



CASCADE Books

A division of WIPF and STOCK Publishers

199 West 8th Avenue, Suite 3, Eugene, OR 97401

Tel. (541) 344-1528 • Fax (541) 344-1506

Visit our Web site at www.wipfandstock.com

COME *and* SEE

Presbyterian Congregations Celebrating
Weekly Communion

RONALD P. BYARS

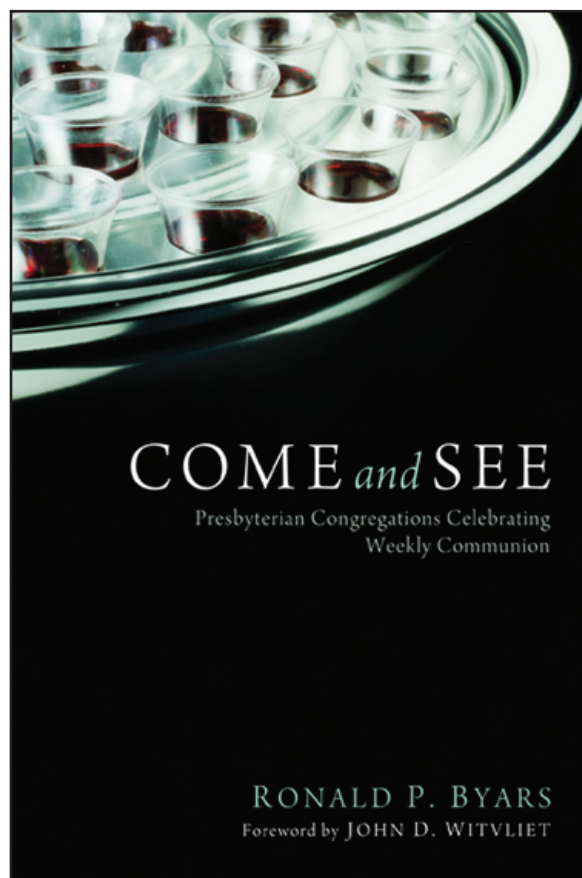
Foreword by JOHN D. WITVLIET

Why has there been such an increase in the number of Presbyterian congregations celebrating the Lord's Supper every week? *Come and See* explores the following causes: generational change, ecumenical convergence, revisiting Reformed roots, heightened interest in spirituality, new perspectives offered by ritual studies, and the postmodern opening to a deeper appreciation of Scripture.

Worship that is a balance of Word and Sacrament is incarnationally serious, recognizing that human persons are embodied beings who bring to worship all of our senses—not only the ability to process words.

Presbyterian congregations celebrating weekly Communion are discovering ways of being and thinking missionally as they link their experiences of being nourished at the Holy Table to the needs of people who are physically as well as spiritually hungry. *Come and See* describes a number of congregations who have made the transition to weekly Communion and tells how they did it, working within Presbyterian polity and local cultures. Some are traditional, established congregations, while others are new church developments. They may be found in the north and south, east and west, across the broad Presbyterian theological and demographic spectrums.

ISBN: 978-1-62032-589-6 / \$19 / 150 pp. / paper



RONALD P. BYARS is Professor Emeritus of Preaching and Worship at Union Presbyterian Seminary, Richmond, Virginia, where he taught following many years in pastoral ministry in both Michigan and Kentucky. In addition to *Christian Worship* (2000), his most recent book is *The Sacraments in Biblical Perspective* (2011). He lives in Lexington, Kentucky.

"In *Come and See*, Byars has provided a rich resource for pastors, worship committees, and governing bodies that is theological, sociological, and practical as churches take a fresh look at how Word and Sacrament together make for a more missional response. I certainly plan on using it with our worship team and recommend it to others. The response could well be transformational for churches of all sizes, traditions, and settings."

STEPHEN R. MONTGOMERY, Pastor, Idlewild Presbyterian Church

"'Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the saving death of our risen Lord until he comes again.' We need to proclaim the past-present-future presence and power of our risen Lord and Savior at every turn in every moment; that's the power of weekly celebrations of the Eucharist. Ronald Byars in *Come and See* reminds the church of our Lord's call and promise. Byars puts into conversation the actual practices and lived theology of worshipping-witnessing communities with the rich theological treasure of the Reformed traditions and the biblical witness. In one volume, we receive that which is being heard, tasted, and drunk. As you read and reflect upon what Byars has written, may the testimonies and our theological traditions metabolize in your life and that of your communities, leading you to meet the Word at the table."

NEAL D. PRESA, Pastor, Middlesex Presbyterian Church, New Jersey

Media, Examination, and Review Copies:

Contact: James Stock

(541) 344-1528, ext 103 or James@wipfandstock.com

Orders: Contact your favorite bookseller or order directly

from the publisher via phone (541) 344-1528,

fax (541) 344-1506 or e-mail us at orders@wipfandstock.com

Come and See

Previous books by Ronald P. Byars

*Christian Worship:
Glorifying and Enjoying God*

*The Future of Protestant Worship:
Beyond the Worship Wars*

*The Bread of Life:
A Guide to the Lord's Supper for Presbyterians*

*Lift Your Hearts on High:
Eucharistic Prayer in the Reformed Tradition*

*What Language Shall I Borrow?
The Bible and Christian Worship*

The Sacraments in Biblical Perspective

Come and See

Presbyterian Congregations
Celebrating Weekly Communion

Ronald P. Byars



CASCADE Books • Eugene, Oregon

COME AND SEE
Presbyterian Congregations Celebrating Weekly Communion

Copyright © 2014 Ronald P. Byars. All rights reserved. Except for brief quotations in critical publications or reviews, no part of this book may be reproduced in any manner without prior written permission from the publisher. Write: Permissions, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 199 W. 8th Ave., Suite 3, Eugene, OR 97401.

Cascade Books
An Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers
199 W. 8th Ave., Suite 3
Eugene, OR 97401

www.wipfandstock.com

ISBN 13: 978-1-62032-589-6

Cataloguing-in-Publication data:

Byars, Ronald P.

Come and see : Presbyterian congregations celebrating weekly communion /
Ronald P. Byars ; with a Foreword by John D. Witvliet.

xvi + 134 pp. ; 23 cm. Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 13: 978-1-62032-589-6

1. Lord's Supper—Presbyterian Church. 2. Lord's Supper—Frequency of communion. 3. Parishes—United States—Case studies. I. Witvliet, John D. II. Title.

BX9189 .C5. B93 2014

Manufactured in the U.S.A.

Unless otherwise noted, the Scripture quotations in this publication are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

This book is dedicated to pastoral colleagues with whom I served
at Second Presbyterian Church, Lexington, Kentucky
or First Presbyterian Church, Birmingham, Michigan

Roy Howard

Louise Westfall

Benjamin Bishop

Contents

	<i>Foreword</i>	<i>ix</i>
	<i>Preface</i>	<i>xiii</i>
	<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>xv</i>
	<i>Abbreviations</i>	<i>xvi</i>
One	Come and See	1
Two	Will It Bring the Numbers Up?	26
Three	Problems, Obstacles, and Opportunities	48
Four	Introducing Change Successfully	74
Five	Where Are We Going and How Shall We Get There?	96
Six	Owning the Practice	114
	<i>Bibliography</i>	127
	<i>Index</i>	129

One

Come and See

They Shall Come from East and West . . .

Neal Presa, pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Middlesex, New Jersey, was elected Moderator of the 220th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA). Middlesex, a town of about fourteen thousand residents just forty-five minutes west of New York City, is a predominantly Italian-American community with a large Roman Catholic parish but also two or three large nondenominational churches nearby. While nominally Catholic for the most part, many Middlesex residents send their children to catechism but are not themselves active in the parish. Though highly churched, the ambience of the community tends to be secular.

Middlesex Presbyterians recently celebrated their fiftieth anniversary, the congregation having been chartered on Pentecost in 1962. The congregation is small, with fewer than a hundred members, about half of whom have grown up in the community while the other half are more likely to be from West Africa—Cameroon or Sierra Leone. It is not uncommon for the West African members, about half of them cradle Presbyterians, to be highly educated. If you should decide to visit Middlesex Presbyterian Church at its service on Sunday morning, you will see that the Communion Table has been prepared with Bread and Cup, and the service will lead to the meal. Is it the first Sunday of the month? Maybe. But if you come back on the second Sunday or the third, or any Sunday at all, you will find the Table prepared for you and for all the people of God.

Come and See

If you were to travel 1,767 miles west from Middlesex, you might choose to worship with Faith Presbyterian Church in Colorado Springs, whose pastor, Tom Trinidad, is Vice Moderator of the 220th General Assembly. When you hear the name Colorado Springs, your mind may turn to Focus on the Family or another evangelical organization such as the Navigators, Young Life, or Youth for Christ, all of which have offices there. A lot of people in Colorado Springs go to church, and many to very conservative churches, but it is a big city (population 660,319), and there is a large, growing and increasingly public and vocal minority report, according to the Vice Moderator. Those who do not go to church have some idea of either what they have rejected or what they think they have rejected.

When Tom Trinidad interviewed at Faith Presbyterian, the committee described the church as relatively small in a sea of megachurches and moderate in a flood of conservative expressions of Christianity. He was impressed by their directness and by their integrity. Faith Church, organized in 1955, records a membership of about two hundred, and it is growing. Worship attendance rose 13 percent in the past year, and the average age of worshipers is getting younger. At Faith, as at Middlesex Presbyterian, the Table is set every Sunday.

Faith Church no longer advertises in the yellow pages but reaches out primarily through the Internet. Their website makes it very clear that they are a PCUSA church and that worship includes weekly Communion. The sign in front of the church is equally explicit. Some newcomers come because they are committed to the PCUSA. Others are drawn by weekly Communion, including some who were accustomed to that in other denominations, but also Presbyterians and others who had been used to quarterly or monthly Communion but know they want more and have come looking for it intentionally.

Ordained PCUSA ministers, nearly all of whom have had to pass an ordination exam in Worship and Sacraments, know that the denomination's *Directory for Worship* (part of the *Book of Order*) says that "it is appropriate to celebrate the Lord's Supper as often as each Lord's Day."¹ Accordingly, the Service for the Lord's Day in the denomination's *Book of Common Worship* sets forth weekly Eucharist as the norm to which all would do well to aspire. However, although a significant number of respondents to a Sacramental Practices Survey undertaken in 2011 by the PCUSA Office of Research

1. W-2.4009

Services would prefer Communion every week, that practice is the exception.² It is still a surprise when visiting a Presbyterian church to discover a congregation that shares the meal in at least one service every Lord's Day. Even more surprising is to find a church whose only service is always a service of Word and Sacrament, like both Middlesex and Faith Churches.

And South and North . . .

And yet, in more and more congregations—from California to New York, and Alabama to Vermont (Presbyterians east and west, south and north)—are moving toward Lord's Day worship in which the Word is proclaimed in Scripture and sermon and then sealed in the Sacrament every Sunday. Harrison, in northwest Arkansas, is a town where it is more likely that the houses will have a front porch than a deck on the back. A visitor is likely to see a lot of cars with Confederate flags in this town of twelve thousand where there are seventy-six churches and a huge Wal-Mart that can swell the population to forty thousand during shopping hours. As you might expect, there is a strong Southern Baptist presence here, but the religious culture is also influenced by the Churches of Christ, who use no musical instruments in worship. When Charles ("Chip") Andrus, an Arkansas native, became pastor in 2006, First Presbyterian Church had a membership of about 280, and by 2011 it had grown by over 20 percent. No doubt it helped to have a new building, completed four months after his arrival, but Chip's commitment to deepening the worship life of the congregation mattered, too. They have been celebrating the Lord's Supper every Sunday morning for several years and continue weekly Communion even as Chip has answered another call.

Far from Harrison but closer to Middlesex is the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church, situated on the Upper East Side in one of the wealthiest areas of New York City, but with members from all over the metro area as well as from the Tri-State Area of New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut. This is the church where a young man named Frederick Buechner heard George Buttrick preach so compellingly that it changed the direction of his life.

Since February 2002, under the leadership of its pastor, Fred Anderson, Madison Avenue Church has been celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly at both of its two morning services and at its 7:30 p.m. service

2. Presbyterian Church (USA) Research Services, "Sacramental Practices."

Come and See

as well. Like Faith Church in Colorado Springs, Madison Avenue is experiencing growth in the number of younger members. Why? “I think a younger generation—folks right up into maybe their early forties—have a very different expectation about what worship should be,” Anderson commented. Some new members are looking for a different way to worship, for a way that’s less about instruction and more about the mystery of meeting Christ. “The whole notion of the Eucharist is that it is where we encounter the presence of Christ now,” says Anderson. At Madison Avenue, they are celebrating adult Baptisms three, four, and five times a year, and the service of both Word and Sacrament has become a part of the congregation’s identity. Young families presume that weekly Communion is simply normative.

Anderson, who served on the task force that developed the PCUSA’s official *Directory for Worship*, had earlier served as pastor of Pine Street Presbyterian Church in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, which he also led to weekly celebration of the Lord’s Supper. Pine Street has been celebrating the Eucharist every Lord’s Day at both of its morning services for over twenty years. When Fred Anderson left in response to a call to Madison Avenue in 1992, the Session and the Mission Review Committee at Pine Street determined that weekly Communion had become central to the spiritual nurture of the congregation as well as an important part of the congregation’s identity, and further recommended that support for weekly Communion be a criterion for the selection of the next pastor. Accordingly, the person invited to be the new pastor accepted the call in part because he felt drawn by their practice of weekly Communion. Russell Sullivan, the current pastor, is the second to follow Anderson’s pastorate, and he also delights in the identity of the congregation as a weekly Word and Sacrament church.

Owensboro is a small city of about fifty-eight thousand people in western Kentucky, near the Indiana border. Jonathan Carroll became pastor of First Presbyterian Church in January 2005. It is a congregation with a reputation for being highly educated, erudite and well-to-do, but as times have changed, so has the congregation, and it has become more diverse. While the congregation still includes plenty of physicians, attorneys, teachers, and college and university faculty, it has also become more blended both socially and educationally. When Jonathan Carroll became pastor, the congregation hoped to recover from a substantial loss of members in the wake of a difficult and distressful time in its life.

The Owensboro congregation was trying something new when they celebrated the Lord’s Supper every Sunday in Advent 2007. After Christmas,

they reverted to their traditional schedule. They planned to celebrate the Sacrament weekly again in Lent of 2008 but revisited that decision, opting instead for weekly Communion on the Sundays of Eastertide. During those weeks of celebrating the meal every Sunday, the Session engaged in serious reflection about the Sacraments, and resolved not to suspend weekly Communion at the end of the Easter season but to continue for a full liturgical year. At the end of that year, concluding at Pentecost in 2009, the Session decided to make weekly celebration permanent. Many of those who had left the congregation have returned, membership is increasing, attendance is growing, and financial support has increased as well. The congregation is completing a renovation of its building.

From Quarterly to Monthly to . . .

Many Presbyterian congregations have moved from the traditional quarterly to monthly Communion, often simply designating a specific Sunday of the month—usually the first—as Communion Sunday. Of course, while that practice provides for regularity and predictability, it is not related at all to the Christian year, so that a congregation may celebrate the meal on a first Sunday but not on the following Sunday, which may be Easter or Pentecost. When David Batchelder was pastor of the Latrobe (Pennsylvania) Presbyterian Church, that congregation combined both practices, following the suggestion of the PCUSA's first Supplemental Liturgical Resource of adding Communion in festival seasons to Communion one Sunday a month.³ This usually means adding Sundays such as the First in Advent, the Baptism of the Lord, Easter and Pentecost, Trinity Sunday, and Christ the King. In Latrobe, they added the big occasions in the liturgical calendar but also celebrated weekly Communion every Sunday between Easter Day and Pentecost as well as on the first Sunday of each month during ordinary time, that long period that stretches over the summer and into the fall between Trinity Sunday and the Reign of Christ (Christ the King).

David Batchelder now serves the West Plano Presbyterian Church in the Dallas–Fort Worth area metroplex, a congregation that celebrates the sacred meal weekly. The West Plano church, established in 1975, had deliberately sought a pastor who would support them in sustaining and deepening their rich liturgical tradition, and David followed the call even though it led him from a larger to a smaller congregation—not a typical move.

3. Presbyterian Church (USA), *Service for the Lord's Day*.

Come and See

In 2003, when David arrived in West Plano, the public schools reported that they enrolled students from ninety-two national backgrounds. Collin County was and still is growing fast. It is, by and large, an affluent community, but one may still find people there who are struggling with homelessness. When David began his ministry, the congregation had two Sunday morning services, but attendance at the second service had begun to decline. They had been celebrating the Lord's Supper every week at the early service since the early 1990s, beginning the practice under the leadership of the congregation's third pastor, the Reverend Wes Lackey. The second service celebrated the Eucharist frequently, but not every Sunday, following the pattern of festival seasons and the odd Sundays (first, third, and sometimes fifth) during ordinary time. West Plano began a weekly celebration at both services in 2006. Having had a positive experience with a single service during the summer, and having adequate space, they chose to move to a single service in 2009, with weekly Communion.

The Edgewood Presbyterian Church is located in Homewood, the oldest suburb just south of the city of Birmingham, Alabama. Edgewood was founded in 1912 as members from two Cumberland Presbyterian churches came together to organize a congregation to be affiliated with the PCUSA, the so-called Northern church in that time decades before reunion. In the early twentieth century, Homewood was largely rural, and Edgewood was the first church of any kind to be organized there. It functioned as a community church, including people from several denominations. When the congregation called a pastor who was (so to speak) "too Presbyterian" for the Baptists, they left and started their own church. The Methodists followed soon after. With a population of about twenty-five thousand people, Homewood now has many churches, a number of them very large.

In 1978, two-thirds of the Edgewood membership followed the pastor out of the denomination and into the Presbyterian Church in America. The faithful remnant was left to pay off the mortgage on what was then a new building. After a dozen years of struggle, Sid Burgess came to be their pastor in 1990, serving another Presbyterian congregation at the same time. The remaining Edgewood members numbered around fifty. General Assembly statistics now report a membership of 218, nearly all current members having joined since 1990 from all over the Birmingham region. Those who find Edgewood and make it their church home are drawn by its relatively small size in a predominantly churched community with many congregations from which to choose. About a third of the current congregation have been

lifelong Presbyterians; another third come from free-church backgrounds (Baptist, Church of Christ, and the like); the remaining third were everything from ex-Roman Catholics to folks with no church background at all. A More Light congregation, many of Edgewood's members have been attracted by its self-identification as "open-minded, open-hearted."

When Burgess arrived, they celebrated the Lord's Supper on the first Sunday of the month, but after a time added the festival days. After a few years, they added every Sunday in Easter, celebrating the presence of the risen Lord. Then they added the Sundays of Advent, then the Sundays in Lent. In about 1998, upon motion by an elder on the Session, they closed the circle and began to celebrate the Lord's Supper every week.

In a growing number of established PCUSA congregations, Communion stands alongside preaching in every Lord's Day service. Some would appropriately be described as progressive while others would be more likely to be profiled as evangelical. Still others defy easy categorization, and might be described more generally as broadly, middle-of-the-road Presbyterian. They come from backgrounds in both the former Southern and Northern churches. The move to weekly celebration is not easily linked to any single theological, geographic, or historical descriptor.

In the past half century, the number of Presbyterian congregations that celebrate the Lord's Supper only quarterly has declined significantly, while by far the greater number celebrate the meal monthly, and a large number celebrate on feast days as well as on a specific Sunday once a month. Following the latter model, some congregations, such as First Presbyterian Church in Tallahassee, led by its pastor, Brant Copeland, celebrate the Supper at least twice a month and often more; or University Presbyterian Church in Austin, Texas, led by its pastor, San Williams, which celebrates the meal every Sunday during Advent and on the Sundays of Easter and on the first and third Sundays of every month as well.

New Church Developments

Long-established congregations face challenges whenever introducing any change in eucharistic practice, whether from quarterly to monthly, or from monthly alone to adding feast days and festival seasons, or from twice a month to every week. The situation is entirely different for a New Church Development (NCD). When a new congregation is in process of organization, those who participate in the project are likely to be people who are

Come and See

willing to take some risks and do not expect their past church experiences to be replicated exactly as they have known them. With a new beginning, a sense of adventure is part of the package. The organizing pastor is likely to share the enthusiasm that accompanies a new beginning, and to be looking for an opportunity to lay strong foundations. This can be a good time for reexamining closely and carefully the long historical tradition of the ecumenical and Reformed church of Jesus Christ and for recovering things of value that may have been either lost or obscured. More and more often, that has meant recovering weekly Communion.

Elizabeth Deibert was the organizing pastor (and is now the pastor) of Peace Presbyterian Church in a planned suburban community called Lakewood Ranch, east of both Bradenton and Sarasota on the west coast of Florida. The community itself is about fifteen years old. When the Presbyterians came to Lakewood Ranch, the United Methodists, Baptists, Roman Catholics, Lutherans and Episcopalians were already there. The congregation began worshipping in 2006, and was chartered in 2009.

Deibert describes the Lakewood Ranch community as “very secular” and oriented toward recreation. Most of the population consists of transplants, younger retirees, and empty nesters, although there are also young families, and Peace Church is working hard to attract all of them. From its first service of worship, the congregation has been celebrating the Lord’s Supper every week.

This is not the first time Deibert has served as an organizing pastor of an NCD. She and her husband, Richard Deibert, also a minister of the PCUSA, organized the Immanuel Presbyterian Church in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1990, which has also celebrated the Sacrament weekly from the beginning, continuing now for more than twenty years. Deibert is persuaded that many of the young families who are drawn to churches like Peace and Immanuel are looking for what she describes as the “mystery” that the Sacrament brings to worship. Those under the age of thirty-five, she observes, are most likely to be in search of such a service.

Mystery, readers will understand, is different from mystification. Mystery is a quality of awe, of reverence before something (or Someone) that cannot be easily packaged in a rational explanation that wraps everything up and sets it aside as settled. Mystery is experienced first and reflected upon later. It can and must be, by the nature of the case, encountered more than explained, and pondered over a lifetime. It is a matter of a meeting, of discerning or apprehending, more than a mental process. The prayer at the Table, like the Bread and Cup; like the sharing, the giving, the eating, and

drinking, is part of the mystery. “I never fail to call down the Holy Spirit,” Deibert declares.

Also chartered in 2009 is the New Covenant Fellowship in Austin, Texas. James Lee was on the staff of Covenant Presbyterian Church in Austin when he was asked to organize a new congregation, which began with a Bible-study group in 2004. Lee is an African American whose family of origin has always been Presbyterian. Lee is a graduate of Austin Seminary, where his teachers included the late Professor Stan Hall, whose years of teaching seminarians about Reformed worship have left a lasting legacy. When the idea of forming a new church was first conceived, it was thought that it should be African American, but the Steering Committee discerned a call to create a racially diverse, multicultural church. About 60 percent of the current members are Euro-American, while 15 percent are African, 10 percent are African American or Asian American, and Latinos number about 15 percent. Roughly 25 percent of the current members have been Presbyterians before. The remainder have come from Missionary Baptist, Southern Baptist, Methodist, Roman Catholic, Assemblies of God, or Church of Christ backgrounds; had no church affiliation; or professed no faith at all.

New Covenant Fellowship sought out a geographical base with a population that was diverse racially and primarily middle-class. For now, they worship in the Fellowship Hall of the Genesis Presbyterian Church in Austin, permitting them to reduce expenses and geographically convenient for a congregation drawn from their identified target area of the city. New Covenant Fellowship has been celebrating the Lord’s Supper weekly from the beginning. Lee, like Deibert, favors the word *mystery* to describe the attraction of Communion. He believes that the prayer of Thanksgiving helps to frame the meal as one of victory, quoting the Memorial Acclamation from the Great Thanksgiving: “Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.”

“We always focus on Christian victory, the victorious Christ,” Lee declared.

When asked whether he would recommend the practice of weekly Communion to another church, and particularly an African American church, Lee responded that he would. “What we would say to the African American community is that because Jesus got up, we can get up. Why celebrate the victory of Christ once a month when we could celebrate it weekly?” Both *The Presbyterian Hymnal* and its successor, *Glory to God*, as

Come and See

well as the hymnals of other denominations, include a triumphant hymn that lifts up the victory theme so important to Lee: “This is the feast of victory for our God. Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!”

In the late 1990s, a small group of Presbyterians near Lake Travis, in the Austin area, began worshiping in their homes in a community called Lakeway, which is outside the city and far from existing Presbyterian churches. These worshipers sought the care of Westminster Church in Austin during the pastorate of Laura Mendenhall. Westminster’s Session provided oversight, authorizing Baptism and the Lord’s Supper for the small community and keeping records for them. When the Westminster congregation celebrated their fiftieth anniversary, they helped to raise money for the group at Lakeway. In 2007, the group was chartered as the Presbyterian Church of Lake Travis.

Mendenhall, who had left Westminster to become president of Columbia Seminary, returned to Texas after her presidency to serve as senior philanthropy consultant for the Texas Presbyterian Foundation, and in October of 2010 was named designated pastor for Lake Travis on a part-time basis. Mendenhall worked closely with her husband, Charles (Chuck) Mendenhall, parish associate at Lake Travis, who is senior development officer with Presbyterian Children’s Homes and Services in Austin.

The Lake Travis Presbyterians had had two pastorates preceding the leadership of Laura and Chuck Mendenhall, but in spite of their efforts, their numbers had diminished, and the situation had become fragile. When the Mendenhalls began their work there, it was not at all clear whether the fledgling group would survive. Laura and Chuck were both asked to work part time, each giving about ten hours a week. With new leadership that brought such a depth of experience, the result has been a pronounced turnaround, and within six months the congregation bought land for a new building, which was completed in early 2013. Laura is no longer the designated pastor, but the pastor, while Chuck continues in his role as parish associate. Since the two always lead worship, they tend to be seen as co-pastors.

The Lake Travis congregation consists mostly of retired people who have moved out to be near the lake, although there are a few younger families. Most of the members have been Presbyterians, and know how Presbyterians do things. One of the two ministers to have served the congregation in formation before the arrival of the Mendenhalls had introduced the practice of weekly Communion. When Chuck and Laura began their ministry there, almost in a position of starting over, the question arose whether

the congregation would continue weekly Communion. It was the local decision makers who decided to continue, and the Mendenhalls supported it. Laura, in particular, who “really, really wanted Communion every week,” was gratified by their decision, and the practice has become very important to Chuck. “The Communion becomes a natural flow as the Word tasted, seen, and shared,” he reflected.

Relearning Church Planting

Just as NCDs tend to be different from established congregations, they are also different from each other, with differences linked to the local cultures, the character and demographics of their neighborhoods, and, of course, to the interests, skills, and priorities of early leaders. In the days when Presbyterian numbers were on the rise nationwide, NCDs were most commonly targeted for high-growth areas similar to the home bases of existing congregations. Nearly always, it was the presbytery that took the initiative to scout out likely prospects, conduct the necessary studies, create the budgets that supported an effort to organize a new congregation, and seek an organizing pastor. Established congregations were not usually reluctant to support the new projects, often even commissioning some of their own members to participate, because it seemed that there were plenty of potential Presbyterians to go around, and there was no need to feel threatened by the prospect of competing with a new congregation for members and funds. Today, strategies for developing new churches may follow the old models but frequently take new departures, particularly in considering start-ups in urban settings that might have been missed in earlier decades in the race to the suburbs. One example is the Upper Room Fellowship in Pittsburgh.

Several years ago, Pittsburgh Presbytery embarked on an effort to relearn how to do new church development. They set up a New Church Development Commission, and the Presbytery called Vera White, a former freelance writer and high school English and theater teacher, to serve on its staff as director of New Church Development, Stewardship, and the Committee on Ministry for Pittsburgh Presbytery. (Vera White is now associate for the Presbyterian Mission Agency’s 1001 New Worshiping Communities project.) White has noted that “eighteen-to-thirty-year-olds are the most unchurched generation in the history of our nation. The traditional, institutional church as a whole has struggled to reach them.”⁴ When taking the

4. Website: <http://www.onethousandone.org/News/1001-News/New-1001-Associate-Vera-White.aspx/>.

Come and See

position with the Mission Agency, White said that she also felt called to help Presbyterians reach out to new-immigrant groups and to inner-city African Americans.

In Pittsburgh, they came to believe that NCDs work best when not started from the top down, and several projects were initiated when the Presbytery affirmed calls that various persons in its midst were experiencing. Michael Gehrling and Christopher Brown felt a call to plant a new church, and consulted with Vera White. She encouraged Mike and Chris to take a “prayer walk”—a walk through a neighborhood that White thought might be the next logical step for an NCD. Gehrling and Brown followed her advice but did not feel a call to that neighborhood, and so sought out other urban neighborhoods for prayerful consideration, including one called Squirrel Hill. Squirrel Hill did not seem the likely target area for a Presbyterian NCD. It is largely Jewish, although 30 percent of the population is not involved with a worshiping community of any kind. Nevertheless, Gehrling and Brown felt that this might be the place for them. It is home to many graduate students, professors, and people with intellectual interests, a constituency that seemed to match the gifts and passions that Mike and Chris believed they brought to the project. Pittsburgh Presbytery heard their sense of call, affirmed it, and ordained them in 2008 specifically to organize a NCD in Squirrel Hill, then provided the structure and guidance necessary to move forward, setting goals and benchmarks, and providing funding for the start-up.

Both Gehrling and Brown are graduates of Pittsburgh Seminary. They had both participated in the seminary’s World Mission Initiative, gaining experience with house churches in Southeast Asia that were growing in spite of limited resources and the use of methods that were not always traditional. The two are both half-time organizing pastors of the NCD, and each has another job. Brown is a barista, and Gehrling is a campus minister at Carnegie Mellon University with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship.

The Upper Room Fellowship began as a house church with eight people meeting in a living room, the coffee table serving as the Communion Table. Today, having outgrown the home setting, they meet in a rented storefront, and they hope to expand into part of an abandoned movie theater next door that is owned by the same landlord. Worship is at the classical hour of 11:00 a.m. on Sundays, and they have, from the very beginning, celebrated the Lord’s Supper every week.

When asked what sort of demographic has been drawn to this NCD, Michael Gehrling replies, “Overwhelmingly, young adults.” Most are professionals who are just starting out in various careers, or graduate students or young, tenure-track professors from the University of Pittsburgh or Carnegie Mellon University who are just beginning their academic careers. In addition, along with the younger generations, Upper Room counts a number of older, primarily single men from the same generation as the co-pastors’ grandparents. In general, all these constituencies tend to be people who are thoughtful about their faith, reports Gehrling, and, although they are at different levels of maturity in understanding it, they are very intentional about taking the faith seriously.

The primary mode of contact with potential members is by word of mouth and by use of the Internet. Anyone looking for a church in Squirrel Hill can find them on the Net and read their mission statement, which includes these words: “We believe that God has called us to be a *cross-cultural, sacramental, and missional* community.”⁵ Gehrling agrees with the observations of others that younger generations are likely to be drawn to worship in ways that are expressive, through which they can feel themselves to be deeply engaged, and sacramental worship provides that. Working with a generation of young adults most of whom come from various Protestant backgrounds that are not noticeably, or at least consistently, sacramental, the co-pastors have been finding that the Eucharist is “highly, highly valued” by constituents who are delighted that it can be celebrated every week. It has become a way of discovering a deep connection with and among people.

Another tent-making NCD pastor is Jud Hendrix of Covenant Community Church in Louisville, Kentucky. The congregation was chartered in 2010, but the process of organizing began at least thirteen years earlier, after Jud and a colleague, Elizabeth Kaznak (who has since become full-time director of a nonprofit organization), had begun envisioning the project with their “launch team” two years before that. Jud and Liz, who had each been associate pastors in Presbyterian congregations in Louisville, were looking for another way of practicing Christian community around some different ecclesiological and theological models. To sum up their thought, they began using the word *postmodern*. The General Presbyter of Mid-Kentucky Presbytery, Betty Meadows, learned about their interest and suggested that they write up a church-development model. They studied some other projects,

5. <http://www.pghupperroom.com/main/>.

Come and See

including the Church of the Savior in Washington DC, and devised their own version, which they understood to reflect Reformed and progressive traditions, and set as their target demographic the young-adult community in Louisville, particularly those who self-identified as “spiritual but not religious”—people who, for the most part, were not new to Christianity, but who had become “de-churched,” finding Christianity and the church to be irrelevant for the most part.

As is often the case, the fledgling group began with worship in a home, but soon moved to a nesting place in the small, established James Lees Memorial Presbyterian Church in Louisville. While they did in fact attract persons who can be described as “spiritual but not religious,” they also attracted some who were deeply committed to the church, but interested in doing church a new way. At one time, sixteen ordained ministers participated in the community. About a third of the worshipers are members of sexual minorities—lesbian, bisexual, gay, or transgendered—people whose experience had been to be disenfranchised by the church. Covenant Community does not identify as a More Light congregation, preferring to think of itself as post-orientation (i.e., feeling it unnecessary to adopt a specific designation to describe themselves in terms of one set of issues or another). Describing the interaction and interrelationships that have developed among the quite varied constituencies that meld in Covenant Community Church, Hendrix speaks of it as making for a “beautiful community.”

When Covenant Community Presbyterian started, most of its members were from the targeted group, young adults, and the average age was twenty-seven or twenty-eight years old; but thirteen years have passed, and the average age is now older, and there are a lot of children. The congregation meets at 5:00 p.m. on Sundays, and they celebrate the Lord’s Supper every week, with a meal following downstairs in the same building. Members of the community bring food to share, welcoming everyone with the expectation that not everyone will have brought a dish themselves. Occasionally they gather in smaller groups around tables in homes, with the intention of reclaiming coffee tables and lunch tables as examples of communion. Communal meals and their eucharistic worship are closely related.

From the beginning, Hendrix reports, they had been thinking about how to reembody worship, bringing the body and the senses back into their assembly, a purpose also expressed by some of the pastors who have introduced weekly celebration in established congregations. Hendrix describes the Lord’s Supper as “a rich, tangible ritual . . . really important to us.” Once

they took a straw poll of the congregation, asking the hypothetical question whether, if, for the rest of their lives, members could either only hear a sermon or only receive communion, which would they choose? All but one person chose communion, which “is really the central piece of our community.”

A Bridge Church

Back in Pittsburgh, where there have been eleven NCDs started over the past thirteen years (during the tenure of Vera White), you will want to make the acquaintance of the Hot Metal Bridge Faith Community. Yes, it really is called Hot Metal Bridge (HMB), the name drawn from a dream experienced by one of the co-pastors, Jim Walker, whose “waking dream” was of running with his friend, Jeff Eddings, across the Monongahela River on a span called the Hot Metal Bridge, which took its name from the era of steel production in Pittsburgh, when molten steel was transported across it to be poured into molds. Walker’s dream was of Jesus calling to him from across the Hot Metal Bridge. Walker shared his dream with Eddings, with whom he is now co-pastor of the HMB Faith Community. Walker, a United Methodist minister, and Eddings, a minister of the PCUSA, launched a new faith community jointly sponsored by the two denominations.

Walker and Eddings, both graduates of Pittsburgh Seminary, had been doing youth ministry but could not miss the fact that the youth with whom they had worked went off to college never to be seen again. They imagined creating a bridge that would reach out to young adults, and they have experienced considerable success. The decision was made to place the church on the South Side, within a mile of eight different institutions of higher education. Walker and Eddings began by connecting with college students, and then, working through a local tattoo shop, they made connections with young adults in the countercultural scene—many musicians and artists—and they also made contact with homeless people, many of whom are also young adults. Of course, ten years have passed since making those first contacts, and a good many of those young adults who were drawn to the project early on have married, produced children, gotten jobs, and bought houses, so the profile of the congregation looks different now than it did then. In effect, the original mission has evolved into something else. HMB is less involved with outreach to students, but another nearby

Come and See

church plant has taken up that role. HMB has taken on a new life connecting with families with small children. Walker evaluates the change, saying,

I think that's okay . . . I think that's just the way things are. When you start to build a community, it starts to take on a life of its own, and I think that's what has happened to us. That's how the church operates. And it's not a threat. The church is always supposed to be creating new communities of faith. It's part of the lifeblood of the church. We're supposed to worship, gather in community. And we should always be creating space for new people, and sometimes that means creating a whole new church for people to gather in.

Does that mean that HMB has become another conventional church? Not really. The Hot Metal Bridge Faith Community celebrates the Lord's Supper every week in both of its Sunday morning services. They decided to do that early on, knowing that their mission was directed to young adults; and young adults do not want to be a passive audience but to be actively involved in worship. The co-pastors understand the Sacrament as key to helping people apprehend that God is reaching out to establish communion with them all the time, not just when they gather on the Lord's Day. So, each service ends with Communion, immediately followed by some sort of meal. At the first service, it is a standing-up breakfast of bagels and coffee; at the second service, it is a sit-down meal. HMB also gathers for meals on Tuesday and Thursday nights. On those two nights, a bakery brings over their unsold bread and piles it on a table, and after dinner, people wrap up some bread to take home. HMB is clearly a community that understands its identity in terms of keeping the meal.

For about five years, the congregation met in a cafeteria they rented for worship. The landlord terminated the relationship, and the community found itself literally homeless. For a while they met under a bridge on the South Side, and then found an old garage to meet in. After that, the United Methodist bishop helped them purchase a bar that HMB renovated. (A video posted on their website shows a number of former churches in the neighborhood that have become bars, restaurants, or homes—and a vacant lot where once stood a United Methodist Church. HMB is the solitary example of a reverse transformation—a bar becoming a church!) The renovated space in the former bar will accommodate about two hundred people for worship, and both of their Sunday services are pretty well filled. They have no plans to add other services.

Come and See

When they renovated the bar, the architect conceived the idea of hanging on the walls the tables needed for meals. The wall-mounted tables unfold when they are needed. Two artists in the church have painted murals on the tables. On one wall, a series of murals on the tabletops depicts bread being made: soil tilled, seeds planted, wheat growing, grain harvested, dough being kneaded, bread being broken. On the other wall the murals are similar, but represent the fruit of the vine, from growing in the vineyard to being poured. Again in this worshipping community it is doubly evident that meal keeping is central to its sense of identity.

Walker describes the Eucharist as he has experienced it in a way that is similar to what Elizabeth Deibert or James Lee seem to be saying when they use the word *mystery*.

I think there is a supernatural quality about sharing in the Lord's Supper each week. There's something powerful about it. I can't prove it, but I think something happens. The Holy Spirit does move, and I've witnessed some really cool things over the years as we've done this week after week after week, and when you stand in line with a kid with a blue Mohawk and covered with blue tattoos, and behind you is a homeless person who's hung over and you share this meal with all these people, it just turns your world upside down.

Walker describes people who might be serving the communicants as "some of the most broken people you ever laid eyes on holding the bread and the cup . . . people who are just hungry and broken and lonely and hurting, and here they are holding the cup . . . It's transformational, impactful . . ."

What Motivates Trailblazers?

In most congregations, whether long established or brand new, pastors are going to have a key role in the shaping of Sacramental practice. The easier thing, when becoming pastor of an existing congregation, is to learn its culture and adjust to whatever practices are already in place. After all, there is a chance that change might be resisted rather than affirmed or consented to, and normally there are issues aplenty demanding the attention of the pastor and church officers; so what motivates a pastor to initiate a more central role for Holy Communion in the weekly worshipping assembly? Later chapters will look more closely at the dynamics of decision making in congregations, but what if we could ask some of these pastors and organizing pastors

Come and See

in weekly-Eucharist churches what made this issue so important to them that they were willing to stick their necks out?

Moderator Neal Presa, pastor of the Middlesex Presbyterian Church, had become active in denominational life and had served on the General Assembly Council. Like many of his ministerial colleagues, he was not uninterested in the Sacraments, but his attention and commitments had been focused in other directions. In 2003–2004, Presa was invited to serve on the General Assembly’s Sacraments Study Group that was formed to reflect on and respond to an overture to the 1998 General Assembly from Central Washington Presbytery asking for guidance with respect to Sacramental practice, and specifically, with respect to the relationship between Baptism and Eucharist. (It was the Study Group that ultimately produced *Invitation to Christ*.⁶)

As Neal took part in the deliberations of the Study Group, he became more and more engaged with the issues they were examining, and when he came back home to Middlesex after meetings, he shared his discoveries with the elders of the church, and they could see that he was energized by the things he was learning. The Moderator testifies that it was participating in this task force that redirected his interests to the point that he felt led to make a sharp turn in his doctoral program. He already had a ThM in pastoral theology from Princeton Seminary in addition to his MDiv from San Francisco Seminary. After moving to Middlesex, he had begun a PhD program at Drew University in Psychology and Religion, and had already completed a semester in that program. Neal’s experience with the Study Group caused him to make a move that was unprecedented at Drew, and that was to ask to change from one doctoral program to another—from Psychology and Religion to the program in Liturgy. In order to make the switch and keep up with his new cohort in liturgical studies, he had to immerse himself in learning what they had already had a semester to absorb. Neal Presa testifies that the Holy Spirit used these two experiences—the work of the task force and his academic studies—to help him see that when it came to the church’s sacramental life, “there was more than meets the eye here.”

How did Vice Moderator Tom Trinidad find himself as a pastor strongly advocating weekly Communion? Trinidad came to the Christian faith through Young Life and helped to organize Wyldlife, a version of Young Life for Junior High students. He became a Presbyterian while

6. Presbyterian Church (USA), *Invitation*.

interning in music and youth at First Presbyterian Church in Colorado Springs. He reports having had no special appetite for weekly Eucharist until he studied John Calvin and his sacramental theology, and Calvin's desire for the sacrament to accompany and seal the Word. In a worship class at Princeton Seminary, he remembers encountering a book by Hughes Oliphant Old in which, as Trinidad remembers it, Old declared that "covenant theology is Reformed sacramental theology." This intrigued him, and he wanted to explore that further.

After seminary, Trinidad became chaplain of Central College in Pella, Iowa, an institution of the Reformed Church in America. Pella, a town with a population of ten thousand, not only had Lutheran, Methodist, Baptist, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and nondenominational churches, but it also had thirteen churches with some sort of Reformed identity (though no Presbyterian church). In this milieu, Trinidad determined that he "wanted to be a voice of invitation to greater ecumenical relationships, and that the Sacraments would be a primary way to do that." The Vice Moderator was drawn to Notre Dame's doctoral program in liturgics because James White, the late Methodist liturgical historian and theologian, was teaching there at the time, and Trinidad had read White's books. He discovered a confessionally diverse community of teachers and colleagues at Notre Dame that exposed him to a deep study of sacramental theology from an ecumenical perspective. His studies led him to a desire to reintroduce among Presbyterians a more Calvinian rather than Zwinglian appreciation of the Lord's Supper, understanding the Sacraments as deeply important in the formation of Christian discipleship. Tom felt some resonance with the early Barth, who wrote in *The Preaching of the Gospel*: "There is indeed no preaching, in the precise meaning of the term, except when it is accompanied and illuminated by the sacrament . . . And this is precisely what we lack today: the sacrament every Sunday."⁷

Like Presa, Trinidad had served on the General Assembly's Sacraments Study Group. He became the designated pastor at Faith Presbyterian Church in Colorado Springs, then the called pastor in 2010. Before he was chosen to be designated pastor, he told the committee that interviewed him, "If you call me to this church, I'm from the first Sunday going to be talking about the importance of Communion, and keep it up until we have weekly Communion." Some were shocked, and others intrigued, but his honesty and his directness apparently appealed to them.

7. Barth, *Preaching*, 23, 25.