

## *What is a Sacrament?*

Sacrament: from Latin, sacer + mentum (making sacred, consecrating);  
used to translate the Greek, mysterion: mystery,  
an action or ritual participation in divine life.

### Sacraments

- embody how we belong to God and one another (Romans 14:7-8).
- set forth God's self-giving love.
- are sign acts, involving physical elements, action, and interpretive words, which express God's self-giving love in Jesus Christ through the Spirit and which express the church's response in faith, hope, and love.
- symbolize and focus our awareness of God's presence in all of life, rather than breaking into an otherwise secular reality.
- use things of ordinary life that become "effective means of God's presence mediated through the created world" (By Water and the Spirit).
- transform human lives and relationships.
- are grounded in the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and presence of Jesus Christ.

### The sacramental

- is both *immanent* (embodied and present in the world we experience) and *transcendent* (opening up for us the mystery of God who is beyond our experience).
- is both *hidden* and *revealed* (opening us up for what is otherwise hidden).
- is both *perceived* (by our senses) and *received* (as being beyond what we ordinarily sense)
- involves both *gift* and *response*
- is a way to talk about "significant, symbolic experiences which open us up to the presence of God in transforming ways"

(summarized from Vogel and Vogel, *Sacramental Living*)

When we say something is sacramental, we are saying that it is an unusually translucent experience which reveals a transcendent and transformative reality which is much deeper beyond it. It is symbolic in the profound sense of that word. So living sacramentally is "being in touch" with sources for spirituality which lie "beyond" or "beneath" or "within" what appears to our senses, for example, the liturgy of the Church.

(adapted from Dwight Vogel, *Food for Pilgrims*, OSL Publications, 2005)

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