

EXPLORING OUR FAITH

A Walk Through the Sunday Service

Session 24 – The Eucharistic Action, Step 4: Sharing and Sending

This is an installment in a series, adapted from notes in the Sunday bulletins at St. Andrew's, that is exploring our Sunday worship. What we do. How and why we do it. History, theology, the way worship connects us with the mystery of God in Jesus Christ. Questions and comments are welcome.

A young priest in Northern Michigan. William Wiedrich was a newly ordained priest assigned to lead a struggling parish in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. He despaired of his dwindling, elderly, inward-looking congregation. One snowy Sunday morning as he made his way through the dark streets of town to get his church open and warm for services, he had an idea. It was crazy, but he couldn't get it out of his mind as he neared the church building. He knew he should check it with his bishop, but it was way too early to bother that authority. So Wiedrich decided just to go ahead.

As his congregation came forward to receive the Bread of Communion, he told them that he would give each person two hosts. One was for them to consume in the usual way. The other they were to take with them from church and give to the first person they met: the clerk at the supermarket, the kid filling their gas tank, a neighbor, a friend dropping by to watch football on TV. Give it to that person, tell them what it was – the Body of Christ, and tell them where they got it and what it meant.

In Wiedrich's recounting, a number of parishioners did just that – and more and more followed suit when their young priest repeated this action on successive Sundays. Word got around town about the crazy church where new things were happening. People began "just happening by" as church let out, in hopes that they would receive one of the "extra" hosts. The struggling parish began to come to life.

Sharing and Sending: Step 4 in the Eucharistic action. Today we reach the last of the four steps that comprise the Eucharistic Action. In Step 1, Jesus takes our lives, symbolized in the bread and wine brought to the Altar. In Step 2, the bread and wine are blessed and offered, and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit is invoked; bread and wine become Christ's Body and Blood. In Step 3, the Bread is broken and the Wine outpoured as Christ died upon the Cross. Now in Step 4, the Body and Blood are shared with us and we are sent forth, transformed ourselves into Christ's Body, to share this gift of God with the world.

Something happens. Looking back over these steps, we realize that Holy Communion is an action. It involves bread and wine; it also involves us. It transforms. It unites – us to God in Christ; us to one another in shared Bread and Cup; us to the world into which we are sent.

In this series of bulletin cover notes we are moving through the steps of the Sunday Eucharist. You can find past notes archived on the parish website. Each week in the 9:00 class we dig deeper into the week's subject, exploring further what we are learning.