

Report of the Commission on Christian Worship

The commission met in person on February 21–23, 2022, in Orlando, Florida. It was the first in-person meeting in over two years. During the meeting, the commission looked forward and back in regard to the worship of the Reformed Church in America (RCA), considering resources for Spanish speaking congregations, the organization of past liturgies, guidelines for communion, worship at General Synod, assignments from General Synod 2021, and a lost order from 2000.

Worship in Hispanic Congregations

The Commission on Christian Worship (CCW) seeks to be welcoming and supportive of the many Spanish-speaking congregations becoming part of the RCA. Reaching out to the Council for Hispanic Ministries and to Hispanic church planters, the commission took initial steps to see how we can grow supportive relationships in this area. We look forward to deepening ties as we move forward.

As a resource for use throughout the RCA, the commission makes the following commendation:

Santo, Santo, Santo/Holy, Holy, Holy: A Bilingual Hymnal is an excellent resource for RCA congregations who are answering the call to integrate Spanish- and English-speaking peoples together in worship. The Commission on Christian Worship has reviewed and commends this unique hymnbook to all RCA congregations. The development and publication of *Santo, Santo, Santo* was under the direction of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, proven curators of hymns and praise songs familiar in most RCA settings with careful consideration given to the theology of the texts. This hymnbook offers a balanced blend of old and new, as well as the incorporation of songs composed in English and translated to Spanish, as well as vice versa. In some cases, the authors have produced original, modern translations of traditional Spanish songs that are rarely, if ever, made available to an English-speaking audience. The layout of the songs utilizes both languages seamlessly and efficiently for a user-friendly experience, and this resource is available to churches at an extremely affordable rate. To discover more about this hymnbook and accompanying resources, see worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/santo-santo-santo-holy-holy-holy-a-bilingual-hymnal.

Availability of RCA Liturgies

In fulfillment of our responsibility to “...disseminate worship resources for church and personal use” (*Book of Church Order*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 11b(2) [2021 edition, p. 120]), the CCW has worked in the past year to extensively revise and reorganize the liturgy pages and resources on the RCA website. Congregational leaders are encouraged to go to www.rca.org/liturgy to find all current orders of The Liturgy, as well as additional liturgies, the *Directory for Worship*, and a treasury of prayers. As of April 2022, the “Liturgy of the RCA” webpages now largely align with *Worship the Lord*, with the addition of orders that have been approved by General Synod (and ratified by classes, where required) since the 2005 publication of that print resource.

A significant accomplishment of the rebuilding of the “Liturgy of the RCA” webpages has been the vast improvement of the Spanish language resources (see the “Looking for liturgy in Spanish?” link). Those resources are now available (as fully as possible) in the same accessible formatting as the English language resources.

Recognizing that the electronic resourcing and accuracy of The Liturgy and of worship resources is essential for the churches, the CCW commits itself to the ongoing monitoring of our worship resources on www.rca.org. That commitment includes work to provide liturgies in Korean and Mandarin.

The Lost Order

As the CCW researched the *Minutes of the General Synod (MGS)* over the past decades to assure the accuracy of our orders, one order that our commission failed to see through to completion was discovered. The “Order for the Organization of a New Church” was approved by General Synod 2000 (*MGS 2000*, R-41, p. 227) for a three-year period of study and provisional use. In the CCW transitions of the following years, any looping back for final approval was forgotten. A search of the relevant minutes of the commission shows no feedback over the past two decades. In consultation with RCA Church Multiplication, the CCW has learned that the order as approved in 2000 is not well suited in style to the current needs of organizing congregations. CCW commits to working with Church Multiplication to provide a resource that meets the needs of new congregations and the RCA as a whole.

General Synod 2021 Request for a Liturgy of Lament

The most recent General Synod adopted recommendation CA 21-3 (*MGS 2021*, CA 21-3, p. 204):

To instruct the general secretary, in consultation with the Commission on Race and Ethnicity, the Commission on Christian Action, the Commission on History, and the Commission on Christian Worship, to craft a Liturgy of Lament for use by RCA congregations relating to the specific roles the RCA has played in oppression of Black, Brown, and Indigenous people of North America, from our earliest days on the Lenape land our church forebears called New Amsterdam, to our members’ involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, to present day issues of injustice and indifference.

At the request of the general secretary, the CCW has taken up this work. The goal is to create a liturgy of lament that can be used as a special service throughout the RCA. This requires research, consideration, adaptation, coordination, and seeking of God, which could not fit into the time for the liturgy to be ready to present at General Synod 2022. The CCW looks forward to guiding this process with the general secretary. If anyone has resources that they believe would be helpful for this Liturgy of Lament, please reach out to CCW member Rev. Kent Frens (kent@tccrca.org) or staff member Erika Fleming (efleming@rca.org).

Guidelines for Communion

In February 2020, the Commission on Christian Worship met in person in Phoenix, Arizona. The goal for that meeting was to produce and share with the denomination guidelines to help make the Lord’s Table more welcoming, especially to those with gluten sensitivities or intolerance. One month later, the guidelines for gluten-free communion were no longer a priority due to the pandemic. The questions shifted from: “How can we celebrate the Lord’s Supper gluten free?” to “Is taking the sacrament even possible virtually?” And then, “How do congregations prepare and share the elements in ways that minimize risk of infection?” The commission decided it was best to wait on releasing these guidelines.

Now, in spring 2022, as congregations return to worship in person and celebrate the Lord's Supper together again, the Commission on Christian Worship commends to the General Synod these guidelines for celebrating the sacrament gluten free. These guidelines are meant to help congregations discover how they might welcome people with gluten intolerances to the table.

THAT ALL MAY COME GLUTEN-FREE GUIDELINES FOR COMMUNION IN THE RCA

The Liturgy for the Lord's Supper invites us to the table with these familiar words: ***"Come, for all things are now ready."***¹

The day before his death, Jesus commanded his disciples to get things ready for the Passover Meal.² At that meal, Jesus instituted what we now celebrate in the Lord's Supper.³ Preparations for this sacrament are an essential element for the feast. These preparations should consider the people in our churches who endure a variety of food allergies, including gluten intolerance.

The real presence and real partaking of Christ is experienced in our simple actions: sharing food and drink, remembering Christ's sacrifice, experiencing oneness in and with Christ, and renewing our hope in the promised kingdom of God.⁴ "It is in the act of eating and drinking that Christ feeds us with his presence through the power of the Holy Spirit."⁵ The meaning of the sacrament and communion with Christ and others is more important than the physical elements.⁶ Because of this, wine may be grape juice, and bread does not necessarily have to be made out of wheat.

The Lord's Table is where God meets the church in the person of Jesus Christ and sacramentally binds us together as the body of Christ. The following guidelines are provided to aid the elders in communion preparations and to increase awareness and sensitivity to the need for full inclusion. Bread preparations that include options for people with gluten intolerance (or other allergies) ensure that all may join in the joyful feast of our Lord.

Full Inclusion

The best practice for full inclusion of all those with gluten intolerance is to provide only gluten-free elements at the Lord's Table. Some people have a variety of gluten-related health issues, including celiac disease, wheat allergy, and non-celiac gluten sensitivity (NCGS). These medically recognized intolerances and sensitivities have created a barrier to full communion in the body of Christ. Utilizing only gluten-free bread or wafers at the table ensures that all are welcome.

Individual Service

The individual service option addresses cross-contamination concerns by maintaining strict safety guidelines regarding the separation of gluten and gluten-free breads. Providing separate gluten-free stations or plates allows for the participation of all people at the table. While this may be a practical option for most congregations, it will call attention to people with gluten intolerance. Furthermore, this separates the congregation from sharing the common loaf.

Alongside

In some ministry contexts, it may be possible to serve communion with a gluten-free option alongside wheat-based bread. Providing a gluten-free option alongside can be done in a variety of ways depending on the traditions of the congregation. In serving alongside and allowing people to partake together, cross-contamination becomes a concern for people with severe intolerance. This option excludes people from freely coming to the table.

Guidelines

General Considerations

- Where to find gluten-free breads and wafers:
 - Search the internet for gluten free bread or wafers (e.g., “gluten free bread near me”).
 - Communicate with people who regularly purchase gluten free products.
- Gluten-free bread or wafers used for communion should be labeled as: “no gluten,” “gluten-free,” “free of gluten,” or “without gluten.”⁷
- Local bakeries should ensure that the gluten-free bread was prepared separately from regular wheat breads and pastries.
- Gluten-free does not guarantee allergen free.
- Create an environment where people feel free to share their allergy concerns with the leadership of the congregation and with one another.⁸

Full Inclusion Practical Guidelines

- Gluten-free communion requires thorough cleansing of the preparation area, the communionware, linens, and the utensils used for preparing communion.
- Those preparing communion must wash their hands thoroughly.⁹
- To avoid cross-contamination, wheat products must not be present.

Individual Service Practical Guidelines

- Serving by intinction
 - Have a separate gluten-free station using the practical guidelines for full inclusion (above). This station should include both the gluten-free option and the cup.
 - Be clear when inviting worshipers to the table which station is gluten free.
- Serving when trays and plates are passed
 - Keep a separate plate only used for gluten-free bread that is prepared using the practical guidelines for full inclusion (above).
 - Designate a server for the gluten-free option. This person should only handle the gluten-free plate.
 - Be clear when inviting worshipers to the table which server has the gluten-free option and how worshipers should indicate they require gluten-free elements.

Alongside Practical Guidelines

- Gluten-free bread or wafers may be offered alongside their wheat equivalent.
- To limit cross-contamination, separately prepare gluten-free and wheat products.

- Gluten-free and wheat breads should be separated when transporting to the table and during the service. This may be two separate plates, a dish on a tray, or a napkin on a plate.
- If people are invited forward for intinction, the bread server may hold both options, allowing the individual to choose.
- Be clear when inviting worshipers to the table that elements are not free from cross-contamination.

A resource from the RCA Commission on Christian Worship

Endnotes

1. RCA Liturgy for the Order for the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper (1968)
2. Matthew 27:17-19; Luke 22:7-13; Mark 14:12-16
3. Matthew 27:26; Luke 22:19; Mark 14:22
4. Belhar Confession, Clause 2; Belgic Confession, Article 35
5. Gregg Mast, *In Remembrance and Hope* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998): 24.
6. Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 79
7. <https://www.fda.gov/food/food-labeling-nutrition/gluten-free-labeling-foods>
8. RCA *Book of Church Order* Chapter 1, Part I, Article 5, Section 3b (2021 edition, p. 22)
9. https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/safe-food-handling/keep-food-safe-food-safety-basics/ct_index

CW 22-1

To commend “That All May Come,” guidelines for gluten-free communion developed by the Commission on Christian Worship, to RCA congregations, assemblies, institutions, and any other RCA body that arranges the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, and to make these guidelines available on the RCA website.

General Synod Worship

The commission continued to refine guidelines that can help shape and form worship together at General Synod. These guidelines seek to recognize the unique nature of General Synod worship as we gather together from across the continent, from a wide variety of styles and cultural backgrounds, and, together in our work, seek the will of God. Worship at General Synod should be hospitable, varied, authentic, and to the glory of God. The challenge is to forge many “I” voices into a common and authentic “We”—to become, by the grace of God, the body of Christ, assembled to listen to God’s Word, to discern God’s will for fulfilling our ongoing mission, and to pray for the lost and broken world God loves so much. It is a joy for the CCW to work with the president and vice president of General Synod on worship that brings many voices together in worship.

Thank You

The commission expresses deep gratitude to Rev. Dennis TeBeest, whose term on the Commission on Christian Worship is ending. He has provided deep institutional knowledge in the area of RCA worship and this commission, a heart for the liturgies of the RCA, and a passion for having things done decently and in order. It was Dennis who went back through more than 20 years of General Synod minutes, finding lost orders, tracking which liturgies had been approved and when, and seeing what others might have missed. This type of work has

blessed the commission and made it better. Dennis will be missed on this commission. God's blessing for our fellow servant of Christ. The commission has also been blessed by the assignment of General Synod Council (GSC) staff person Erika Fleming. She is a great addition to our work, and we are thankful for her support.