

# Introduction

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The four services presented here reflect the belief of the Reformers that the service of Word and Sacrament is the normative service of the church – as we read in Acts 2:42, ‘They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.’

John Calvin maintained that any time the church came together to meet it should involve the reading of scripture, preaching and the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. This should be done at least every Sunday.

For reasons of history, the predecessor denominations of the United Reformed Church (except for the Churches of Christ) have never been, or felt, able to do this. However, they never lost sight of the centrality of the service of Word and Sacrament, and even when the Lord’s Supper has not been celebrated we still look to that service to provide us with an order for our worship of God.

The first two services have been written especially for this book, and both contain a wealth of new material. The first order of Holy Communion provides a full order of worship for a service of Word and Sacrament with the use of many of the liturgical items found in *Rejoice and Sing*. The language draws on a very rich range of biblical imagery, especially from the Old Testament. Within the service the narrative of the institution (1 Corinthians 11:23-26) may be used as a warrant before the thanksgiving prayer or included within it. While the former position is traditionally Reformed, both practices are ecumenically acceptable.

A greater degree of participation by the congregation is allowed for, both in the responses and in physical movement.

The service may either be used as it stands or it may be shortened by the omission of some of the suggested items.

The second order of Holy Communion is one that is especially suitable when there is a broader range of ages present in the congregation and a less formal service is desired. The language is simpler and more direct, and the congregational responses can be made by the repetition of phrases.

The third order of Holy Communion is taken from the 1989 *Service Book* and continues the liturgical heritage of the Churches of Christ in our midst. The most noticeable variation from the other services is the way in which the thanksgiving may be divided so that thanks is given over the bread and it is shared, and then a thanksgiving over the wine before it is shared. This reflects the early tradition according to which, at the Last Supper, Jesus said separate prayers over the bread and the wine.

The fourth order of Holy Communion is perhaps the most historic of the four services for the United Reformed Church. Usually thought of as the order from *New Church Praise*, it had appeared shortly before that, being produced at the request of the first United Reformed Church General Assembly in 1973. Primarily the work of James Todd, it drew on material from both the Presbyterian and Congregational churches, and ecumenically from the Joint Liturgical Group of Great Britain. Much of the material used in it can be found at the front of *Rejoice and Sing*, and the first section of thanksgiving prayer can be varied to reflect the different seasons and festivals of the church year.