



# BRMC Small Group Study on the Sacraments

## Session 1

### Addendum

#### Leader's Guide

Please note that this Addendum accompanies the pulpit sermon series on the Sacraments. This Addendum hopes to clarify some questions that may arise in the small group discussions on the Sacraments.

1. Why do Protestants have only two sacraments, while Roman Catholics have seven?
  - The difference lies in our definition of what constitutes a "sacrament". Roman Catholics believe that the transforming love of Christ encompasses every area of our lives, and so understand the sacraments as acts by which God's grace is encountered through representative milestones of life. This is why the Roman Catholic church recognises seven sacraments:
    - a. Sacraments of Initiation
      - i. Baptism
      - ii. Confirmation
      - iii. Eucharist
    - b. Sacraments of Healing
      - iv. Reconciliation (i.e. confession)
      - v. Anointing (i.e. Last Rites)
    - c. Sacraments of Service
      - vi. Marriage
      - vii. Holy Orders (i.e. ordination to deacons, priests, bishops)
  - Protestants take a different approach, and only recognise two sacraments: Baptism, and Holy Communion. We agree that God is at work through all aspects of human life, and so many things are sacramental in nature, including marriage and the last rites. Many remain practiced by Protestant Christians as a "means of grace" – channels by which we encounter and are strengthened by God's grace. However, Baptism and Holy Communion are elevated over all the other sacramental acts because they are the only acts instituted by Christ, as marks of the new people of God. Peter Leithart suggests that for an action to be considered a sacrament, it must be instituted by Christ in Scripture, practiced only by Christians, and accessible to all Christians (and not just some, as in the case of marriage and ordination)<sup>1</sup>.
2. Why must the Sacraments be administered by pastors, and not any other Christian?
  - This is primarily for reasons of order. The Sacraments were instituted in a particular way, in order to convey certain meanings through the actions performed. There are

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<sup>1</sup> Peter J. Leithart, TH275 Sacramental Theology, Logos Mobile Education (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

therefore right and wrong ways to administer these sacraments, as Paul warns in 1 Cor 11:27-29. The reason why this is important and serious is because what we do in worship shapes and forms what we believe about God and ourselves. We teach each other theology through our acts of worship, in the songs we sing and the things we do. Administering the sacraments wrongly thus incepts bad theology into the Body of Christ. Furthermore, there is a need to ensure that the participants in the Sacraments have been adequately prepared and readied to receive the sacraments.

- Pastors are the persons the Church has chosen to play this role of ensuring that the Sacraments are administered rightly, and that the people are adequately prepared to receive the Sacraments. It is not that pastors are a special class above that of the rest of the congregation – we are a priesthood of believers after all. But pastors are the persons the Church has designated to bear the responsibility of studying and understanding the sacraments to a greater degree, in order to educate, form, and admit (or deny) people to receive the sacraments. This is especially so within the Methodist tradition. Within the Methodist tradition, the administration of the Sacraments has always been considered a “priestly role” performed only by the pastors. The preaching of the word on the other hand is considered a prophetic role, and therefore open to those who aren’t pastors.<sup>2</sup> All pastors are preachers, but not all preachers are pastors. This is why the climax of a worship service is not the sermon, but the sacrament of Holy Communion.

### 3. Why don’t we do Holy Communion online?

- This is a question Christians all over the world are wrestling with, and there is no consensus at the moment. Theologically, arguments for and against online Holy Communion have been made, and different denominations will arrive at different answers depending on their understanding of Holy Communion. A very broad consensus has been to submit to the decisions of the denominational leaders.
- The Methodist Church in Singapore takes the position that Holy Communion must be consecrated by a fully ordained pastor (i.e. an elder) and received within the context of a community. Our Bishop has given the dispensation to allow, if churches really want to, for Holy Communion to be administered online with several conditions, including the pre-consecration of the elements by an elder, and the partaking as a congregation. This is not an ideal arrangement, but a concession given in order for Holy Communion to be administered to the larger church.
- Within BRMC, Holy Communion is only administered physically. The pastors have wrestled with the issue, and decided to keep administering Holy Communion physically until we can resolve the resulting theological and logistic issues that arise from the dispensation given.

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<sup>2</sup> See John Wesley’s sermon, “The Ministerial Office”.