

oil to be sealed with his Spirit. In the bread and wine which have become his body and blood the whole Christ enters us to make us one with him. With the words of absolution he forgives our sins.



Oil is used to anoint the sick and dying. The exchange of vows and the bodily consummation that follows make a man and a woman one flesh. Prayer and the laying on of hands ordain a man to act in Christ's own person.

### The Church's Power Over The Sacraments

The sacraments belong to the Church only because they are entrusted to her by Christ. They are her life because Christ is her life. The Church therefore has no power to change the essence of a sacrament though from time to time she may properly change how a sacrament is administered. For example, the Church can permit lay people to distribute Holy Communion; it cannot substitute rice and tea for bread and wine as the sacramental sign of the Eucharist. Nor replace a man by a woman as the sacramental sign of the risen Christ, who remains a man.

### Our Sacramental Lives

The sacraments of baptism, confirmation and holy orders give us the power to share in Jesus' office and mission. They imprint a seal on us. We can only receive them once. But we can only carry out the responsibilities they give us if we participate in Christ's life, death and resurrection. For this we need the other sacraments, above all regular reception of penance and the Eucharist, if we are truly to put on Christ.



## Diocesan Liturgical Commission Christchurch

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To: Priests and Pastoral Assistants  
Parish Liturgy Committees  
Parish Councils  
Directors of Religious Studies  
Religious Houses  
Principals - Catholic Schools  
**All Parishioners**



### GOD'S MASTERPIECES THE SEVEN SACRAMENTS OF THE CHURCH

The sacraments of the Church are its lifeblood. They exist to make present the Word she preaches. They are mysteries of faith. Like all the mysteries God has revealed to us, they are not puzzles to confuse us or problems to be solved. They are realities so profound that we can only begin to grasp them with faith and love and we need to go on pondering over them always.

### Why "God's Masterpieces"?

Human beings are the crown of God's original, marvellous creation – creatures made in his own image, capable of knowing him and loving him and delighting in the works of his hands, even capable of using what he has given us to go on creating in our turn. When we turned away from him and opened ourselves to sin and suffering, he sent his son to become one of us and redeem us. With the birth of Christ, the Creator of all that *is* entered the world he had made in a new way, and began the work of transforming it into a **new creation**. Christ's power to bring this about, won by his death and resurrection, passes from him into the sacraments of the Church, the Church that was born from his side on the Cross. As Pope St Leo the Great put it, "The visible presence of our Redeemer passed over into the sacraments."

The sacraments **belong** to the Church. They are Christ's gift to his Church. It is in and through them that the risen Christ fulfils his promise to be with us always. God is and always has been present throughout his creation, holding it in being, loving all his people. His Spirit blows where it wills. But in the sacraments of the Church Christ is present and active in our lives through the power of his Spirit in a new and unique way that **does not exist outside the Church**. They are the **means** by which we are made into the new creation. This is why they have been called "God's masterpieces".

### The Sacraments and the "Real" World

We think of our everyday world, its wonders and horrors, its marvellous knowledge explosion and "miraculous" technology, as reality. And so it is, real enough. But it is not the whole of reality. It does not encompass God's reality. We and all creation are encompassed in his reality. In the sacraments God uses material things and words to become fully present to us here and now, to enter into our lives at specific moments and in specific ways, to effect direct entry into our ordinary reality in order to catch us up into his divine reality.

### The Sacraments and our Faith

The sacraments are divine actions. We did not invent them. They are the fullest actualisation of God's longing for communion with his people, the means by which the risen Christ continues to dwell amongst us. His real presence under the appearances of bread and wine in the Eucharist, and his actions in the other sacraments, exist objectively, independently of whether we believe in them or not.

At the same time, we have free will. Christ does not impose his grace on us. **The sacraments are encounters with a living person**. How we prepare for them, how we allow them to affect our lives, will determine how effective and fruitful these encounters are for us. We must have faith to engage in them.



To put this another way – our faith is necessary for us to believe in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist but it is not necessary to bring this presence about, it does not cause it. That happens through the power of the Spirit acting in his Church, and in the case of the Eucharist, for example, through the sacramental power given to the priest, who, as John Paul 11 says, lends Christ his mouth to utter the words "This is my body...".

### Sacraments and Holiness

In the sacraments, the saving actions of Christ are made available to each of us. They are the signs and **instruments** by which the Holy Spirit dispenses the mystery of our salvation. (CCC 1111). They bring about the effect they signify. They are "powers that come forth" from the body of Christ, which is ever-living and ever life giving. Through them, Christ enters our lives to draw us into a loving relationship with him by the power of his Spirit and thus into the life of the Trinity. This is grace, God's gift, which justifies, elevates and empowers the soul for a new life and equips it for truly supernatural activity. Because they are divine actions, they do not depend for their efficacy on the holiness of the minister. Nor do we need to have attained holiness to receive them, only to want to grow in it. God, who knows of what we are made, does not allow the factual immediacy of his sacramental presence to us to be conditioned by our sinfulness.

### Why Does Christ's Sacramental Presence Need Material Signs?

Our bodies are intrinsic to who we are. We can only give and receive love through visible, material signs and words and bodily actions. The risen Christ is not at present visible to us in his glorified body. **But we are still what he once was**. To continue to act with his saving healing love among us he uses the material signs we need. So he baptises us with water and words to let us share his life in the Church, and anoints us with