



# Community of Christ

CHRIST'S MISSION, OUR MISSION

## **Sharing the Sacraments of Community of Christ When In-person Contact Is Not Possible October 7, 2020**

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to reduce opportunities for the church to provide in-person pastoral-care ministries and to gather physically for fellowship, worship, and community formation. As the pandemic continues, the Presidency is receiving requests for guidance on how to make all sacraments available during this time of physical separation.

The sacraments are vital to the church's mission of forming spiritual communities and nurturing lives of discipleship. In our prayerful consideration about how the sacraments bring needed ministries when we gather in-person or online, the following Doctrine and Covenants sections continue to offer guidance in this unique time:

Look especially to the sacraments to enrich the spiritual life of the body. Seek for greater understanding of my purposes in these sacred rites and prepare to receive a renewed confirmation of the presence of my Spirit in your experiences of worship.

—Doctrine and Covenants 158:11c

You have already been told to look to the sacraments to enrich the spiritual life of the body. It is not the form of the sacrament that dispenses grace but it is the divine presence that gives life. Be respectful of tradition and sensitive to one another, but do not be unduly bound by interpretations and procedures that no longer fit the needs of a worldwide church. In such matters direction will come from those called to lead.

—Doctrine and Covenants 162:2d

Generously share the invitation, ministries, and sacraments through which people can encounter the Living Christ who heals and reconciles through redemptive relationships in sacred community.

—Doctrine and Covenants 163:2b

At the 2019 World Conference, the following words of counsel were shared with the church. This counsel challenged the Presidency to give increased attention to how to make the sacraments available to the church, through online experiences, during this pandemic:

Technology presents opportunities for involvement in sacraments by priesthood members and participants in separate locations. The First Presidency will act in its calling as chief interpreters of

scripture, revelation, and church policies to provide procedures for offering sacraments in new situations while upholding essential meanings and symbols of the sacraments. As the church explores new opportunities for sharing sacraments, direction will come as needed through inspiration and wisdom.

After extended consideration, the Presidency is providing principles and guidelines for offering the sacraments through online means during the pandemic. These principles and guidelines may be refined in the future as the church lives into its experiences with online ministries.

We recognize the sacraments, as expressions of God’s loving grace and presence, involve symbols, procedures, and words that draw us deeper into covenant with God, who yearns to offer wholeness in our lives. Evangelist Jane Gardner expands our understanding of symbols as she states, “Symbols of faith are manifestations of the Divine using:

- things (olive oil, water, bread);
- actions (laying on of hands);
- events (a Communion service);
- people (ministers or fellow disciples);
- communities (congregations, [groups]); and
- symbolic language (“repent,” “covenant,” “consecrate,” “bless”).”<sup>1</sup>

When recognized symbols of the sacraments are encountered visually or through words, they invite individuals and the spiritual community to remember encounters with God that bless life and anticipate additional ones.

The principles and guidelines below uphold the importance of symbols and words as elements of the sacraments. We acknowledge that sacrament ministry through online technology will require a different way of experiencing some symbols. When it is not possible to use symbols that involve touch, such as laying on of hands, providing a visual expression of those symbols or an auditory statement, which is provided in the Guideline section below, is an effective way to encounter symbolic meaning and connection in the sacraments.

As much as possible, we encourage priesthood to make the sacrament symbols visually present in the online sacrament experience. Making the symbol visually present may not always be possible due to multiple circumstances. Priesthood members are encouraged to do the best they can to uphold the principle of symbol(s) associated with the sacrament. In all instances, the priesthood member(s) providing the sacrament, the recipient(s) of the sacrament, and the gathered community should be invited to embrace the presence of the Holy Spirit as they remember the life and ministry of Jesus Christ through the sacrament symbols.

In this spirit, we believe the gift of offering the sacraments through an online setting will provide effective ministry needed in the church and the broader community.

It is our hope that providing for the sacraments to be shared through online experiences will continue the pastoral-care ministries the church is called to extend into human life, even during this time of physical distancing. It also will provide the church learnings for how to share the sacraments in a world that is becoming more borderless through online connections. May blessings abound as you offer these gifts.

The First Presidency

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<sup>1</sup> *The Sacraments: Symbol, Meaning & Discipleship*, ed. Andrew Bolton and Jane Gardner, Herald Publishing House, 2005, p.30.

## **Definitions**

The following definitions offer clarity for specific words in this document.

**Auditory expression:** Using words to form a mental image and sense of the sacramental symbols when online connection does not allow visual images to be seen.

**Online:** Connection with others through the Internet or telecommunication networks using electronic devices—computer, tablet, mobile phone, Smart TV, game consoles, etc.

**Real time:** The nearly simultaneous sharing of an activity or gathering with others online as though they were in the same physical location. Real time is the same as being live as compared to watching a recorded gathering.

**Visually present:** The opportunity for online participants to see on their electronic devices the symbols of the sacrament as it is offered.

### **The following principles during the pandemic apply to all sacraments when provided in an online setting:**

1. Sacraments are provided in the spirit and context of worship.
2. While actual physical presence is customary, there are circumstances when physical presence is not possible or wise.
3. Real time online sacrament ministry is treated as though all participants are in a single physical location, sharing together in a nearly simultaneous experience.
4. Real time online sacrament ministry includes visual and auditory (and/or closed-captioned) connection. If visual connection is not available, auditory-only and/or closed-captioned is acceptable.
5. Participants physically present with each other observe all public health mandates and precautions to protect each other and the most vulnerable.
6. Objects or substances used in sacraments are prepared and utilized with the health and safety of all participants in mind.
7. If a sacrament includes physical contact (anointing, laying on of hands, baptizing, etc.), permission is requested from the recipient (or responsible adult) to be physically near and touch the candidate in the prescribed manner.
8. If physical laying on of hands is not possible or wise because of health precautions, an alternative ritual expressing the meaning of laying on of hands is provided. (See below.)
9. The use of a proxy is not allowed. A proxy is giving authority to a person to physically represent the recipient of the sacrament or represent the priesthood member(s) performing the sacrament when the recipient and priesthood member(s) are not physically present with each other.
10. Requests for exceptions to these principles and following guidelines need to be submitted to the Presidency through the mission center president and apostle.

**The following are:**

- **Guidelines for specific sacraments not covered in the principles above.**
- **Specific statements for sacraments involving laying on of hands. These statements are provided to help draw the recipient(s) and gathered community to be centered in the meaning and blessing of the sacrament.**

**Sacrament of Baptism**

Symbols:

- Water
- Immersion
- Words of the baptism prayer statement
- Priesthood ministry

Priesthood: Aaronic priest and Melchisedec

*The priesthood member and candidate should be together, in-person, for the sacrament of baptism.*

*If there is a case where a priesthood member and candidate are not able to be together, in-person, an exception to provide an online sacrament of baptism can be requested from the apostle, who will consult with the First Presidency.*

**Sacrament of Confirmation**

Symbols:

- Laying on of hands
- Priesthood ministry

Priesthood: Melchisedec

*Before the worship experience, ask the candidate(s) to prepare a worship environment at their location(s).*

*When ready for the confirmation prayer, a priesthood member states:*

*“Entering into this sacrament, we remember the life of Jesus and those who were touched and blessed by his ministry.”*

*Addressed to the candidate(s): “As we share this sacrament with you, may you accept God’s invitation into the sacredness of this moment as you allow yourself to imagine and sense the touch of our hands on your head.”*

*When possible, priesthood members need to make sure participants can see the priesthood members’ hands. As an example, this could occur as the priesthood members stand behind an open chair symbolizing where the recipient of the sacrament might be.*

## **Sacrament of the Lord's Supper**

Symbols:

- Bread and wine (such as unfermented grape juice, water, or other unfermented beverages)
- Authorized prayers
- Priesthood ministry
- Sacred meal of the faith community

Priesthood: Aaronic priests and Melchisedec

*When ready for the blessing prayers:*

A priest or Melchisedec priesthood member should read the prayer(s) of blessing on the emblems so that those in all locations experience the blessing(s). Participants in all locations should be encouraged to kneel, if possible.

If priests or Melchisedec priesthood are not available to serve the emblems in some locations, participants may take the emblems for themselves from a designated plate or location.

*More information on the guidelines for serving the sacrament of the Lord's Supper can be found at:*  
[www.CofChrist.org/common/cms/resources/Guidelines-Lords-Supper-9-2019-EN.pdf](http://www.CofChrist.org/common/cms/resources/Guidelines-Lords-Supper-9-2019-EN.pdf)

## **Sacrament of Blessing Children**

Symbols:

- Laying on of hands
- Priesthood ministry

Priesthood: Melchisedec

*Before the worship experience, ask the child's family to prepare a worship environment at their location.*

*When ready for the child's blessing prayer, a Melchisedec priesthood member states:*

“Entering into this sacrament, we remember the life of Jesus and the children who were touched and blessed by his ministry. May we accept God's invitation into the sacredness of this moment as we pray for this child to experience the touch of the hands of blessing.”

*When possible, priesthood members need to make sure participants can see their hands of blessing.*

## **Sacrament of Laying on of Hands for the Sick**

Symbols:

- Laying on of hands
- Anointing with consecrated oil
- Priesthood ministry

Priesthood: Melchisedec

*When anointing is not possible, the Melchisedec priesthood member reads:*

Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord.

—James 5:14 NRSV

“We use oil that has been consecrated and prayerfully reserved for this special purpose (*display the oil for participants to see*). I place a drop of oil in my hand as I offer an anointing prayer. May you accept God’s invitation into the sacredness of this moment as you allow yourself to imagine and sense the consecrated oil and the touch of my hands on your head.”

*The same or a second Melchisedec priesthood member states:*

“I continue in the Spirit of this sacrament as I pray for your well-being and wholeness, as Jesus touched and prayed over many who were in need. May you feel that same touch of Holy Presence as you imagine and sense the touch of my hands on your head.”

*When possible, priesthood members need to make sure participants can see their hands. As an example, this could occur as the priesthood members stand behind an open chair or bed symbolizing where the recipient of the sacrament might be.*

## **Sacrament of Ordination**

Symbols:

- Laying on of hands
- Priesthood ministry

Priesthood: Aaronic priests (to Aaronic offices) or Melchisedec

*Before the worship experience, ask the ordinand(s) to prepare a worship environment at their location(s).*

*When ready for the ordination prayer, a priesthood member states:* “Entering into this sacrament, we remember the life of Jesus and those who were touched and blessed by his ministry.”

*Addressed to the ordinand(s):*

“May you accept God’s invitation into the sacredness of this moment as you allow yourself to imagine and sense the touch of our hands on your head.”

*When possible, priesthood members need to make sure participants can see the priesthood members’ hands. As an example, this could occur as the priesthood members stand behind an open chair, symbolizing where the recipient of the sacrament might be.*

## **Sacrament of Marriage**

Symbols:

- Words of the covenant statement
- Priesthood ministry

Priesthood: Aaronic priest and Melchisedec

1. Priesthood members are required to comply with all local government requirements for providing an

- online marriage ceremony, officiating a marriage, and ensuring that legal documentation is met.
2. The sacrament of marriage in Community of Christ expects the following covenant statement be used as stated in Doctrine and Covenants 111:2b: “Do you both mutually agree to be each other’s companions, husband and wife, observing the legal rights belonging to this condition; that is, keeping yourselves wholly for each other, and from all others, during your lives?” After answering in the affirmative, the officiating minister pronounces the couple married, and typically offers this blessing: “May God add his blessings and keep you to fulfill your covenants from henceforth and forever. Amen” **(NOTE: See national policies where an alternative covenant statement has been provided as a result of national conference recommendations.)**

## **Sacrament of Evangelist Blessing**

Symbols:

- Laying on of hands
- Written words of blessing
- Priesthood ministry

Priesthood: Evangelist

*Enter the words of blessing portion of this sacrament after an extended period of preparation with the requestor(s). Ahead of the appointed time, ask the requestor(s) to prepare a worship environment at their location(s).*

*When ready to offer the words of blessing, an evangelist states: “Entering into this sacrament, we remember the life of Jesus and those who were touched and blessed by his ministry. May you accept God’s invitation into the sacredness of this moment as you allow yourself to imagine and sense the touch of my/our hands on your head(s).”*

*When possible, priesthood members need to make sure participants can see the priesthood members’ hands. As an example, this could occur as the priesthood member stands behind an open chair, symbolizing where the recipient of the sacrament might be.*