Conducting the Lord's Supper[5]

Read through your congregation's Communion order before the service. Arrange ahead of time who will serve, who will usher communicants forward, whether individual cups and a common cup will be offered, and how many people will commune at once. Check that there is enough bread and wine, and that every vessel containing bread or wine to be distributed is on the altar when the Words of Institution are spoken. If another person will assist you, walk through the distribution together beforehand.

Note that Communion wine is available in most liquor stores; many churches use Mogen David Concord Grape. If you do not know of a local store that sells Communion wafers, they can be ordered online at www.christianbook.com.

Step 1: Prepare the altar before worship. Place the bread and wine in the Communion vessels according to your congregation's practice, and cover them. If you will offer individual cups, have the filled cups in their tray. Keep the vessels covered until the Communion service begins.

Step 2: Announce the congregation's Communion practice. This can be done before the service or before the Communion liturgy. Speak warmly and plainly, especially for visitors. For example: "We welcome all our guests to worship with us. Because receiving the Lord's Supper together is also a confession of unity in faith, our congregation practices close Communion. We ask that those who have not expressed their agreement with our teaching through membership here or in a sister CLC congregation speak with an elder before coming forward to receive the Sacrament." Make sure the usher knows whom to direct forward.

Step 3: Make ready during the hymn before Communion. While the congregation sings, remove any outer veil covering the Communion ware and arrange the plate, cups, and any individual cup tray so you can reach them without difficulty. Leave lids or other covers over the bread and wine until you are ready for the Words of Institution. If your congregation has a different established practice for uncovering the vessels, follow it.

Step 4: Following the General Prayer and Lord's Prayer, have the congregation rise. Announce, "We now continue with the order of service for Holy Communion, found in your bulletin [or hymnal] on page __."

Step 5: Lead the Preface ("The Lord be with you," etc.) and Sanctus ("Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth," etc.) In the Ministry by Mail order, face the congregation for the opening exchange and face the altar for "Let us give thanks to the Lord our God" and the prayer that follows. The congregation then sings or speaks the Sanctus ("Holy, holy, holy"). If you use the TLH service, follow its printed Preface and Sanctus.

Step 6: Follow the order you are using (either the TLH or the provided bulletin) before the Words of Institution. The Ministry by Mail Communion order places its Exhortation after the Sanctus; face the congregation and read it as printed. The provided worship bulletin has already included the Lord's Prayer, so it's not needed here. In the TLH Communion service, follow the printed placement of the Lord's Prayer after the Sanctus. Check the whole service beforehand so that the Lord's Prayer is neither accidentally repeated nor omitted.

Step 7: Speak the Words of Institution. Remove the covers from the bread and wine. Take the plate with the bread in hand, face the congregation, and say:

> "Our Lord Jesus Christ, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take, eat; this is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'"

[5] Clement, The Shepherd's Assistants, 17–18.

Set down the plate, take the cup in hand, and say:

> "In the same manner also he took the cup after supper; and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you; this cup is the New Testament in my blood, which is shed for you, for the remission of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'"

These are the words in the Ministry by Mail order. If you are using the TLH service, read its printed Words of Institution instead.

Step 8: Speak the peace and lead the Agnus Dei. Face the congregation for "The peace of the Lord be with you always" and allow its response. The congregation then sings or speaks the Agnus Dei ("O Christ, the Lamb of God..."). An usher may begin directing communicants forward when that portion is finished, according to your congregation's practice.

Step 9: Give the bread. Take the plate and move along the communicants in an orderly manner. Give a piece of bread or a wafer to each person. Your congregation's custom may be to place it in the person's outstretched hand or to place the wafer on the lower lip of an open mouth. As you give it, say the words printed in your order, such as: "Take and eat; this is the true body of our Lord Jesus Christ, given into death for your sins." Continue with the rest of the printed distribution words if your congregation uses the full form. Take time to give each communicant the bread securely before moving to the next person.

Step 10: Offer individual cups first, if your congregation uses them. Carry the tray steadily and allow each communicant who chooses an individual cup to take one. Have an assistant handle the tray if that makes the distribution easier and more orderly. If you are not using a common cup at all, speak the "take, drink" words as you go.

Step 11: If you also use a common cup, return with it, and speak the words for the wine. As each person receives the wine—whether from the individual cup already in hand or from the common cup—say: "Take and drink; this is the true blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, shed for the remission of your sins." Where the custom is to hand over the common cup, place it securely in the communicant's hands and be ready to receive it back. Where the leader holds it, hold it firmly and bring it to the communicant's lips. Let the communicant help tip it while your hand remains steady, like a hinge; do not pour it into the person's mouth. Follow your congregation's practice for wiping and turning the rim between communicants.

Step 12: Dismiss each group. Once everyone in a group has received both the bread and the wine, speak the dismissal printed in your order. The Ministry by Mail order says: "May the body of our Lord Jesus Christ and his precious blood strengthen and preserve you in true faith to everlasting life." Follow your congregation's practice for collecting used cups. The usher may then direct the next group forward. Repeat the distribution until all communicants have received it. If you yourself are communing, arrange beforehand to have another Elder serve you.

Step 13: Cover the vessels and conclude the liturgy. When all have communed, return the vessels to the altar and reverently cover the remaining bread and wine. Invite the congregation to rise for the Nunc Dimittis ("Lord, now You let Your servant depart in peace"). Then lead the Thanksgiving and its prayer. If using the Ministry by Mail order, return to the regular bulletin for the final hymn and benediction. If using the TLH Communion service, continue with its remaining responses and benediction as printed. Follow your congregation's arrangements for caring for the remaining bread and wine after worship.

Move carefully, and give yourself time. If something unexpected happens, pause and attend to it calmly. Christ's promise rests in his words and gifts, not in the speed or smoothness of the distribution.