

# COMMUNION

## A TRANSFORMATIONAL PRACTICE

We believe that communion is a transformational practice in the personal and shared lives of all those who worship at Salford Mennonite Church. “It is our theology incarnate,” as John Rempel writes, “for how we practice it reveals more of what we believe about grace, the church, and mission than any other aspect of congregational life.” We come to the table together in this vital act of “congregational life” expectant and eager to know God, ourselves, and others as fellow seekers and followers of Christ.

## DIVERSE EXPRESSIONS

We practice this transformative ordinance humbly because there is no outline for the communion service found in the Bible. At Salford Mennonite Church we continue to discern our congregational practice of the Lord’s Table as a gathering of Christ’s beloved community by looking to and learning from diverse expressions of the table practice.

We turn to the **gospel passages of the Last Supper**<sup>i</sup> in which Jesus taught his closest followers both how to remember him and participate together in his body. We read **early church accounts**<sup>ii</sup> of the table such as Paul’s reminder to the Corinthians, “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?” (I Cor 10:16), and we listen for echoes of those **unwritten accounts** by women, children, the ostracized, and all those who were not present or mentioned in the biblical stories of the table.

We consider our **lived experiences** of the communion table, the **many Christian traditions** that have shaped communion beliefs in our increasingly diverse Salford body, and our own **Anabaptist traditions**.

## A MORE OPEN TABLE

Like many Anabaptist congregations, Salford’s practice of communion has transformed from the traditional closed table of adult baptized believers to a more open table that has at different times in past decades included people regardless of age, baptism, or belief. The traditional practice of the closed table is rooted in an Anabaptist emphasis on the covenant community in Christ practiced at the table. This covenant is emphasized in Article 12 of the CoF: “[during communion] the church renews its covenant with God and with each other and participates in the life and death of Jesus Christ, until he comes.”

The emerging practice of the open table comes out of the hospitable and welcoming nature of God increasingly emphasized in Mennonite theology, reconsideration of the Last Supper in the context of Jesus' radical acts of inclusivity in other "table stories," and our relationships with those in other Christian and faith communities. Together we continue to discern prayerfully and humbly the relationship between the traditional value of covenant community and the emerging value of openness in our practice of communion at Salford.

## AN INVITATION

Although we at Salford are invited to partake in the same communion meal, we know the Lord's Supper will hold differences in meaning - both joyful and painful - for each of us based on our experiences, theology, and understanding of scripture. Despite these differences, we hope people of all ages can experience our communion practice as an invitation to deeper experience of and commitment to both the way of Jesus and the community of Christian believers.

We welcome anyone to participate in communion who is eager to know transformation through Christ's grace, Christ's hospitality, and Christ's call to covenant community just as we welcome anyone who chooses, in their own journey of discernment, to defer or abstain from the table.

As you discern your own relationship to the communion table, we encourage you to consider these questions in prayer, reflection, and discussion with others in the Salford community:

If you take communion, what are you celebrating? What are you committing to? What are you asking for?

This meal is a symbol of Jesus' active love of the world. What does it mean for you to participate in this love at the communion table?

Are you open to the possibility that Jesus might teach, challenge, inspire, or call you through this sacred ritual?

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<sup>i</sup> Matthew 26:26-28; Luke 22:19-20; John 6:53-58

<sup>ii</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:17-24