

11. We Are One Body Because We all Share in One Bread: Pioneering and the Eucharist

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Introduction

I write as someone leading a small, new form of church that serves a group who have no connections to Church. Many have low levels of literacy, mental health difficulties, childhood trauma or other struggles. We operate under a Bishops Mission Order from the Church of England, but began our life as a non-denominational mission project led by people who considered themselves 'low' church regarding the Eucharist. This is the story of how our eyes have been opened to its unparalleled power and beauty.

I have had quite a steep learning curve to understand the myriad rules around how the ritual of the Eucharist is celebrated in the Church of England, but this has been a positive process in the main, driving us to clarify how we understand ourselves in relation to Scripture, tradition and the wider body of the Church. We have also come to see that participating in the ritual of the Eucharist has formed and shaped us into becoming church, and over time has formed and drawn the participants into becoming baptized Christians. Communion has proved itself to be hugely valuable as a missional practice, drawing people into its orbit from those who are outside the walls of Church. Finally it is a ritual that constitutes and contains the entirety of our faith in a microcosmic dramatic performance and is therefore hugely effective as a practical, demonstrative tool for teaching and communication.

In this chapter we examine some historical and contentious issues, discuss contemporary approaches to eucharistic inculturation, and the struggle to re-appropriate and reimagine the ritual for people new to the Christian faith.

Eucharistic liturgy

The Eucharist, and its associated liturgy and practice, is a huge subject. It encompasses several thousand years of history, stretching from Jewish Temple practice through the early years of the Christian Church, via its appropriation by the state under the Roman Emperor Constantine, to the Protestant Reformation, which sought to rid it of associations of power and corruption. Today pioneers and new faith communities often wrestle with its controversies, contradictions and paradoxes as we try to identify its core meaning for new people coming to faith. For most faith communities, that will necessitate some grasp of history and how it influences our understanding of contemporary eucharistic practices.

It is important to note at the outset that there is not one 'right answer' when it comes to the theology that underpins Holy Communion, or the practices and liturgy that embody it. Each church and denomination has its own history, doctrine and practice; some are informal and occasional, while others, like the Church of England and Roman Catholic Church, have complex formal, legal and liturgical structures that determine many of the practices around it. The Salvation Army, on the other hand, celebrates Holy Communion once a year only.

All churches have some rules and behaviours around this ritual and it is important to get to know and understand something of the history and theology of the denomination or stream we may be associated with or supported by, in order to understand this. For pioneers working with no denominational or congregational ties or commitments, this issue is both easier and harder to deal with, and may require the focused commitment of the community over a period to decide where to locate the practice and what theology and meaning underpin it. For those of us with complex territory to negotiate, prayer and good collaborative working relationships will help to establish a place of integrity from which to explore the possibilities of inculturating the ritual.

Almost all churches and denominations have liturgies associated with the taking of bread and wine, even if they consider themselves to be non-conformist or non-liturgical. For example, is the bread sliced and out of a packet; does it comprise tiny wafers or one large one; is it unleavened or freshly baked? Is the wine alcoholic or a grape juice; is it served from paper cups, ancient gold vessels or tiny plastic or glass cups? Who is allowed to touch and serve the elements; is communion taken weekly, monthly or even annually; who is allowed to receive it? Is it served from behind a rail or passed around the room? All of these are liturgical practices that speak of the identity and underpinning theology of each community of faith. Does the community view its participation as an act of obedience to Christ and a memorial of the Last Supper; do they understand Christ to become literally, mystically or symbolically present in the breaking of the bread? Are the words fixed and unchanging, performed by one role only, or is it a largely improvised and informal ritual that can be led by anyone?

For new church communities that are being shaped around the needs of people unfamiliar with church culture and history, there are important decisions to be made about the place of Holy Communion and in what ways it may have meaning for the new groups that are being reached. How can we negotiate the complexity surrounding it in order to enable people to access the meaning of it in ways that are culturally appropriate and resonant? I believe that these are questions of huge importance but they may require us to wrestle like Jacob to grasp the blessing within. If we grapple with these questions seriously, we may discover this rite to be one of the most important shapers of new communities of faith.

Hands off? Understanding the Anglican approach

It may seem hard to understand why there is so much stricture regarding the exact words and actions used to celebrate the Eucharist in the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches, particularly for pioneers from other denominations who are working ecumenically, and for others who are new to the Church of England. It's worth bearing in mind that it is considered a very wonderful and precious matter and so is taken seriously out of reverence and not just to be difficult!

One of the historical reasons is because it used to be thought that Christ had handed down the actual words that were to be spoken from the Last Supper, and these had been passed on via apostolic succession, lending some of the sacredness to the act. However, in the late nineteenth century the discovery of some scrolls known as the Didache,²³ which recorded many details of the worshipping life of the early Church, actually revealed a wide variety of different prayers and liturgies that were used. This shift to a greater variety of words has manifested itself within the Anglican Church, which moved from having only one eucharistic prayer in 1928 to the authorization of eight with the publication of Common Worship in 2000.

I learned about the 'rules' as part of my journey of leading a new church, and discovered that the Church of England has a process of authorizing the words that are going to be used in its services via the systems of consultation and governance of General Synod and the Liturgical Commission. Anglican history, stemming from the earliest Book of Common Prayer, has had a huge influence on how the Church of England regards worship and it is important to understand a little of this.

One reason why Fresh Expressions may have attracted criticism from some quarters of the Anglican Church is that the possibility of diverse congregations springing up with greater freedom in shaping worship opens up a possible weakening of commitment to common prayer, which is the idea that we all say the same things in our worship services, and this represents doctrinal and ecclesial unity.

The Book of Common Prayer (1549, 1552 and 1662) is very important to Anglican identity. The principles held within it underpin theology and doctrine expressed via the liturgy. Its author, Thomas Cranmer, was keen for the people to understand and take more responsibility for their own Christian faith, and the reading of Scripture was important for this. Cranmer developed the lectionary and a book of homilies, and these gave preaching the word a central place in the service: 'Cranmer's chief reason for implementing standard liturgies was to provide a venue [for] the Bible' (Jacobs, 2013, pp. 26–7). This may surprise some who are of the opinion that the Anglican Church has prioritized the liturgy over the reading of Scripture.

It is hard now to imagine the huge impact of the introduction of the Prayer Books, which put prayers, psalms and liturgy into the hands of parishioners, in their own language, for the first time. The notion of 'Common Prayer' has been one of the strongest identities expressed in Anglican worship ever since and is perhaps increasingly important today when 'a degree of commonality in liturgy is needed to maintain and enhance the unity of the Church' (Gray-Reeves and Perham, 2011, p. 12).

All these points of history are not reasons why new things cannot be tried or introduced, but they may explain why at times a warning klaxon seems to sound when we try to discuss changes to practices around the Eucharist. For Anglican pioneers, it helps to understand the sensitive issues from history and become familiar with the themes and rhythms found in the liturgy, drawing on them when creating prayers and services that may be simpler for new people, but maintain a 'family resemblance' to the original.

In 2005, Steven Croft (now Bishop of Sheffield) proposed that Anglican unity had begun to shift from definition 'by common worship texts, to unity defined by common worship shapes'. He proposed a definition of Anglican unity on the basis 'of the common values which lie at the core of our corporate life and ... heritage' instead (Earey, 2013, p. 87). Mark Earey suggested a core set of values or principles that relate to Anglican identity in worship, asking if we can move away from a liturgical 'policing' strategy to a commitment to our shared history and an 'eye to the needs of our particular context' (Earey, 2013, p. 68). These proposals can give us confidence as pioneers to shape worship that is appropriate for our people and makes a connection with our shared history and identity.

In my experience the single biggest factor in giving pioneers appropriate freedom and creativity in an Anglican context is the relationship to your bishop. In the Diocese of Gloucester, Bishop Michael Perham undertook a tour of Fresh Expressions in the UK and the Episcopal Church in the USA several years ago and wrote a book exploring what he had seen in

new ecclesial communities. When we approached him, despite being a committed liturgist, he was very willing to listen to the reasons why we felt we needed to create new and shorter services and prayers, and he gave us written permission to explore this, within a framework of serving people missionally from outside of church culture. His letter ended: 'The most important thing is that the worship should honour Jesus Christ and be filled with the Holy Spirit!'

Sacrament and participation

The name Eucharist derives from the εὐχαριστία (eucharistia), meaning 'thanksgiving'. It is not a word used in the New Testament as a name for the rite, but the related verb is found in New Testament accounts of the Last Supper:

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' (1 Cor. 11.23–24)

Some churches, Anglican, Orthodox and Catholic among them, consider the Eucharist to be a sacrament. A sacrament is something that points to a greater reality, and that also helps that reality to come into being; a small action that helps us to be drawn into Christ's life and body in a fuller and more mysterious way. It speaks of his provision for us in creation through bread and wine, his desire to gather in and offer a welcome in the body of Christ which is the community of the Church, building us together as we are reminded of his grace to us in his life and death, and allowing us to offer our own response as a sacrifice of praise and recommitment.

The Salvation Army believes 'that it is possible to live a holy life and receive the grace of God without the use of physical sacraments and that they should not be regarded as an essential part of becoming a Christian'. Salvationists see the sacraments as the outward sign of an inward experience, and it is the inward experience that is the most important thing.

However, anthropologists have noted that as physical beings, the creation of ritual is universal and helps people make meaning and develop self-understanding. So I believe the Eucharist to be an important part of the journey of faith. As a ritual it also points us to greater self-awareness, a necessary part of being human, as we engage in self-examination to recognize our life, our mistakes, repetitive habits and selfish behaviours. The Eucharist offers an opportunity for penitence as we consider the relation of our own mess and mistakes to the grace offered through the sacrifice of Christ, and draws us to reflect on our need for forgiveness. If we celebrate it often, this penitence helps us keep 'short accounts' with God, forming the habit of becoming aware of when we have caused hurt or damage to others or the planet. I believe that this regular habit of opening ourselves up to the gaze of God via the Eucharist helps us hold the paradox of our own weakness and failure together with the fact of our deep acceptance and forgiveness by the Father.

However, it has been noted that people unfamiliar with church today may have a different approach to 'sin' from regular churchgoers (see Emma Nash in Baker and Ross, 2014, p. 197), and this may impact what is understood by the relationship between communion, the sacrifice of Christ and our individual and corporate need for forgiveness. One of the shifts in scholarship over the last 50 years has been to relate the ritual of communion to the metaphors and themes found in the whole life and ministry of Christ, rather than locating communion solely in the

narrative of the Last Supper, with its backdrop of Passover and the sacrifice of the paschal lamb for the sins of the people. We will explore this shift further.

The Eucharist is a rite of participation, one that forms us on the journey of faith. It allows new believers and old to appropriate the metaphors of resurrection life again into our own lives. It is hugely important that it is a participatory rite, engaging our senses and bodies:

By receiving the body of Christ I become a little more a member of his body, the Church. The symbol (sacrament) produces in me what it signifies ... and brings me into contact with a Reality, by acting on me, in me ... The fact of receiving the consecrated bread brings into existence the reality of communion with Christ. (Lebon, 1987, p. 9)

A mutual recognition of ourselves and our relation to others is an important part of gathering together as the Church to undertake the eucharistic celebration: 'Men and women are ritual animals [and] this symbolic action allows individuals or groups to recognize one another at the deepest level of their identity ... Rites are social practices' (Lebon, 1987, p. 15).

Rowan Williams writes in *Lost Icons* that our development as a person and a self grows over time in community with others, and our self-awareness is shaped by our shared understandings (Williams, 2003, pp. 140–1). We need to be aware that we each bring ourselves into dialogue with a faith community, along with our own understandings of tradition and culture, and are shaped by the people and practices in that place.

Shared understanding of the Christian narrative has broken down in some parts of today's culture, so new spaces need to be made for this dialogue and self-understanding to occur. Williams believes that we need a sense of ourselves being held within a narrative as part of human development, even as this narrative is constantly being re-edited over time. Every event that happens connects to others and to the gospel story and reorders who we are and will be, so that 'every telling is a retelling, and the act of telling changes what can be ...' (2003, p. 144). In this way, new identities can be explored and inhabited. Participating in the gospel narrative, via the Eucharist, helps us to develop our humanity.

Eucharist as plausibility structure

People working in ministry and mission ponder how to help people who have never heard the good news of the gospel to access it in a way they can understand and which makes sense. We also need to consider how we ourselves live, show and tell the Jesus story with integrity so that our actions and words work together to communicate clearly.

What we have learned, over the last seven years in a UK context, is that telling, proclaiming, witnessing and evangelizing is not enough; nor is inviting people into 'our church' and then expecting them to get the hang of it because it makes sense to us. This is partly to do with British postmodern society, where experience and authenticity tend to help people make sense of things, but it is also because our shared cultural framework and foundation for understanding faith is now largely lost among some groups in our culture.

When establishing a new church community, one of our tenets has been about offering a space where people who have lost their thread of connection to the gospel can come and be introduced to the Christian narrative and try it on for size; to question and explore, begin to find where they may belong in the story. We hope they can taste and see and participate in it

in ways that reduce the cultural hurdles that church can present. We offer a 'plausible structure' to others, sharing the story of Jesus, who he is, what his coming, living, dying and rising is all about, and showing what belonging to the family of God feels like. This is experienced along with a community of fellow journeyers who are still exploring and asking questions, but who have been travelling for a while and can share their own experiences.

The sociological idea of 'plausibility structures' was explored by Sam Richards regarding the Eucharist (Ward, 1999, pp. 116–30). Richards develops the idea that people need spaces, relationships and experiences to enable us to process, internalize and begin to believe and live the gospel. In a surrounding culture that no longer has this explicit in its daily story, this space becomes important. People need to be able to experience it in order for the narrative to make any sense and to participate in it, chew it around, see what it feels like, try it out with others, see how others live in it and how it makes sense to them, and to do this over a period of time with others.

The need to 'have a go' is a very human characteristic and is a facet of learning and growing. We need spaces to practise, and learn from one another's questions and reactions. A community that is open to questions and diverse perspectives is helpful to people at the start of a journey towards faith, and to all of us as we continue on that road.

Richards posits reception into the ritual of communion as access to tasting and experiencing the action that surrounds the death and resurrection of Christ. In joining in, sharing the peace, tasting the bread and wine, people are drawn into the welcome of God at the heart of the faith community. This is why we ask the newest person to offer the cup of wine to others at communion (if they are comfortable, of course) and why we welcome all to take bread and wine. The invitation and participation have proved transformative to many on the journey towards faith. It seems that being given a role at the centre of the action enables people to process and explore the ritual and its meaning for themselves. Communion is a place where we retell and reshape our own stories in the light of Christ's redemptive story.

Table fellowship or Last Supper?

The theology underpinning our community life and our Eucharist draws from the coming and the life of Jesus, as well as his death, and resurrection. It does not focus solely on his death on the cross.

The notion of the Eucharist as primarily based upon a metaphor of sacrifice seems to have been introduced by Augustine around the fifth century, when he suggests that the Church is herself offered on the altar as an invisible sign shown by the symbols of bread and wine she offers (Gorringe, 1997, p. 10).

In recent years there has been a dawning awareness of the connections between the meal of the Eucharist and the radical behaviour of Jesus regarding his dinner companions. The influence of Hellenistic culture relating to meals is also important and provides the context for the Gospel accounts (Bradshaw and Johnson, 2012, p. 1). There is therefore a need to set the Last Supper in the broader context of Jesus' teaching, practices and miracles around eating, hospitality and the kingdom of God, where the metaphor was more often about abundance of life and nourishment than of sacrifice (Bradshaw and Johnson, 2012, p. 21).

In Hellenistic culture, diners reclined on couches around a room with food laid on tables in front of them. 'They would be ranked according to their social status' (Bradshaw and Johnson, 2012, p. 2). There was a sense of quid pro quo and patronage, whereby the host might expect support from guests in local matters at a later date. For those of lower social status, food of lesser quality might be served in a separate room; for others who could not be offered a seat, a food parcel might even be given to eat at home.

There was a definite social order around the eating arrangements and we see Jesus confront and repudiate this in the Gospels when he provides the best wine for everyone at the wedding at Cana (John 2.10); when he addresses the pecking order at the table (Luke 14.8); the expectation of the host's getting something in return from the guest (Luke 14.12); and in the invitation of the poor to the banquet (Luke 14.21).

These form part of Jesus' teaching around the kingdom of heaven, where the paradigms of culture and society are turned upside down by grace, and radical inclusion is modelled to a divided society. Religious piety expressed by ritual purity around food was a major issue of social hierarchy in Jewish culture and Jesus deliberately contravened every one of these cultural norms: 'His feeding miracles functioned as performative versions of his teaching ... moving the boundary markers with regard to those whom his contemporaries deemed acceptable to God, challenging the divisions in society' (Bradshaw, 2012, p. 9).

Through the actions of his life and ministry, Jesus showed his intention towards radical social inclusion and the breaking down of hierarchy and exclusion in the kingdom, modelled throughout his ministry:

For a first century Jew, having dinner with someone was making a statement about acceptance and about religious fellowship. Supper was not just sustenance; supper was spirituality. Doing lunch was doing theology. And Jesus was a guy who would chow down with just about anybody. He accepted dinner invitations from upstanding Pharisees ... [and] he also swapped snacks with less savoury souls. (Gempf, 2005, p. 132)

This clash of covenants explains the root of the conflict between the Pharisees and Jesus; while they were still adhering strictly to the law based on Israelite worship at the Temple, Jesus has begun reinventing covenantal practice in anticipation of his death and resurrection, the birth of the new Church and the destruction of the Temple around ad 70. Jesus may have been paving the way by his example for worship and hospitality described in the book of Acts: the new Church was being built on 'radically different principles from those of honour, shame, patronage and clientage. For Jesus, healing ... calls forth hospitality ... The table hospitality practised by Jesus recreated the world' (Bradshaw and Johnson, 2012, p. 9). Perhaps we need to allow its power to recreate us as the Church.

The unity and equal sharing of a meal among a diverse group marked out the new Church from all other gatherings in Roman society, which was highly stratified, 'yet the Christians had declared that there was neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, master or slave in Galatians 3:28' (Zizioulas, 1985, p. 151). This radical equality and hospitality are such important motifs for the Christian faith and need to be rediscovered and emphasized in our eucharistic practice.

Eschatology and eucharistic community

'Gathering together is a prophetic act which reveals God and makes his presence known' (Lebon, 1987, p. 45). Jesus did not coincidentally eat with people who were socially excluded from the Jewish community; his deliberate act of eating with people considered unacceptable caused a scandal among the Pharisees and even his own followers. That a ritual of gathering and eating is given to us by Christ as our act of remembrance is significant for us in a number of ways.

For Martelet, there is significance in the elements of bread and wine as representing the joint work of God in creation and humankind in cultivation and culture: 'bread and wine are ... part of humanized nature ... It is the [hu]man in his [her] entirety ... that is signified in our Eucharists.' He continues: 'In his Incarnation and in his Eucharist God is strictly inseparable from love and bread ... and the inestimable value of the human itself which bread and wine symbolize' (Martelet, 1976, p. 35). This resonates with the value Jesus accorded to people who suffered from sickness or mental illness and were further harmed by their enforced separation from society imposed by the purity laws.

They were restored as much by their restoration to social and relational life as by his direct healing (John, 2001, pp. 23–4), working with the grain of how humans are made physically and socially and relate to one another in community. In the Orthodox tradition the main focus of the Eucharist relates to this power of gathering and community; the very nature of a eucharistic community is found 'in its inclusiveness of all' (Zizioulas, 1985, p. 154). It is an eschatological picture of the kingdom of God, where the first shall be last and the hungry will be filled.

As we have gathered together around the communion table with people who often remain hidden due to shame and exclusion, we have found that they begin to be revealed after a time of journeying with others in a safe environment (Rom. 8.19). People begin to confess brokenness and be healed, freed to participate again in the life of the local community, their family life or taking responsibility for their health, reviving ambitions and educational journeys, and exploring their spiritual journey. These are our common human journeys.

Gathering together to break bread encompasses all our brokenness and shame within the brokenness of Christ at Calvary, and unites us equally in our need of healing and restoration. We begin to hold our heads up higher. This is foretold in the banquet in Matthew 22.9, when all are invited to the marriage feast to be wed to Christ, and in Matthew 21.31 when Jesus declares that tax- collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom ahead of the religious elite. The bread and wine remind us of our equal need of bread for survival; none can outlive human frailty and limitation, whatever our status.

'If Christ himself suffered "outside the camp" (Heb. 13.13) it was in order to show that the offering he made of himself was directed to the profane and commonplace life of [people] ... that were regarded as profane.' Martelet here draws our attention to the requirement of justice imposed upon us in receiving the Eucharist, challenging us to ask whether we are a 'community where the poor cannot possibly feel at home' (Martelet, 1976, p. 182). 'Can those who have more than enough happily retain what they do not need so long as a member of Christ ... is destitute, without breaking up the communion? This practical awareness of others is an exact measure of our belonging to the risen Christ.'

Participation in the Eucharist brings with it a powerful challenge to each of us and to the Church, regarding our commitment to justice. Stretching our understanding of who may access the rite, and in what way they and their life experience can be incorporated into the life of Christ, is a work of justice that calls for the practice of inculturation.

Inculturation

Finding a way to share the importance of the eucharistic message today requires inculturation: the practice of listening to the immediate context and the timeless mysteries of the faith together.

Contextual theologian Steve Bevens advocates for the inclusion of context and our present lived experience to be brought fully into the life of the Church: 'Theology that comes out of a world church, a minority church, a multicultural church, a poor church, can open our ears to new voices – some right in our own back gardens ... and others very different from our own' (Bevens and Tahaafe-Williams, 2011, p. 14). He argues that this type of new voice, derived from the development of contextual theology, 'offers the church a new look at itself'.

The idea of inculturation began to be articulated in the Church of England by the Faith in the City report in 1985, which identified the entrenched poverty of the white urban working class, trickling away from the Church of England, and discussed ways in which the gap could be bridged. It recognized that 'the failure of the Church today ... is ... a failure to attend to the voices, the experience and the spiritual riches of the "poor" in its midst' (Faith in the City, 1985, p. 62).

It goes further:

A Church which has only a single highly intellectual style of doctrinal formulation and which orders even its most contemporary forms of worship by reference to a closely printed book of over a thousand pages can never hope to bridge the gulf which separates it from ordinary people. We must recognize that ... authentic Christian faith ... can be expressed and achieved in a variety of styles and idioms, by imaginative story-telling, for example, as much as by expositions of doctrine. (Faith in the City, 1985, p. 66)

The report critiques the intellectual assumptions around how faith is learned and identifies that our liturgy may be written from a narrow cultural perspective which limits its adoption by those from other cultural standpoints. It is doubtful that this issue has yet been addressed fully 30 years later.

Experience and experiment

The Upper Room was formed in response to the exclusion of people from the Church by social barriers. We opened a space that provided welcome to listen to people and begin an experimental process of inculturation together: 'To engage in dialogue it is essential that one speaks the same language, uses the same code. If I want to speak with someone else, first of all I have to listen in order to learn his language or [her] code' (Lebon, 1987, p. 57).

We heard people express in their own language their sense of exclusion from church because they did not wear the right clothes, espouse the right morality or lifestyle, or were unable to read in order to follow the complex services. They expressed shame when they thought of attending church, feeling that they would be unwelcome, unacceptable, that church was not

possible for people 'like me', and that they couldn't possibly 'go in there'. And yet, Lebon reminds us that our rites are meant to be 'at the service of humanity' (Lebon, 1987, p. 17). What does it mean in this scenario that Jesus said the Sabbath was made for people, and not the other way around?

The people we serve have little previous contact with the Church and little theological foundation for understanding the symbolism, allusions and scriptural references, so we decided to begin simply and strip back to the basics of Jesus' activities on earth. These seemed to be based around eating and drinking with excluded people as often as possible. We saw this led him to reciprocal opportunities for listening and sharing with people.

We began by offering tea, toast, listening and prayer at two drop-in sessions per week. Over time, people who were homeless, mentally ill, suffering chronic illness or domestic abuse came and brought their friends. They welcomed prayer, listening and sharing together. We celebrated birthdays and hosted get-togethers. Over time, we added a monthly community meal. People were drawn to being together and eating with Christ seated at the table, just like the crowds that followed Jesus.

Seen through the lens of the table fellowship of Jesus, consider a homeless man eating birthday cake, being sung to among a new church family, celebrating his birthday for the first time in many years: could this also constitute a celebration of communion, of restoration of identity and healing? I am uncertain that we can contain the longing of Christ for his people in our formal official services and I believe that he draws a chair up to the table to eat and be present among us when inclusion is mingled with love and food in his name.

After several years together we began a communion service, using bread baked by a community member and grape juice out of care for the people with addictions in our family. This was followed by a picnic lunch. People began to encounter Jesus in the breaking of the bread, as on the Emmaus road, and ask to be baptized. We began to witness something revelatory taking place.

Our most recent venture centres around growing food on an allotment and a class learning to cook nutritiously and cheaply, as well as developing relationships among isolated people in the groups. Angel Méndez-Montoya has written movingly on the connection between the love that goes into cooking food for a meal together with others and the self-giving love of Christ poured out in the Eucharist. He describes food coming from creation as a 'cosmic banquet' (Méndez-Montoya, 2012, p. ix) and the process of preparing food for others 'a form of theological rejoicing' (p. xi). Drawing on the levelling need of all humans for food and love, he believes that 'food ... can be envisioned as a means of the highest spiritual experience of God's love and of human's love responding to God', and that eating is the means of 'physical and emotional change and ... spiritual transformation; the Eucharist is the paradigmatic example' (2012, p. 2).

Conclusion

As a community we have come to understand the power of the Eucharist, seeing it as a performative rendering of Jesus' teaching on the kingdom of heaven. We have learned that it is no coincidence that he instituted a physical act of ritual to enable remembrance of his radical eating and socializing habits, and that when we participate in sharing this welcome and hospitality, people are drawn towards him and changed. This learning has emerged from the

welcome and hospitality offered to us by the Church of England, and our resultant grappling with its rules and doctrines as we sought to find the blessing in them for people who were far off. Whether our stream takes this ritual seriously or lightly, I recommend that pioneers forming new church communities seek after the blessing and the life that flows from the Eucharist and its power to shape all our faith journeys.

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Note

[23](#) The Didache, or apostolic teachings, are ancient writings dated around the second century, containing detailed information on the practices of the early Christian Church. These were discovered in the late nineteenth century and they showed that there were a whole variety of prayers used by the early Church when celebrating communion. Prior to this, it had been thought that there was one handed down by Christ himself.