



EUCCHARIST CHURCH

December 1, 2016 Anno Domini (year of our Lord)
Feast of the prophet Nahum

What if day-to-day life was actually a lot more meaningful, interconnected, sacred, and mysterious than you currently realize? What if the time you spent in menial activities and working for a living wasn't merely a distraction from following Christ but, instead, a means toward it? What if *all of life* became a means toward knowing and loving God?

Our church motto captures this hope: *all of life in reference to Christ*

Most of us would agree: it doesn't work to merely follow Jesus on the weekend or here and there. If Jesus isn't Lord over our bodies, our finances, our work, our entertainment, our desires, our relationships... then He's not much of a Lord.

But how, practically speaking, can He be Lord of all aspects of our life?

That's the question we're asking this next year. Welcome to the ***Year of Sacramental Living***. We're devoting a year to intentionally learning to live *all of life in reference to Christ*. Is a year enough? Clearly not. But it's a good place to start. Our hope is that it will be the onramp to an entire life lived in reference to Christ.

The meaning of the term *sacramental* is the key to the journey we're about to embark on. We are convinced that it's the key that unlocks the possibility of living *all of life in reference to Christ*. It also has the potential to revolutionize our understanding of what we're doing as a church, our understanding of how mission works, and much more. The term "sacrament" comes from a Greek word meaning "mystery" which tells us that we're dealing with something beyond ideas, theories, and human categories. We're talking about profound love—love deep enough to cause God to enter into human flesh and dwell among us.

As a pastoral team and staff, we've been praying and planning for this upcoming year since our retreat in August. Our hope and prayer is that each person involved in the life of Eucharist Church this coming year will experience deep and abiding transformation as we sojourn together being formed more deeply into the Body of Christ.

Are you ready? I couldn't be more excited about it. Let's do this together!

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Ryan+', written in a cursive style.

Ryan+
Rector

The Year of Sacramental Living *What are we going to be doing this year?*

Our first step: Telling time in reference to Jesus

You should have received a calendar with this letter. It's Eucharist Church's gift to you! The calendar gives you the Christian Calendar in one place. It tells you the major Christian holidays, it gives you the minor feasts, and gives you a list of saints each day to remind you that we stand on the shoulders of many generations of faithful people who have come before us.

What are you supposed to do with the calendar?

- Put it somewhere where you can look at it daily as you stop for prayer. Thank God for the lives of the saints listed on each day (feel free to look their stories up online). Notice how many opportunities there are for feasting and fasting. What would your life look like if it was structured around the Christian Calendar? We're going to lean into a number of the feasts this coming year as a church. Part of our goal is to learn how to celebrate together!
- Mark the major holidays and feasts into your personal calendar / outlook so that you are reminded about them and can plan accordingly. For example, plan now to take a vacation day on *Good Friday*; be sure to get off of work early so that you can participate fully in *Ash Wednesday*. Plan to lean into the feasts/fasts and holidays of the Church year. Overall, this calendar exists to remind us that we inhabit a unique story centered around Christ and that we're not doing this alone but with millions of others who follow Christ.

Here are some of our big picture plans and goals for the Year of Sacramental Living and for Eucharist Church over the coming months:

- **A Sunday morning time for Spiritual Formation | Catechesis: 9:00-9:45 am each Sunday** (starting in January) - Catechesis (instruction) is for everyone. We all need it - baptized and unbaptized. We'll provide children's catechesis as well as adult catechesis (at the same time in two different spaces). The teaching and formation that transpires at 9am each Sunday will be an essential part of our year of sacramental living. It will take some effort to get yourself to church at 9am, but the fruit borne out of this will be worth it. What if you committed to try it for a year?
- **A growing network of neighborhood based "Table Groups"** (formerly known as Community Groups) - The goal of these Table Groups will be fellowship and prayer. Each group will meet for a meal, spend time sharing personally and spiritually, and engage in evening prayer together. These groups will not be focused too much on information or teaching. Instead, they will be focused on relationships - being places for practicing Christian love and Christian hospitality to those seeking.
- **High quality "Front Porch" events (at least quarterly)** - These are events intended to give us an opportunity to invite curious friends, coworkers, and neighbors who do not know Jesus into a setting that is appropriate for seekers in order to make relational connections and experience a taste of the Good News. Last year's examples: *The Spirituality of Wine*, *The Hospitality of Tea*. We'll also offer smaller, simpler events that will function similarly on a more monthly basis as much as we are able.
- **A Summer Camping Adventure** - We are planning a highly experiential and relational opportunity to lean into the meaning of "sacramental" together as a community. It will involve camping, a lot of time in leisure together, a sense of camaraderie, prayer, and more. It promises to be an adventure! *Details forthcoming...*
- **Retreats, art classes, service opportunities, podcasts, book discussions, and more...**

Overall, if we are doing things right we will love God more than ever before as we're learning to celebrate our life together in Christ. We'll practice thanksgiving, give and serve generously, grow deeper relationships, proclaim the gospel to our neighbors in word and deed, extend healing and compassion to the broken world around us, and increasingly see creation as transparent to the glory of God.

Eucharist Church and its development process

Background to the Year of Sacramental Living

Beginning a year ago back in the fall of 2015, we began our journey by laying out a year devoted to the process of establishing a local communion (church) — a community of baptized believers with a common life centered around a weekly Eucharist. Theologically speaking, it's the Eucharist (Holy Communion) that forms and renews us as individuals regularly into the Body of Christ. So this was the essential foundation for us.

Fast-forward... This past year has been a fruitful year. We've seen our regular group of active folks triple in size, we've added key staff, we've begun weekly full worship services, we've established a congregational council, we've begun ministries and offered outreach opportunities and much, much more. All praise and glory to God for bringing us to where we are today!

Going Forward: The next step for our church, beginning now and heading into 2017, involves receiving, embodying, and extending this *Eucharistic life* into all areas of life. To do this we must begin to think and act in a truly incarnational way. That's what being "sacramental" is all about. To be sacramental is to be incarnational. *We'll be learning a lot about this together over the coming months.*

Some theology to start chewing on — why we must take a collective approach:

The goal of receiving the weekly Eucharist (Holy Communion) is not merely to have a small moment of individual piety on a Sunday morning (though receiving Communion can and should be a profoundly personal experience—knowing we are loved with indescribable love in and through Christ). The goal of Communion is to be formed together into the distinctive people of God, the temple of the Holy Spirit, those preparing to be eternally adopted into God's household through Jesus Christ. It's a necessarily communal act.

To put it as clearly as possible, the goal of receiving the Body and Blood of Jesus is to be regularly and repeatedly re-membered/bound together into the very Body of Christ. As such we are called, empowered, and sent into the world in order to extend/prolong the Incarnation of Christ. Yes, you read that correctly... WE are the visible, tangible extension of Jesus' earthly ministry. The point of Jesus ascending to the Father was that the Father might make Him "*the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all*" (Ephesians 1:22-23). With Jesus as the Head, we continue His work as His hands, feet, arms, ears, and mouth.

Perhaps this puts some stuff in perspective for you. When I first started to grasp the implications of this (only a few years ago), I could barely believe it. It knocked my socks off! The Church matters A LOT to God.

We *gather* on Sundays to be re-formed into the Body of Christ in order that we might be *scattered* throughout the week as bread *blessed, broken, and offered for the life of the world*. But it can't stop there. We must be brought back together—*gathered* this time with the wounded, the weak, and the spiritually hungry with us, coming to sit at Jesus' feet, where we who are baptized are once again re-membered into Christ's Body - renewed with the life of Christ through His Holy Spirit. **This is the breathing pattern of the Body of Christ.** To cease to participate in either part of the pattern (being gathered / being scattered) is to risk spiritual sickness and potentially death, as is the case when human bodies stop respiration.

The idea that we would be entrusted with this kind of responsibility is totally crazy. But that's what the scriptures teach and what the Church has always believed. This means that our life together is anything but insignificant! It is nothing less than a mysterious participation in the very life of God (II Peter 1:4). "*For this very reason, you must make every effort to support your faith with goodness, and goodness with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with godliness, and godliness with mutual affection, and mutual affection with love. For if these things are yours and are increasing among you, they keep you from being ineffective and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" II Peter (1:5-8)