**SACRAMENTS**

(30-45 minutes)

PURPOSE:

* To show how God works through our material world to make His presence known to us.
* To present the sacraments as signs (actions) of Christ’s presence here and now.
* To examine each of the sacraments in light of our being called to share in Christ’s ministry to the world.
* To identify ourselves as sacraments of Christ and His Church in the world.

CORE IDEAS:

* God works through the sacraments for our sake.
* The sacraments are special encounters with the Risen Christ.
* A personal relationship with Christ is possible.
* The sacraments are the ways in which God continues to reach out to us to strengthen us for life in Him.

INTRODUCTION:

1. The “bookends” of this talk are Baptism and the Eucharist.
   1. In baptism we are made members of the body of Christ and to share in His ministry.
   2. The Eucharist signifies our unity with God, one another, and with self; it is a personal encounter with the Risen Christ that empowers our ministry day by day.
   3. These are the two sacraments of the Gospel. (see BCP p. 858)
   4. The other sacraments of the Church are means by which God supports our ministry with and in Jesus Christ.
2. We have been considering the ways in which God enables us to live continually in His grace.
   1. Piety and study are two ways which enable us to live a life of grace.
   2. Another way which we can live a life of grace is through the sacraments.
3. The sacraments are not magical actions to influence God and the course of human events.
4. Sacraments affect us personally.
5. Sacraments also have apostolic effects, that is, they empower us to carry out our ministry in union with Christ.

GOD WORKS THROUGH THE SACRAMENTS FOR OUR SAKE:

1. We are made of matter and spirit. (see Gen. 2:7)
2. When God meets us it is through the material as well as the spiritual.
   1. God reaches us through all creation. (see Psalm 19:1-4; Rom. 1:19-20; Eucharistic Prayer B, BCP p. 368)
   2. God reaches out to us through people, family, friends, prophets, and pastors.
   3. God has reached out to us in the Word made flesh, Jesus of Nazareth.
3. What is a sacrament?
   1. The formal definition is “an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace” (BCP p. 857)
   2. Outward and visible signs are those events where spiritual realities shine in through the material, which is where God is known.
   3. Signs of inward and spiritual grace are those events where God’s grace, His power to transform, are given in a particular way.

THE SACRAMENTS OF THE CHURCH ARE SPECIAL ENCOUNTERS WITH THE RISEN CHRIST:

1. The sacraments are given by Christ. This does not mean that Christ gave instructions to his disciples on the number and nature of the sacraments.
   1. It means that Christ, through the Holy Spirit, has led His people to discover that God acts in special ways to nurture them.
   2. These are not the only ways in which God can act but we may be sure that in these ways God does nurture us. (see BCP p. 861)
2. The sacraments of the Church are means by which Christ is here and now, communicates His saving presence to us, and strengthens our communion with God.
3. What is required of us for the sacraments to be effective is a faithful response, trust in the presence of Christ, offering ourselves to Him, and receiving the grace intended in each sacrament.

BAPTISM:

1. Baptism is the sacrament of new life. It tells us who we are and whose we are. (see BCP p. 306)
2. The outward sign of baptism is water.
   1. Water symbolizes the washing away of sin.( see Acts 22:16; 1 Cor 6:11; Titus 3:5; Heb.10:22)
   2. Water symbolizes the passage from sin and death to the life of grace. (see 1 Cor.10:1-2)
   3. Water is also connected with burial and resurrection in its identity with Christ. (see Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:12)
   4. Water is about growth and life – watering plants and quenching our thirst.
3. The inward grace is assurance of sins forgiven, the assurance of new life through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and the assurance of life eternal.
4. The personal effects of baptism are:
   1. Adoption as God’s children;
   2. Members of the Body of Christ;
   3. Inheritors of the Kingdom of God and joint heirs with Christ.
5. The apostolic effects of this sacrament are:
   1. A new life and power through the Holy Spirit to gain victory over sin and death. (see Acts 1:4-5; Gal. 3:27)
   2. A ministry to bear the Good News of life in Christ as we live the life of grace in the world. (see Rom. 12:5-8; 2 Cor. 5:18-19; Col. 3:23-24)
   3. Growth into the likeness of Christ.

CONFIRMATION:

1. Many people are baptized in infancy and this does not take away from the reality and effects of the sacrament; however, it is necessary to make a mature public commitment to Christ.
2. The sacrament of confirmation is making a mature commitment to Christ. (see BCP p. 860)
3. The outward sign of confirmation is the laying on of hands by a bishop.
   1. This is a sign of blessing. The blessing we seek is the power of the Holy Spirit to live in grace.
   2. In this sacrament we are strengthened for our own ministry to represent Christ and His Church, bearing witness in the various environments of the world according to the gifts given them.
4. The inward grace is the strength to carry out our service to Christ and the strength to remain faithful to Christ.
5. The personal effects of the sacrament are the confident affirmation of our faith, the assurance that the grace given at baptism continues and a new awareness of our place in the ministry of Christ’s Church. (see BCP p. 418)
6. The apostolic effect of this sacrament is our commissioning to serve others, and our empowerment to witness and minister in Christ’s name. Our commissioning is recognized in a public setting. (see BCP p. 418)

BAPTISM AND CONFIRMATION:

1. Baptism and Confirmation equip us for the ongoing ministry of the Risen Christ. .
2. Baptism and Confirmation help us discover our vocation as God’s servants to others. This is also a guiding principle of the Weekend.
3. The other sacraments of the Church are means by which God under girds and supports our ministry with and in Jesus Christ.

HOLY ORDERS:

1. This is the sacrament of spiritual leadership.
   1. The Church exists for ministry. To carry out effective ministry, we need those who will guide, coordinate, and support us. (see BCP pp. 854-855)
   2. This sacrament signifies a ministry of service to the ministers of the church.
2. The Bishop has a specific ministry of guarding the faith, unity, and discipline of the Church. (see BCP p. 855)
   1. The Bishop is an apostle, chief priest, and pastor of the Church in a diocese.
   2. The Bishop has responsibility for the continuing ministry through the power to ordain and confirm.
3. A priest or presbyter has the specific ministry of pastoral care. (see BCP p. 856)
   1. This ministry includes teaching, preaching, administering the Word of God with the bishop, administering the sacraments of the new covenant, blessing, and declaring pardon in God’s name.
   2. Priests share with bishops and fellow presbyters in overseeing the work of the Church.
4. The deacon has a specific ministry of service. (see BCP p. 856)
   1. This ministry represents Christ and his Church to those in need and interprets those needs to the Church.
   2. The deacon assists the bishop and presbyters in proclaiming the Word of God and administering the sacraments.
5. The outward and visible sign of Holy Orders is the laying on of hands by a bishop.
   1. The sign is a blessing. The bishop signifies the acceptance of the one ordained into a common ministry. The sign confers authority.
   2. Ordination is not a reward for good service but marks the beginning of a specialized ministry.
6. The inward grace of ordination is the abiding power of the Holy Spirit to do the work of the particular order. Ordination does not create competent professionals.
7. The end is neither clericalism, i.e. domination of the Church by clergy, or laicism, i.e. domination of the Church by the laity. Wholeness is each order serving others for the building up of the Body.

RECONCILIATION:

1. This is the sacrament of renewal. (see BCP p. 861)
2. The outward sign is an examination of conscience, confession of sin, and absolution in the name of Christ. The priest may also offer counsel, direction, and comfort.
3. The inward grace is the forgiveness of sin, peace and unity with God and His Church, and the power of the Holy Spirit to amend life.
4. The personal effect of the sacrament is to set us on firm ground for spiritual growth.
5. The apostolic effect is to enable us to take our productive place in the ministry of the Church.

MINISTRY TO THE SICK (UNCTION):

1. This is the sacrament of healing. (see BCP p. 861)
2. The outward sign is prayer appropriate to the needs of the individual. The Laying on of Hands and anointing with oil in the name of the Lord by a bishop or priest is also a sign.
3. The inward grace relieves anxieties restores spiritual strength, and in some cases restores physical health. Confession and absolution provide forgiveness of sin and assurance of God’s mercy and may be a part of unction.
4. The personal effect of the sacrament is placing the whole person into the care of God and receiving comfort and the assurance of God’s care.
5. The apostolic effect is the restoration of health (in varying degrees) in order for us to be effective witnesses to the power and love of God.

MARRIAGE:

1. This is the sacrament of the union between a man and a woman. (see Eph. 5: 31-32) Marriage symbolizes the relationship of Christ to His Church characterized by unity and sacrifice.
2. The outward sign is the mutual consent of the man and woman to live as husband and wife, vows of fidelity with the intention of a life-long union, and the blessing of God by a bishop or priest. (see BCP p. 861)
3. The inward grace is God’s favor and blessing of the union and the wisdom and will to care for each other.
4. The effect is that marriage has a ministry. The more that is given from marriage to Christ’s service, the more joy and meaning can be found in marriage.

NOTE: The Spiritual Advisor may be required to deal with the realities of separation and divorce. It may also be appropriate to speak to those who choose to remain single.

THE EUCHARIST:

1. This is the sacrament of unity: unity with Christ in His body and blood; unity with God through the self-offering of Christ; unity with Christ’s body the Church; unity with ourselves growing into the life of grace.
2. The outward sign is the bread and wine given and received according to Christ’s institution. The sacrament is received in harmony with others, with openness to the Word of God, with response to prayer and action, offering our souls and bodies to God.
3. The inward grace is the Body and Blood of Christ given to his people and received by faith.
4. The personal effect is living and giving thanks and praise to God for the wonder of His grace.
   1. It is a joyous encounter with the Risen Lord on a continuing basis.
   2. It is the opportunity to offer ourselves anew for the work of Christ.
   3. The new covenant unlike the old covenant set in stone is set in love and mercy and inscribed on our hearts. (Ezek. 36:26; 2 Cor 3:3)
   4. The effect of the Eucharist is the forgiveness of sins, strengthening our union with Christ and one another.
   5. This is a foretaste of the Kingdom.
5. The effect is the empowerment of the body of Christ in the world, and witnessing the Good News of God’s love.

CONCLUSION:

1. Through the sacraments of Christ, we become living sacraments.
2. We are the living presence of Christ in and for the sake of the world He loves and seeks to redeem.

COMMENTARY:

1. In some communities a Eucharist will follow this talk. This may be an opportunity to say some additional words. This should not, however, be an instructed Eucharist.
2. The Spiritual Advisor needs to be aware that this is not a confirmation class. Many of the participants may already be aware of what is included in the talk and it will be a refresher.
3. The focus of the talk is to have participants come to an understanding what it means to be sacramental.