sacramental Means of Grace

SESSION OVERVIEW

Baptism: The Sacrament of Initiation

The Lord's Supper: Sacrament of Sanctification

Application

Exam

Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should:

- define and teach the biblical, historical, and practical aspects of the sacraments of Christian baptism and the Lord's Supper
- own and embrace the sacraments as a means of grace for God's people and yourself
- incorporate the practice of the sacraments in your own spiritual life
- plan and lead services that feature formative observances of the sacraments of initiation and sanctification

The Sacramental Means of Grace

INTRODUCTION



WHAT ARE THE SACRAMENTS?

Barbara Brown Taylor says the sacraments show us the ways in which “God is willing to cleanse, strengthen, inspire, empower, bless, forgive, feed, and heal those who come to God in faith.” The sacraments, she claims, reveal a God anxious for us to come home. “Like the prodigal son’s loving father, God is out the door to greet us before we get our strangled speeches out of our mouths, bestowing upon us the very relationship for which we were ready to beg.” *From The Preaching Life (Boston: Cowley Publications, 1993), 67.*

The sacraments are a marvelous means of grace to the traveler on the way to the New Jerusalem. The word sacrament comes to us endowed with meaning from both Latin and Greek. The Latin word is *sacramentum* and its history reveals meanings that include the oath of allegiance made by a Roman soldier. This oath was the promise made accompanying a formal agreement much like the handshake after the signing of a contract.

The Greek word is *mysterion* which adds the idea of the mystery of the Kingdom Jesus bequeathed to His disciples in Mark 4:11 (NASB). It connotes the truth that the meaning of a sacrament is not fully understood by unbelievers. This mystery cannot be unraveled by human reason alone; faith delivers a sense of the mystery of spiritual things. One of the ways we receive the mystery is through the sacraments. *From Works, 5:188.*

John Wesley defined a sacrament as “an outward sign of inward grace, and a means whereby we receive the same.” Wesley shortened the definition found in the Book of Common Prayer: “An outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace given unto us; ordained by Christ himself, as a means whereby we receive the same, and a pledge to assure us thereof.”

In contemporary English that definition reads, “A sacrament must be a divinely given action in which there is a divinely given physical sign that carries with it a divinely given promise of grace to the recipient.” *From Staples, Outward Sign, 87-88, 94.*

How many sacraments are there? Catholics celebrate seven (Eucharist, baptism, confirmation, ordination, penance, extreme unction, and marriage). Protestants have typically celebrated only two: baptism the sacrament of initiation and the Lord's Supper (Eucharist), the sacrament of sanctification. The sacrament of baptism is therefore a mark of a beginning. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper is the ongoing mark of a journey. Protestants have usually set down these criteria any rite must meet in order to be called a sacrament of the Church. *Ibid.*, 92-93. See Rob L. Staples, *Outward Sign and Inward Grace* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1989), 85-87.

- To be a sacrament the rite must have been instituted, participated in, or authorized by Jesus Christ.
- A sacrament must have a physical sign or symbol (water, bread, wine).
- A sacrament must have a biblical word of promise that requires the response of faith. The sacraments are marks of the existence of a Church. The Church exists where the gospel is preached and the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion are practiced. You may have a wholesome fellowship, a helpful group, but without preaching and sacraments, it is something less than the Church.

In this module, we explore the sacraments of initiation and sanctification, Christian baptism and the Lord's Supper. We will look at these practices especially with an eye for how they sustain the spiritual life of the Body of Christ.

BAPTISM: THE SACRAMENT OF INITIATION



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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT BAPTISM

Question: Why is baptism called the sacrament of initiation?

Answer: It comes at or near the beginning of the believer's new life in Christ. In the Book of Acts baptism followed very closely the affirmation of faith in Jesus as the Son of God and Savior of the world. The new converts on the Day of Pentecost were baptized straightaway (Acts 2).

The Ethiopian led to faith by Philip was baptized the same day (Acts 8). In later years, the study and discipline of preparation for baptism took some time, but still baptism was what officially made them a new member of the Church. John Wesley called baptism "the initiatory sacrament that enters us into covenant with God."

Question: What does the New Testament say about baptism?

Answer: Read the following biblical examples:

- Matt. 3:1-6, baptism of John the Baptist
- Matt. 3:13-17, baptism of Jesus
- Matt. 28:18-20, Great Commission includes baptism
- Acts 2:38, Pentecost converts baptized
- Acts 8:12-13, 36-38, Philip baptizing
- Acts 9:18, baptism of Paul
- Rom. 6:1-4, baptized unto death, into life
- Gal. 3:26-29, putting on Christ in baptism
- Col. 2:11-13, buried and raised in baptism

Question: What does the Church of the Nazarene say about baptism?

Answer: The 12th Article of Faith in the *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene reads:

We believe that Christian baptism, commanded by our Lord, is a sacrament signifying acceptance of the benefits of the atonement of Jesus Christ, to be administered to believers and declarative of their faith in Jesus Christ as their


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Savior, and full purpose of obedience in holiness and righteousness. Baptism being a symbol of the new covenant, young children may be baptized, upon request of parents or guardians who shall give assurance for them of necessary Christian training. Baptism may be administered by sprinkling, pouring, or immersion, according to the choice of the applicant.

Some important aspects of this statement are:

- commanded by our Lord
- signifying acceptance of the benefits of the atonement of Jesus Christ and commitment to obedience
- available for those of all ages (see liturgy in the *Manual* for baby baptism and adult baptism)
- baptism may be received through various forms

Question: What theological affirmations are made about Christian baptism?

Answer: Nazarene theologian Rob L. Staples summarizes the typical Protestant theology of baptism (*From Staples, Outward Sign, 144*).

- It is the mark of our inclusion in the new covenant that Christ established.
- It is the symbol of our identification with the death of Christ.
- It is the symbol of our participation in the resurrected life of Christ.
- It is the symbol of our reception of the Holy Spirit, which is the Spirit of Christ.
- It is the action through which we are made part of Christ's Body, the Church.

Question: Does getting baptized save you?

Answer: Though some groups seem to teach that the act of baptism automatically saves, the answer is no. Baptism and regeneration is not the same thing. Mere performance of the rite cannot save one. Repentance, confession, and faith give access to the atonement of Christ. Jesus our Lord is the Savior. No ritual, however holy, is a savior. Baptism in the Book of Acts is more like the "conclusion or climax of conversion itself."

Baptism is the outward testimony of an inward change of heart and life. Coming forward for baptism tells everyone you have crucified the old sinful life and now walk in newness of life with the Lord. Participating in this sacrament in response to the Lord's command is a marker event through which God's grace is made


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available in life changing ways. This presence of Christ in the sacrament makes our participation more than an arbitrary choice. We have in some ways failed as a church in regularly inviting new Christians to this sacrament

Question: How seriously did the Early Church take baptism?

Answer: Though the converts in Acts were baptized immediately upon conversion, the practice of the Church soon changed. Nearly all the Acts converts had an understanding of the Hebrew religion and the Old Testament. This gave them a foundation that made prompt baptism appropriate.

As the Church moved out all over the known world, their converts were steeped in paganism. Thus, preparation for baptism—officially becoming part of the Church—became appropriate. For our spiritual ancestors in the young, Christian movement, baptism marked a radical change. It was a public testimony that they were forsaking a sin-soaked culture and were embracing the way of purity, holiness, and love modeled by Jesus. To be baptized was no flippant decision. Though you had become a born-again believer, you still had to live a holy lifestyle for a long time before you were baptized. In church, you had to sit with the nonbaptized section. You had to leave before the Lord's Supper was served to the baptized. Preparation for baptism included a course of spiritual formation and instruction that went on for up to three years. The candidate had to complete three grades, moving from hearer, to kneeler, to chosen. See *Shepherd of Hermas*, *and the Didache*.

Question: What do we know of the actual baptism ceremony in the Early Church?

Answer: When the moment for baptism finally came, a solemn ceremony took place. A period of fasting by the candidate and the ones sponsoring him or her preceded the ceremony. You were baptized (triple immersion or pouring), in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then a triple affirmation of faith was made, which eventually took the form of the Apostles' Creed. One took a solemn vow to renounce the world, the evil desires of the flesh, and the devil. A vow to obey the commandments of the Lord followed.

The newly baptized were anointed with consecrated oil as a sign of the gift of the Holy Spirit. A white robe was given to the candidates and the sign of the cross was made on each believer's forehead. Then a crown of leaves was placed upon the new Christian's head. A time of prayer followed. Then the newly baptized were led to a meal of milk and honey and consecrated bread and water. Sometimes a sermon and Holy Communion followed this meal.


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After this, the new church members began a post-baptismal course of instruction to help them with their daily walk. To sin against those solemn baptismal vows was very serious. In some eras and locations, the backslider was forbidden to return to church, for he or she had “crucified the Son of God afresh.” In other times and areas the backslider had to sit in the mourners or penitents section of the church for a year, maybe for life. For our early ecclesiastical ancestors baptism was believer baptism, which is, baptism of born-again, instructed, and tested believers.

Question: What about infant baptism and baby dedication?

Answer: Infant baptism became popular when Christianity conquered the Roman Empire. Then it was decided that everyone, including newborns, needed the special grace of Christian baptism. About AD 320, Emperor Constantine made it legal to be a Christian. By AD 381 Emperor Theodosius made it illegal to be anything other than Christian. The belief became popular that infant baptism delivered both the new birth (regeneration) and the infusing of the Holy Spirit to the new baby. Some believed this assured heaven for the child no matter how he or she later lived. What a sure method of evangelism! Others taught the benefits of the atonement delivered by infant baptism could be sinned away—and usually was. John Wesley, true to his Anglican doctrine, so believed. *From Manual, 2005-2009, par. 800.2.*

Some Wesleyan-Holiness theologians still teach that special graces are infused—even regeneration and the bestowal of the Spirit—at infant baptism. The general belief among Holiness people, however, stops short of such claims. The first Nazarene ceremony for infant baptism begins, “While we do not hold that baptism imparts the regenerating grace of God . . .” The ceremony makes it clear the child will need to make an adult confession at some point to fully realize the benefits of his or her baptism.

Probably, the majority of Wesleyan-Holiness people prefer believer baptism. That is, baptism at the time of a personal confession of faith. There is biblical precedent for both infant baptism and dedication. When, as recorded in Acts, whole households were baptized, surely some children were included. The Old Testament gives accounts of dedicating a child (Hannah and Samuel, for instance). It is the position of the Church of the Nazarene that either of these rites is acceptable and both are valuable.

Question: Where can I find ceremonies and rituals for baptismal services?

Answer: The *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene has rituals for baptism and dedication: paragraphs 800.1–800.4.


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Question: Should a person ever be rebaptized?

Answer: No. Though some who were baptized as infants, or those who have left one church for what they see as a better one, often feel as if they want to be rebaptized, it should not be done. Baptism is a divine act, and to do it over is to charge God with incompetence or negligence. Some call rebaptism a blasphemy. Many of us on the other hand, would welcome a service for the renewal of baptismal vows. *Also, see Jesse C. Middendorf, The Church Rituals Handbook (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1997), 930.*

THE RENEWAL CEREMONY

The Affirmations of Faith

Our spiritual ancestors in the Early Church were immersed in or poured with water three times in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. They were then to give a triple affirmation of faith in the Holy Trinity. Let us follow their example responding with the words of the Nicene Creed (*Worship in Song*, number 14).

With those wishing to renew their baptismal vows standing at the altar or other designated part of the worship scene, let the minister ask:

Minister: Do you believe in God the Father?

Renewing Believers: I believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible.

Minister: Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

Renewing Believers: I believe . . . in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made; who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried, and the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

Minister: Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

Renewing Believers: I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.



The Renewal Vows

Minister: On behalf of Christ and the Church, I ask you: Do you renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel against God?

Response: I renounce them.

Minister: Do you renounce the evil powers of this world that corrupt and that destroy the creatures of God?

Response: I renounce them.

Minister: Do you renounce sinful desires that draw you away from the love of God?

Response: I renounce them.

Minister: Have you repented of your sins, turned to Christ, and accepted Him as your Savior?

Response: I have.

Minister: Have you put your whole trust in His grace alone for your redemption?

Response: I have.

Minister: Do you promise to follow and obey Him as your redeeming Lord?

Response: I do.

Minister: Will you earnestly seek to purify yourself from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for Christ?

Response: I will, with God's help.

Minister: Will you serve the present age, fulfilling in your life and ministry the call of Christ to make disciples of all nations?

Response: I will, with God's help.

(Hale, *The Church Rituals Handbook*, Beacon Hill Press, 1997, 16-19. Used by permission.)

THE LORD'S SUPPER: SACRAMENT OF SANCTIFICATION



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A BIBLE STUDY ON THE LORD'S SUPPER

Carefully and thoroughly read Luke 22:7-23; 1 Corinthians 10:14-22 and 11:17-33. Use the following statements to organize and interpret what you read. Write out your answers and be prepared to share them with your mentor. Match the following questions with the appropriate verse (s) from the scripture passages you read.

- Jesus started this tradition.
- We are commanded to keep this sacrament in memory of Jesus.
- The Lord's Supper points to the Second Coming.
- There is danger of betrayal even at the table of the Lord.
- We should examine our hearts before taking Communion
- The privilege of the Lord's Supper can be abused and cheapened.
- Holy Communion commemorates and renews the new covenant in Jesus' blood.
- Prayers of thanksgiving should be a part of Communion.
- Holy Communion is the Christian's Passover.
- All Christians are one body.
- The Communion cup is a cup of blessing that we bless.
- The bread and wine stand for the body and blood of Christ Jesus.

THE SIGNIFICANCE AND MEANING OF HOLY COMMUNION

Affirmations. Because the Lord's Supper carries so much significance, we must examine our motivations, our very selves, in preparation. When you take Holy Communion, you make important affirmations.

1. You publicly identify yourself with Christ and His people.
2. You affirm your faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.
3. You demonstrate your belief in salvation by grace, for no one is worthy to kneel at the Lord's Table on his or her own merits.


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4. You repent of any known sins, for one cannot bring unconfessed sins to the table of the Lord.
5. You seek purification, holiness, and sanctification.
6. Your action says you are ready to encounter God in soul-shaking dimensions.
7. You memorialize or commemorate the suffering of Jesus Christ on your behalf.
8. You reenact the sacrifice of Christ and commit yourself to share in His sufferings on behalf of the lost for which He died.
9. You renew the covenant with Christ.
10. You declare your hope in the return of Jesus Christ.
11. You assert your faith in the resurrection of Jesus and in your own resurrection (Rom. 8:11).
12. You express your commitment to the unity of the church, and your willingness to reach out in love and forbearance to the family of faith.
13. You are nourished by the Bread of Life and the Blood of the Lamb.
14. You give thanks to God.
15. You acknowledge the true presence of the historical Christ.
16. You participate in a celebration of joy and Christ's victory.

Thoughts on the Eucharist. Consider the following quotations about the Lord's Supper. As you read the quotations, prayerfully meditate on their meaning and the implications they have for your practice of receiving communion.

- "In the Supper our Lord is present. The Christ of Calvary, risen and ascended, sits with us in the Supper" (J. Kenneth Grider, *A Wesleyan-Holiness Theology*, 519).
- "Of thy sacramental feast this day, O Son of God, accept me as a partaker . . . I will not give thee a kiss like Judas" (*The Liturgy of St. Basil*).
- "The question is not, 'Am I good enough to take communion?' Rather it is, 'Am I willing to give my whole life in self-oblivious sacrifice in the name of Jesus?'" (Evelyn Underhill, *The Mystery of Sacrifice*, [Harrisburg, PA, Morehouse Pub., 1991], 51).


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- “As our bodies are strengthened by bread and wine, so are our souls by these tokens of the body and the blood of Christ . . . This gives strength to perform our duty, and leads us on to perfection” (John Wesley, *Works*, 7:148).
- “As this piece [of bread] was scattered over the hills and then brought together and made one, so let your Church be brought together from the ends of the earth into your Kingdom” (*The Didache*).
- The Lord’s Supper is “the sacrament of memory” (William Barclay).
- “The Church is the Body of Christ, the organ of His eternal self-offering . . . each of her members accepts a sacrificial status, is willing to give all for the world’s need.” In the Lord’s Supper, the believer “is stretching out the arms upon the cross . . . that they may embrace the whole world” (*Underhill*, 29, 34).
- “Our minds leap forward, too, in the Supper. We are to hope at this time for the second coming of Christ to finalize our redemption” (*Grider*, 510).
- In the Eucharist, it may be that “the soul is led into the very recesses of the Godhead, and by love made visible is snatched up to the Invisible Love” (*Underhill*, 5).
- “Consume the thorns of my offenses. Make clean my soul, make holy my mind” (*The Greek Heiratikon*, quoted in *Underhill*, 74).
- “It approaches the ridiculous to exclude fellow believers from Communion . . . It is unfortunate, if not ridiculous, in a local church setting, when a visiting Christian is prohibited from receiving Communion!” (*Grider*, 508).
- “This meal need not be special or exhilaratingly meaningful (though sometimes it is both). This is the normal food of Christians . . . We return again and again to the Lord’s table . . . as habitually . . . as we gather at the breakfast table” (William Willimon, *The Service of God* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983], 127).
- “The Eucharist was not a solemn, mournful occasion, but a festive one . . . [with] the presence of Christ as the host of a present celebration” (Rob Staples, *Outward Sign and Inward Grace*, 229, 245).
- “In my hand no price I bring; Simply to thy cross I cling” (Augustus Toplady).

These quotes encourage us to recognize the depths of the mercies, grace and sustaining power offered in the Lord’s Supper. As Christians, we should be hungry to receive this great feast. The Lord’s Supper is a sacrament of sanctification.

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This sacrament is for the journey. We are called to repeatedly partake; our need for God's transforming power is never ending. Wesley encouraged the early Methodists to regularly and often receive the sacrament of communion. In the module that discussed Frontier Worship, we saw the shift to offering the sacrament of communion less often. This was largely a pragmatic decision.

A concern often voiced about the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is that those who receive communion regularly will receive the sacrament lightly. There are other options rather than insist on only offering this sacrament during special events. Some suggestions would be:

- institute a time of confession before receiving communion
- utilize the ancient liturgies of the Church
- introduce the congregation to some of the quotes offered above
- use images via symbols or media that remind us of the sacrifice
- offer music which leads the congregation through confession, prayer, thankfulness, celebration

APPLICATION



NOTES

1. Review the rituals of baptism and the Lord's Supper (as found in *The Manual of the Church of the Nazarene*, paragraphs 800.1–800.4 and 802). Write down any questions or concerns you have. Bring this list of comments to your next meeting with your mentor. Be prepared to talk with your mentor about what the benefits might be for congregational participation in such events. If you do not see this fitting into your church's practices what kind of renewal ceremony would you create?
2. A concern often voiced about the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is that those who receive communion regularly will receive the sacrament lightly. What are some practices we can do individually and corporately when celebrating the Lord's Supper that would safe guard against these concerns? Record your ideas and be prepared to share this list with your mentor.

JOURNALING

Note: Throughout your work in this module, it is suggested you keep a journal. This is an important tool in the study of spiritual formation. Journaling is a tool to help you slow down in your studies and listen to your heart, soul, mind, and most importantly to God.

Recall your baptism. Let your entry reflect your thoughts and feelings concerning your baptism. Describe a significant Lord's Supper in which you have participated.

SUGGESTED READING

- Grider, J. Kenneth. *A Wesleyan-Holiness Theology*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1994, 492-510, 519.
- Staples, Rob L. *Outward Sign and Inward Grace*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1989, 85-243.
- Taylor, Richard S., ed. *Beacon Dictionary of Theology*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1983, 63-66.
- Tracy, Wesley, et al. *Reflecting God*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City and Christian Holiness Partnership, 2000, 123-26.
- Tracy, Wesley. *Reflecting God Leader's Guide*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City and Christian Holiness Partnership, 2000, 33-35.
- Tracy, Wesley. *Reflecting God Workbook*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City and Christian Holiness Partnership, 2000, 86-88.

EXAM



NOTES

1. The sacraments are a means of grace to the traveler on the way to the New Jerusalem.
A. True
B. False
2. The Latin word *sacramentum* is best translated as secret.
A. True
B. False
3. Catholics celebrate ten sacraments.
A. True
B. False
4. The Lord's Supper is considered a sacrament of initiation.
A. True
B. False
5. Baptism is the outward testimony of an inward change of heart and life.
A. True
B. False
6. John Wesley defined a sacrament as "an outward sign of inward grace, and a means whereby we receive the same."
A. True
B. False
7. Nazarenes celebrate three sacraments: baptism, Lord's Supper, and foot washing.
A. True
B. False
8. Baptism and regeneration is the same thing.
A. True
B. False
9. Nazarenes administer baptism by sprinkling, pouring, or immersion.
A. True
B. False

**NOTES**

10. The new converts on the Day of Pentecost were _____.
- A. baptized after they joined the new church
 - B. baptized straightaway
 - C. baptized in the Jordan River
 - D. baptized and received communion on the same day
11. Protestants use which of the following criteria for a rite to be called a sacrament of the Church?
- A. The rite must have been instituted, participated in, or authorized by Jesus Christ.
 - B. The rite must have an initiatory meaning.
 - C. The Early Church must have sanctioned the rite.
 - D. all of the above
12. When taking Holy Communion one does NOT make which of the following affirmations?
- A. You publicly identify yourself with Christ and His people.
 - B. You affirm your faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.
 - C. You affirm you are without sin.
 - D. You participate in a celebration of joy and Christ's victory.

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT



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Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. Discuss the rituals (baptism and communion) as found in the *Manual* with your mentor. Discuss any questions or comments raised as you studied these rituals. Discuss your church's practices concerning these rituals. What benefits might there be to having your congregation participate in one of the renewal ceremonies described in this module?
2. Share with your mentor the ideas you recorded concerning how to safe guard against the possibility sacrament of the Lord's Supper becoming mundane.