

Presiding at the Lord's Supper

Principles for Presiding in Worship

- The presider is a person who has been called by God through the voice of the church to lead the people in prayer at the Lord's Table. The presider has been equipped for this calling by the gifts of the Spirit and the instruction of the church. Therefore, the presider should have a clear role in visibly and graciously leading the congregation in worship, ordinarily taking responsibility for the majority of the speech and action in the liturgy.
- The role of the presider should be understood as *servant* leadership—a ministry undertaken in the name of Christ and for the sake of the church. Such leadership is a responsibility or calling to serve others, not a right or privilege to be lorded over others. Above all, the presider points to God's gracious action in Jesus Christ and facilitates the people's grateful response in worship and service.
- Liturgy is best understood as a prayerful activity of the whole body of Christ, worshiping God together. While it does consist of particular words and gestures by particular people, liturgy cannot be reduced to these elements in isolation; it depends on the relationships among them and the work of the Holy Spirit through them.
- Ordinarily, one presider is sufficient. Be mindful of unintended messages that may be conveyed by the practice of co-presiding. An attempt to share leadership among two or more persons may be perceived by worshipers as a display of dignitaries or even a power struggle among the pastoral staff. Of particular concern is the impulse to pair women and men at the table; in some contexts this may give the false impression that the woman's leadership is incomplete.
- There are no magic words, magic actions, or magic people. But there *are* certain words, actions, and people that help us to identify "what the church does" when it celebrates the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Careful consideration should be given to the use of the institution narrative, prayer for the Holy Spirit, manual actions with the bread and cup, and the role of the Minister of Word and Sacrament as presider.
- A speaking part isn't the only form of leadership or participation, and bold print in the bulletin (unison reading) doesn't necessarily amount to meaningful engagement in worship. Our primary form of participation in worship is prayer, and the presider's role is to draw people into this prayerful communion with God.
- The Presbyterian form of government and understanding of the church is built on shared responsibility and accountability, exercised through councils of the church that covenant together to seek the mind of Christ, the will of God, and the way of the Spirit. When in doubt about a particular practice or pattern of leadership at the Lord's Supper, consult with the appropriate council—the session, at the congregational level, or presbytery, for gatherings beyond the local congregation.
- Let faithfulness to God, vitality in Christ, and responsiveness to the Spirit be the goals of sacramental celebration, not validity. The sacraments are signs of Christ's abundant grace and should be offered and received as "gifts of God for the people of God."

Read John 13:1–17, 31b–35, the Gospel reading for Maundy Thursday. What does Jesus do and say this passage? How does he demonstrate and exemplify the role of the presider? How does the presider proclaim and embody the "new commandment"—to love and serve one another as Christ has loved us? How do these actions reveal to others that we are Christ's disciples?

In the pages that follow, the words in black boxes and in the left-hand column (marked with W-references) are from the Directory for Worship, found in the *Book of Order*, Part II of the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The words in the right-hand column and the illustrations are from the *Book of Common Worship* (WJK, 2018), pp. xvii–xxvi, 25–29.

“†” – In the Directory for Worship, the functions described as belonging to teaching elders may be, in particular circumstances, also performed by ruling elders.

W-1.0106: Word and Sacrament

In Christian worship Jesus Christ is truly present and active among us, by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the gifts of Word and Sacrament. Wherever the Scriptures are read and proclaimed and the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are celebrated, the Church bears witness to Jesus Christ, the living Word, and proclaims the mystery of faith. Through these means of grace, God imparts and sustains our faith, orders our common life, and transforms the world. Through these same acts of worship, we share in the life of the Spirit, are united to Jesus Christ, and give glory to God.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

- Why are the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the Sacraments such important signs of Christ’s presence and action with the church?
- Why is the work of the Holy Spirit so important in the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the Sacraments?
- How have you experienced Christ’s presence and action through the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the Sacraments?

W-3.0401: Theology of the Sacraments

The Sacraments are the Word of God enacted and sealed in the life of the Church, the body of Christ. They are gracious acts of God, by which Christ Jesus offers his life to us in the power of the Holy Spirit. They are also human acts of gratitude, by which we offer our lives to God in love and service. The Sacraments are both physical signs and spiritual gifts, including words and actions, surrounded by prayer, in the context of the Church’s common worship. They employ ordinary things—the basic elements of water, bread, and wine—in proclaiming the extraordinary love of God. The Reformed tradition recognizes the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper (also called Eucharist or Holy Communion) as having been instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ through the witness of the Scriptures and sustained through the history of the universal Church.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

- What does it mean that the Word of God is “enacted and sealed in the life of the Church, the body of Christ,” through the Sacraments?
- How have you experienced the Sacraments as divine acts of grace? How have you experienced them as human expressions of gratitude?
- What are the distinctive words, actions, and prayers involved in Baptism and the Lord’s Supper? What are the “physical signs” and “spiritual gifts” of the Sacraments?
- Why do we say that Baptism and the Lord’s Supper have been instituted by Jesus Christ in the Scriptures and sustained through the history of the universal Church?

W-3.0409: Theology of the Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper (or Eucharist) is the sign and seal of our communion with the crucified and risen Lord. Jesus shared meals with his followers throughout his earthly life and ministry—common suppers, miraculous feasts, and the covenant commemorations of the people of God. Jesus spoke of himself as the bread of life, and the true vine, in whom we are branches. On the night before his death, Jesus shared bread and wine with his disciples. He spoke of the bread and wine as his body and blood, signs of the new covenant and told the disciples to remember him by keeping this feast. On the day of his resurrection, Jesus made himself known to his disciples in the breaking of the bread. The disciples continued to devote themselves to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, prayers, and the common meal. As Paul wrote, when we share the bread and cup in Jesus' name, "we who are many are one body" (1 Cor. 10:17).

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper offers an abundant feast of theological meaning, including: thanksgiving to God the Father; remembrance of Jesus Christ; invocation of the Holy Spirit; communion in the body of Christ; and a meal of the realm of God. The Reformed tradition understands the Lord's Supper to be a sign of God's covenant. The bread of the Lord's Supper is linked with the bread of Passover and the gift of manna in the wilderness. The Lord's Supper thus connects us with God's saving power and providential care from generation to generation. Like the offering of sacrifices, a sign of Israel's thanksgiving for God's faithfulness, the Lord's Supper is a sacrifice of praise and a sign of our gratitude for God's steadfast love. The Lord's Supper represents God's gracious invitation to an everlasting covenant. The Lord's Supper also reflects our calling to feed others as we have been fed, and offers a foretaste of that heavenly banquet when God will wipe away every tear and swallow up death forever. ...

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

- What are the biblical stories, themes, and images you associate with the Lord's Supper?
- What does the Lord's Supper convey about: (a) who God is and what God does; (b) who we are and what we are called to do; and (c) who our neighbors are and how we called to live with them?

[W-3.0409 continued: Theology of the Lord's Supper]

... The Lord's Supper enacts and seals what the Word proclaims: God's sustaining grace offered to all people. The Lord's Supper is at once God's gift of grace, God's means of grace, and God's call to respond to that grace. Through the Lord's Supper, Jesus Christ nourishes us in righteousness, faithfulness, and discipleship. Through the Lord's Supper, the Holy Spirit renews the Church in its identity and sends the Church to mission in the world.

When we gather at the Lord's Supper the Spirit draws us into Christ's presence and unites with the Church in every time and place. We join with all the faithful in heaven and on earth in offering thanksgiving to the triune God. We reaffirm the promises of our baptism and recommit ourselves to love and serve God, one another, and our neighbors in the world.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

- In the liturgy for the Lord's Supper, how can the presider communicate God's gracious action and facilitate people's grateful response?
- How can the presider embody God's invitation into the presence of Christ and express God's call to join Christ's mission in the world?

[W-3.0409 continued: Theology of the Lord's Supper]

... The opportunity to eat and drink with Christ is not a right bestowed upon the worthy, but a privilege given to the undeserving who come in faith, repentance, and love. All who come to the table are offered the bread and cup, regardless of their age or understanding. If some of those who come have not yet been baptized, an invitation to baptismal preparation and Baptism should be graciously extended.

Worshippers prepare themselves to celebrate the Lord's Supper by putting their trust in Christ, confessing their sin, and seeking reconciliation with God and one another. Even those who doubt may come to the table in order to be assured of God's love and grace in Jesus Christ.

The Lord's Supper shall be celebrated as a regular part of the Service for the Lord's Day, preceded by the proclamation of the Word, in the gathering of the people of God. When local circumstances call for the Lord's Supper to be celebrated less frequently, the session may approve other schedules for celebration, in no case less than quarterly. If the Lord's Supper is celebrated less frequently than on each Lord's Day, public notice is to be given at least one week in advance so that all may prepare to receive the Sacrament.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

- How are the sacraments of Baptism and the Lords' Supper related and connected?
- Why are confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation important parts of our preparation for communion with God and one another in the Lords' Supper?
- How can the Lord's Supper be presented and experienced as "a regular part of the Service for the Lord's Day"?

W-3.0410: Responsibility for the Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper shall be authorized by the session and administered by a teaching elder. It is appropriate that a presbytery authorize and train ruling elders to administer the Lord's Supper in the event of the absence of pastors (G-3.0301b). The session may authorize the celebration of the Lord's Supper at events other than the Service for the Lord's Day, including services of Christian marriage, ordination and installation, services of wholeness, ministry to the sick, and services of witness to the resurrection. At all such events, the Word is to be read and proclaimed. When the Lord's Supper takes place apart from public worship, the congregation shall be represented by one or more members.

A council may authorize the celebration of the Lord's Supper in certain contexts beyond the congregational setting, such as hospitals, prisons, schools, military bases, or other ministry settings (G-3.02, G-3.03).

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

- Why is it important to have authorization from the session (or other appropriate council) when celebrating the Lord's Supper?
- Why is it important that the Lords' Supper be administered by a teaching elder (or ruling elder) who is authorized and trained for this ministry?
- Why is it important for the Lord's Supper to be celebrated as an act of the congregation?

W-3.0411: Offering

Christian life is an offering of one's self to God. In the Lord's Supper we are presented with the costly self-offering of Jesus Christ for the life of the world. As those who have been claimed and set free by his grace, we respond with gratitude, offering him our lives, our spiritual gifts, and our material goods. Every service of worship shall include an opportunity to respond to Christ's call to discipleship through self-offering. The gifts we offer express our stewardship of creation, demonstrate our care for one another, support the ministries of the church, and provide for the needs of the poor.

Tithes and offerings are gathered as an act of thanksgiving to God. Gifts of food for the poor may also be collected at this time, and the table may be prepared for the Lord's Supper. All of these gifts are received with a prayer of dedication to God, spoken or sung. Because ruling elders and deacons are charged with the stewardship of the church's resources and leadership in ministry to the poor, it is fitting for a ruling elder or deacon to lead this prayer. Signs of Christ's peace and reconciliation may be exchanged, if this did not take place earlier in the service.

OFFERING

One of the following, or another invitation to offering (118), may be said.

- 1 The earth is the Lord's, and all that is in it, Ps. 24:1
the world, and those who live in it.
- 2 Freely you have received, freely give. Matt. 10:8

Then the leader says:

Let us return to God the offerings of our life
and the gifts of the earth.

As offerings are gathered, an anthem may be sung or other appropriate music may be offered. The presider and elders or deacons prepare the table. The people's offerings, which may include food for people who are hungry, are brought to the table. A song of praise may be sung.

As the offerings are presented, the following may be said:

Heaven and earth are yours, O Lord, 1 Chr. 29:11, 14
and of your own we give you.

An elder or deacon may then pray:

Blessed are you, O God, maker of all things.
Through your goodness
you have blessed us with these gifts:
our selves, our time, and our possessions.

Use us, and what we have gathered,
in feeding the world with your love;
through the one who gave himself for us,
Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**^{ELW}

The norm of Christian worship is to celebrate the Lord's Supper on each Lord's Day. If the Lord's Supper is omitted, the service may include a prayer of thanksgiving (149–51), concluding with the Lord's Prayer (144). The service then continues at the closing hymn.

Rubrics (in red print) offer instructions for planners and leaders of worship as well as guidance on liturgical action. They are not spoken in the service and ordinarily do not appear in printed worship aids for participants. Rubrics are especially important in helping us to embody the action of the liturgy through movement, posture, and gesture.

In this resource, parenthetical references to page numbers indicate the location of additional liturgical texts in the Book of Common Worship (WJK, 2018); parenthetical page number references preceded by the abbreviation GTG indicate related musical materials in Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal (WJK, 2013); the abbreviation PH refers to similar materials in the Presbyterian Hymnal: Hymns, Psalms, and Spiritual Songs (WJK, 1990).

Green letters (ABCD, etc.) refer to illustrations of liturgical gestures.

W-3.0412: Great Thanksgiving

Following the offering and the preparation of the table, a teaching elder† invites worshipers to the Lord’s Supper using sentences of Scripture. ...

As this Invitation to the Lord’s Table illustrates, the Gospels exhibit a distinctive pattern of action—taking, blessing, breaking, and giving bread—when Jesus shared meals, whether at the feeding of the multitudes, at Passover before his death, or in his resurrection appearances.

[W-3.0412 continued: Great Thanksgiving]

... At the table, facing the people, the teaching elder† shall lead the people in a prayer to the triune God: giving thanks for God’s creative power, providential care, and covenant faithfulness, along with particular blessings of the day; ...

D The orans (Latin for praying) posture for prayer is traditionally used in eucharistic prayer, and may be used in other prayers in the liturgy as well. This ancient gesture, associated with the image of Christ crucified and risen and with the idea of opening or lifting our hearts to God, can be seen in depictions of prayer from early Christian art.

Musical responses, such as the Sanctus, Memorial Acclamation, and Amen are an important form of congregational participation.

INVITATION TO THE LORD’S TABLE

The presider may say these or similar words (119):

This is the joyful feast of the people of God!
People will come from north and south and from east and west to sit at table in the kingdom of God.

Luke 13:29; 24:30–31

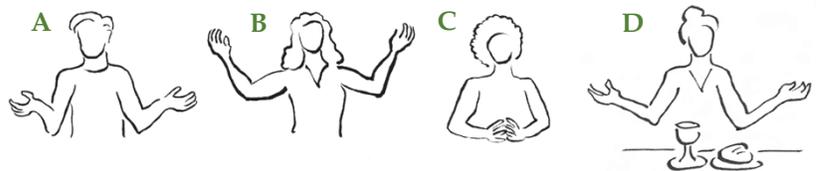
According to Luke, when our risen Lord was at table with his disciples, he took the bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.

This is the Lord’s Table. Our Savior invites those who trust him to share the feast that he has prepared.

GREAT THANKSGIVING

All may stand for the Great Thanksgiving (121). The introductory dialogue may be sung (GTG 9) or spoken. With hands lifted, the presider says:

- A** The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**
- B** Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord.**
- C** Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right to give our thanks and praise.



- D** Praise to you, O God, for all your works. You created the world and called it good and made us in your image to live together in love. You made a covenant with us, and even when we turned from you, you remained ever faithful.

The Sanctus (“Holy, Holy, Holy Lord”) may be sung (GTG 551–609; PH 565–605) or spoken (141–42):

Therefore with all creation we sing your praise:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.**

**Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

[W-3.0412 continued:

Great Thanksgiving]

... remembering God's acts of salvation through Jesus' birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and promised return, ...

[W-3.0412 continued:

Great Thanksgiving]

... as well as Jesus' institution of the Sacrament (if not otherwise spoken at the invitation to the table or the breaking of the bread); ...

In Reformed tradition and according to the PC(USA) Directory for Worship, the words of institution may be used at one of three places in the eucharistic liturgy: (1) at the Invitation to the Table, (2) during the Great Thanksgiving, or (3) at the Breaking of the Bread. This resource, like the 2018 Book of Common Worship, encourages the second option as most consistent with ecumenical practice and most conducive to a joyful celebration of the Lord's Supper. Regardless of where the words of institution are used, the bread is broken (and cup poured) after the Great Thanksgiving.

[W-3.0412 continued:

Great Thanksgiving]

... and calling on the Holy Spirit to draw worshipers into the presence of the risen Lord, nourish them in the body and blood of Christ, unite them with Christ in the communion of saints and the Church in every place, and send them in mission to the world. ...

The presider continues:

[D] Thank you, O God, for sending us your Son. He lived among us and told your story. He healed the sick and welcomed sinners. He shared our pain and died our death, then rose to new life that we might live, and all creation be restored.



When the words of institution are included within the eucharistic prayer, the bread and cup may be lifted or touched (E), but they are not broken and poured at this time.

The words of institution (142–43) are spoken here, if not elsewhere:

E We give you thanks that the Lord Jesus, on the night before he died, took bread, and after giving thanks to you, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take, eat. This is my body, given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.



In the same way Jesus took the cup, saying: This cup is the new covenant sealed in my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this in remembrance of me.

The presider continues:

[D] Remembering your boundless love revealed to us in Jesus Christ, we break bread and share the cup, giving ourselves to you to live for him in joy and praise.

The memorial acclamation may be sung (GTG 551–609; PH 565–605) or spoken (143):

Great is the mystery of faith:
**Christ has died, Christ is risen,
Christ will come again.**

The presider continues:

F Gracious God, pour out your Holy Spirit upon us and upon these your gifts of bread and wine that they may be for us the body and blood of Christ and that we may be his body for the world.



[D] By your Spirit unite us with Christ and one another until we feast with him and with all your saints in your eternal realm of justice and peace.

[W-3.0412 continued:

Great Thanksgiving]

... The prayer ends with praise to the triune God. Musical acclamations, such as "Holy, holy, holy," "Christ has died," and "Amen," may be included. The Lord's Prayer follows.

Congregations may wish to use another version of the Lord's Prayer (debts/debtors, e.g.). The ecumenical, contemporary English version is provided here to promote the unity of the church and to encourage prayer in the vernacular (common) language of the people of God. The presider may invite worshipers to pray "in the words closest to your heart," including languages other than English.

W-3.0413: Breaking the Bread

At the table, in full view of the people, the teaching elder† breaks the bread and pours the cup, or lifts a cup that has already been filled. These actions may be accompanied by sentences of Scripture or performed in silence. The use of one loaf and one cup expresses the unity of the body of Christ and the communal nature of the Sacrament. The bread used for the Lord's Supper should be common to the culture of the congregation; those who prepare the bread shall make provision for the full participation of the congregation. The session will determine whether wine is used; a non-alcoholic option shall be provided and clearly identified.

Through Christ, with Christ, in Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all glory and honor are yours, almighty God,
now and forever. **Amen.**

The Amen may be sung (GTG 551–609; PH 565–605) or spoken.

LORD'S PRAYER

The Lord's Prayer is sung (GTG 464; PH 571, 589–90) or spoken (144).

As our Savior Christ has taught us,
we are bold to pray:

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.**

BREAKING OF THE BREAD

G *The presider lifts and breaks the bread, saying words of scripture (145):*

Jesus said: I am the bread of life. *John 6:35; 15:5*

H *The presider pours and/or lifts the cup, saying words of scripture (145):*

Jesus said: I am the vine, you are the branches.

Come to me and never be hungry;
believe in me and never thirst.

I *Extending the bread and cup to the people, the presider says:*

The gifts of God for the people of God.
Thanks be to God.



These biblical words at the breaking of the bread are drawn from the "I am" sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of John. Jesus said: I am ... the bread of life; the light of the world; the gate for the sheep; the good shepherd; the way, the truth, and the life; the resurrection and the life; and the true vine. These evocative phrases connect Jesus with the holy name of God in the Hebrew Scriptures: "I am who I am" (Exod. 3:14).

W-3.0414: Communion

The bread and cup are shared in the manner most appropriate to the occasion. Worshipers may gather at the table, come forward to meet the servers, or receive the bread and cup where they are. The bread may be broken and placed in people's hands or they may receive pieces of bread prepared for distribution. They may drink from a common cup, receive individual cups, or dip the broken bread into the cup. Ordinarily ruling elders, deacons, and teaching elders† serve the bread and cup; the session may authorize other church members to do so. While the bread and cup are shared worshipers may sing, other music may be offered, appropriate passages of Scripture may be read, or the people may pray in silence.

When all have received the bread and cup the remaining elements are placed on the table. The teaching elder† then leads the people in prayer, thanking God for the gift of the Sacrament and asking for grace to live and serve faithfully until the coming of Christ's realm in fullness.

COMMUNION

During the communion of the people, hymns, psalms, and spiritual songs may be sung (GTG 494–538; PH 500–521), or other appropriate music may be offered.

J *In giving the bread, the server says:*

- 1 The bread of heaven. **Amen.**
- 2 The body of Christ,
given for you. **Amen.**

K *In giving the cup, the server says:*

- 1 The cup of salvation. **Amen.**
- 2 The blood of Christ,
given for you. **Amen.**



PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

The presider leads one of the following or another prayer after Communion (146). Option 1 may be sung (GTG 535; PH 597).

- 1 Bless the Lord, O my soul;
**and all that is within me,
bless God's holy name.**

Ps. 103:1–2

Bless the Lord, O my soul;
and forget not all God's benefits.

- 2 God of abundance,
with this bread of life and cup of salvation
you have united us with Christ,
making us one with all your people.

Now send us forth in the power of your Spirit
that we may proclaim your redeeming love to the world
and continue forever in the risen life
of Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**^{ELW}

J It is best for the server to take a piece of bread and place it in the hands of each worshiper. This manner of distributing the bread is more consistent with the nature of the sacrament, as the grace of God is something we receive as a gift, not something we take for ourselves. Worshipers may approach the communion servers with hands cupped and outstretched, a prayerful gesture that expresses our readiness to receive the gift of God's grace.

**[W-3.0414 continued:
Communion]**

As soon as possible after the service (ordinarily on the same day), the bread and cup may be shared with absent, homebound, or hospitalized members by two or more persons in ordered ministry. Those who carry out this extended service of communion shall be authorized by the session; equipped with the necessary theological, pastoral, and liturgical gifts and resources; and instructed to maintain the unity of Word and Sacrament through the reading of Scripture and offering of prayers.

At the conclusion of the Service for the Lord's Day, the bread and cup are to be removed from the table and used or disposed of in a manner approved by the session, in keeping with the Reformed understanding of the Sacrament and principles of good stewardship. This may be accomplished by consuming what remains or returning the elements to the earth.

Deacons and/or elders may be commissioned to extend the celebration of the Lord's Supper to those unable to gather with the worshiping community (745). The presider and people say:

We send you out with this bread and cup 1 Cor. 10:17
to share the feast of the risen Lord.

**We who are many are one body,
for we all partake of the one bread.**

Those commissioned for the extended serving of Communion depart immediately.

The extended serving of communion is a strong sign of the unity of the church, including in the sacrament those who are unable to gather with the worshiping community. It is also a valuable opportunity for ruling elders and deacons to be engaged in the ministry of pastoral care.

W-3.0415: If the Lord's Supper Is Omitted

The Lord's Supper is integral to the Service for the Lord's Day, a service of Word and Sacrament. If, in local circumstances and by the decision of the session, the Lord's Supper is to be omitted from Sunday worship, the service continues after the prayers of the people with the offering and a prayer of thanksgiving and dedication, followed by the Lord's Prayer.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

- What have you learned about presiding at the Lord's Supper from this resource?
- What surprised, confused, or challenged you? What other questions do you have?
- How will you seek to make use of this learning in your practice of ministry?