

CHAPTER 9

The Peace

The people and presiding priest exchange the Peace

The Peace forms the hinge between the Ministry of the Word and Prayer (which we have inherited from the Synagogue), and the Ministry of the Sacrament (which we have inherited from Jesus and through him from the meals celebrated in Jewish homes). It is found at this point of the service in the earliest liturgies.

A sign of peace can act out our love for our brother and sister (1 John 4:20) and the peace we wish to make before we present our gift at the altar (Matthew 5:23-24). It is especially a sharing of the peace given by the risen Christ (John 20:19,21,26).

With hands extended wide the presider says, "The peace of Christ be always with you." On occasion an introductory sentence might link the Peace to the celebration of the day. Another option is to slightly adapt the words to the occasion. For example, during the Easter Season, the greeting could be, "The Peace of the Risen Christ be always with you."

The people's response can be followed by "Let us offer one another a sign of (this/Christ's) Peace." Giving specific instructions on what form this "sign" should take is best avoided. For some this is an important moment of human contact in the midst of a lonely week. For others physical contact may be threatening rather than speaking of Christ's peace.

Teaching which encourages sensitivity is appropriate. The Peace is part of worship, it is a liturgical action. To seek out our friends and ignore the stranger or visitor or the one with whom we really need to seek reconciliation is to miss the point of the Peace. The Peace anticipates the coming kingdom, it is not a foretaste of the morning tea after church! To put this in another way, it is the Peace which should shape the atmosphere of morning tea after church, rather than the atmosphere of an ordinary New Zealand morning tea being that which shapes the way we relate at the Peace.

The period of the Peace can be ended either by using the sentences "E te whanau, we are the body of Christ ..." (page 419), or by beginning a hymn, or by beginning to prepare the table.

Some Questions

In what ways is the sense of community in your church different from the community life at the time of "the Book of Common Prayer"?

How might the sign of peace help create community?

Where are the weaknesses in this area in your context?

How do you respond to the author's highlighting that for some the sign of peace is an "important moment of human contact" while for others "physical contact may be threatening"?