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Celebrating the Lord's Day

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Introduction

New covenant people should celebrate the Lord's Day every week. Many still do and know how to do so. Those, however, who live in societies with a high degree of technological development have often lost the ability to set the day aside to honor the Lord. They usually still attend church services on Sunday, but they do not do anything at home, the place they live most of their lives. This booklet provides a help to do that.

The booklet contains two ceremonies for a household opening and closing of the Lord's Day. They are based on the practices of the Jewish people that the Jesus and his disciples as well as the earliest Christians probably followed. In addition, there are explanations of the ceremonies, instruction on how to celebrate, and some historical background.

This booklet is a guide for those who wish to lead Lord's Day ceremonies. It contains a copy of the ceremonies at the end. The ceremonies are also available with simplified directions in a separate booklet for use by all the participants.

Celebrating the Lord's Day

In the book of Nehemiah, there is a passage which is puzzling to many people today. The people of Israel had come back from exile and were in the process of rebuilding. They first rebuilt the temple, then the city walls. Then they gathered together to hear the “book of the law of Moses which the Lord had given to Israel”. In so doing, they began to rebuild their way of life, the way of life God had given them. As the book was being read, the people began to weep.

And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, “This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep.” For all the people wept when they heard the word of the law. Then he said to them, “Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to him for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.” (Neh 8:9–10)

The response of the people is puzzling to us because we have lost an understanding of celebration (and of mourning as well). The people described in the passage had just heard and understood the words of the law, and they had discovered that they were not keeping them. They began to mourn out of repentance when Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites told the people not to. They said that the people should rejoice because the day was holy to the Lord. They probably said that because it was the first day of the seventh month, “the feast of trumpets” (cf. Lev 23:23–25; Num 29:1–6), and they were not celebrating as the law said they should. In response the people began to celebrate.

This passage illustrates some important truths for us. It shows, first of all, that joy or rejoicing is more than feeling happy. When the Levites told the people

to rejoice, they meant they should hold a feast. They told them, in other words, to celebrate. Rejoicing (or joy) for the Israelites was something they did not just something they felt. In scriptural language “to rejoice” often means to celebrate, to express the goodness of an occasion in a joyful way. We can see this also in the book of Deuteronomy when it instructs the people to keep the great feasts like Passover, Weeks, and Tabernacles. It tells them to come to Jerusalem, make an offering, and “rejoice before the Lord your God” (16:11), that is, to celebrate in God’s presence.

First of all we celebrate certain days or events because it is good and right to do so. It would not have been right for the Israelites to mourn on a festive day. Moreover, we celebrate because celebrating is a way of honoring God. Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites told the people that the day was “holy to the Lord your God.” That meant that it was his in a special way and should be set apart (holy) to honor him. The people therefore, were supposed to celebrate in order to honor the Lord. Finally, we celebrate as an expression of gratitude for the good things God has done for us. It is only appropriate, “fitting and right” to thank the Lord our God for his great goodness to us.

Celebrating is also a great benefit to us. “The joy of the Lord [rejoicing in the Lord] is our strength.” When we celebrate God’s goodness and what he has done for us, we are strengthened and refreshed. Our God is a God who wishes to share his joy (and his strength) with us when we worship him. To be sure, sometimes we should worship him soberly, humbling ourselves in repentance and mourning. But the main times of worship under the old covenant and the new covenant are times of celebration—times of rejoicing in God’s presence. The Lord’s day is one of these.

We can see in the Scripture indications that the early Christians observed the Lord’s Day. John, in the book of Revelation, says, “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day” (1:10). Likewise we read of Paul gathering with the Christians at Troas on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7) and also instructing the Christians at Corinth to set aside contributions for the community at Jerusalem on the first day of the week (1 Cor 16:2). The day we call Sunday in English, the first day of the week and the Lord’s Day, seems to have been a special day for the first Christians and was used as a day for gathering together. Probably it was the day of assembly because it commemorated the resurrection of the Lord which had occurred on Sunday.

The earliest writings from within a hundred years of the death of the last apostle indicate even more clearly the way the Christians marked Sunday. Some of

these writings explain their understanding of the meaning of the Lord's day. It was:

- *the celebration of resurrection*: Ignatius of Antioch, writing within twenty years of the death of the apostle John, said,
Let every friend of Christ keep the Lord's day as a festival, the resurrection day, the queen and chief of all days of the week and the day on which our life sprang up again and victory over death was obtained in Christ. *(To the Magnesians, 9)*
- *the celebration of creation and the new creation*: Justin Martyr, a convert who was born and raised near Jacob's well, writing about forty years later, said,
But Sunday is the day on which we hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ, our savior, on the same day rose from the dead. *(First Apology, 67.)*
- *The celebration of the beginning of the age to come*: *The Epistle of Barnabas* (section 15), written about the time Ignatius wrote, says,
I will make a beginning of the eighth day, that is, the beginning of another world. Wherefore, also we keep the eighth day with joyfulness, the day on which Jesus rose again from the dead.

Since Sunday was the day after the seventh day, it was the eighth day as well as the first day. Because the seven days symbolized God's original creation of the world, the eighth day can be seen as the beginning of the new creation, the world to come. In the New Testament the number eight seems to have been seen as a symbol of the new creation (cf. 1 Pet 3:20; 2 Pet 2:5). The early Christians knew that they were participating through the Spirit in the age to come and prayed on the Lord's Day that Jesus might come and bring in the new age completely: "Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev 22:20)

Sunday, then, is the weekly celebration of the Christian people. It is the day on which they gather together to celebrate the resurrection, the completion of the work of redemption, the day on which the new creation was inaugurated and therefore the day on which the age to come was opened to the human race. It is the day on which the true sun of righteousness rose with healing in his rays (Mal 4:2). Just as Easter is the major yearly celebration for Christians so Sunday is the weekly celebration for Christians. It is a day to rejoice in our hope (Rom 12:12)

The celebration of the Lord's Day holds a similar place for Christians to the one the celebration of the Sabbath held for Jews. Christians who were not born or circumcised as Jews were not obliged by the New Testament to keep the seventh day (cf. Col 2:16; Gal 4:10). That was the day of celebration for those who were under the Mosaic law. However, Christians since then have usually seen a connection between the Sabbath and the Lord's Day.

Some Christians have said simply that the Lord's Day is the Christian Sabbath. Christians keep the Sabbath commandment on Sunday rather than Saturday and so Sunday is the new covenant Sabbath. Others have said that the Sabbath commandment was given to teach that one day a week should be set aside for the worship of God. Christians keep the commandment, but they do not have to do it on the seventh day. Taking a day of rest and worship is part of God's purpose for the human race and therefore obligatory, but doing it on the seventh day was only obligatory for the Jews. For Christians, it is more fitting to do so on the first day, the day of the resurrection. Finally, other Christians have said that setting aside a day of rest and worship is not obligatory at all, but nonetheless it is very valuable to do, and one of the purposes of the Sabbath commandment is to teach us the value of such a custom. Although these views show some difference regarding the relationship of the observance of the Lord's Day to the Sabbath commandment, almost all Christians see the importance of having such a day and accept the first day of the week, the Lord's Day, as the weekly day of celebration for new covenant people.

There are many truths that Christians have learned from the Sabbath celebration and applied through the centuries. They have, as we have said, learned first of all the value of setting aside one day of the week for the worship of God. Such a custom is a way of honoring God as well as a means of spiritual growth.

Christians have also learned the value of a day of rest. In the scriptural passages about the sabbath, "rest" is not inactivity, but it is a different kind of activity. It is the ceasing from the work by which we support ourselves and maintain our life and instead imitating God in his rest. Just as he finished his work of creation and "stepped back" to appreciate its goodness (Gen 1:31–2:3), so we cease from our work and step back to appreciate what God has done for us during the week, but even more what he has done for us in creating and redeeming us. It is a day of thankfulness to God.

The Lord's Day is therefore a day of gathering together, of prayer and Christian study, of giving alms and doing good (like visiting the sick). It is a day for the Christian community and for the family. It is not so much a "day off," though it is a day off from our ordinary work, but a day in which we do "not go our own ways or seek our own pleasure or talk idly" (Is 58:13), a day to honor God.

Finally, Christians have learned from the Sabbath that the Lord's Day is a time of celebration, a time to "take delight in the Lord." It is a day in which the joy of the Lord, rejoicing in the Lord, can be our strength. Here, especially, modern Christians need to learn something. They need to learn how to celebrate again.

Although once Christians knew how to take a feast day and celebrate, and Christians in many places in the world still do, in most Christians modern life has eroded an understanding of how to keep a feast. For that reason, we can learn again an old truth from the celebration of the Sabbath.

This booklet contains a way of setting aside the Lord's day and making it a family or household celebration. The celebration here does not replace the communal worship service on Sunday any more than the Sabbath meal replaced the temple or synagogue services. Most especially, it is not a celebration of the Lord's Supper or Eucharist. Rather, it is a help for making the whole day a feast day, and doing so by providing a way to open and close the Lord's Day at home, as the Jewish people in New Testament times would have done and probably the early Christians would have as well.

The booklet contains an order for an opening meal to begin the Lord's Day and for a closing meal to conclude it. It is modeled on the Sabbath meals as Jesus and his disciples would probably have celebrated them, but the prayers have been changed to bring out the significance of the Lord's Day. It contains one way of making the Lord's Day a delight and a source of life for the whole Christian people. Those who have made use of it as a means of setting aside a day to celebrate the resurrection of the Lord have discovered that a day specially set apart for the Lord is a day which he blesses with his presence.

Holding a Festive Meal

MEALS LIKE THE THOSE DESCRIBED IN THIS BOOKLET can simply be meals during which we say some prayers or they can be true celebrations, feasts. Most of us have never learned how to hold a festal or celebrative meal. This section of the booklet contains some simple instructions for how to do so. If we follow most of them, something different will happen at our meal. The next section in this booklet describes how Jesus celebrated the Sabbath meal. If, in addition to what will be presented in this section of the booklet, we do many of the things he did, we shall find the ceremony even richer.

The Scripture talks about two truths concerning a feast day. First, the day has to be “made holy”. The verb “make holy” or “hallow” or “sanctify”, when used to speak about periods of time, means “set aside” or “make special.” Therefore, a feast day is a day which has been set aside as a special day. There are, however, many ways days can be set aside as special. Election day, for example, is a special day, set aside for the governmental function of electing new officials. A holy day, however, is a day that has been set aside as special because of God. To be sure, Christians do not have holy days in the same sense Jews did under the old covenant. No days or feasts are essential for our salvation (Col 2:16). On the other hand, the Scripture approved observing some days (Rom 14:5–6).

For Christians, having feast days, then, can be a good custom, a custom, in fact, established officially in most Christian churches. But even more importantly, the ability to make a day special in a good way is something human that is in danger of being lost. We still know, for instance, that a family should set aside a wedding day or a funeral day as a special day, the one for celebrating, the other for mourning. We therefore need to make the Lord’s Day special if we seek to celebrate it.

The second truth is that a feast day is day “observed in honor of the Lord,” to use Paul’s phrase (Rom 14:6). Or we could say, it is a day to give honor to the Lord. “Honor” is another biblical word that we often do not understand. The New Testament noun “honor” can mean “worth.” The verb “to honor” someone or something means to express its worth. We can honor the Lord in various ways. Praise and worship are ways of honoring God. Money offerings can express honor as well (as our word “honorarium” shows). But setting aside a special day and holding a feast—celebrating—is also a way of honoring God. If, therefore, we do some special things to express the honor we wish to give God because of the resurrection of his Son, the source of our salvation, we can observe the day in the honor of the Lord.

We can make the Lord’s day a special day to honor the Lord, by making it a day “of rest” (a day of only certain kinds of activity), involving attending a church service or gathering of the Christian community, and studying or meditating on the Scripture. Most Christians have had developed teaching about what should be done on the Lord’s Day and what should not be. A special celebrative meal or two was one of the activities which all Christians encouraged.

The Jewish people at the time of Jesus and the apostles and still today were clear that if human beings were to set aside a day effectively, they needed to do something to mark its beginning and end. Otherwise the holiness, the “specialness” of the day would get lost. They therefore had prayers to set the day aside and others to begin the working days, and they said those prayers at meals that opened and closed the holy day. This booklet contains Christian prayers that can help us have celebrative meals which open and close the Lord’s Day and therefore can make these special times to honor the Lord and express the meaning of the day we intend to keep.

The following is a list of some customs that can help make the opening and closing meals of the Lord’s Day special and so more of a true feast:

- We can serve especially good food and drink.
- We can sing songs that are appropriate to the Lord’s Day—joyful Christian songs.
- We can make the table or room of celebration look nicer (using better dishes or tablecloths if we have them, decorating the table or walls, cleaning up).
- We can light a candle for the Lord’s Day.
- We can “dress up,” not necessarily in formal clothes but at least on the better side of what we would normally wear.

- We can sit in a special order at table instead of taking the seat that happens to be nearest to us or sitting where we usually sit.
- We can invite guests.
- We can take a longer time at the table enjoying one another's company and God's goodness, and we can spend time together before or after the meal.
- We can, of course, use the prayers in this booklet.

If we follow many, or, better still, all of these customs, our meals will become more of a celebration.

In order to honor the Lord, everything we do at a festive meal does not have to be "religious." The occasion can be special and still be natural and joyful. The more we learn how to celebrate and make celebration a regular part of our life, the more pleasant the occasion becomes. Celebrating does involve some effort, but at the same time it yields refreshment and strength. "Rejoicing in the Lord is our strength."

The way we pray the prayers is also a way of honoring the Lord and of celebrating. Prayers are more than words. They lift our minds and hearts to God our Father, the King of the Universe, who loved us enough to create us and give his Son for us and our salvation. We can *learn* to pray well (Luke 11:1). The way we pray at a festive meal, and the actions that go along with the prayers to bring out their meaning, give honor to God and life to us.

The following is a list of some truths and customs which will help us to pray the prayers well.

- We should pray attentively and reverently. We can be reverent and joyful at the same time, but we cannot be reverent and negligent or sloppy.
- The leader should lead with dignity (1 Tim 3:2; Tit 2:2), presiding clearly and firmly, praying with strength, drawing everyone into the occasion.
- Expressive actions should go with the prayers (lighting the candle, holding up the cup and bread).
- We should not include the commentary in the prayers. At the beginning of learning to celebrate the Lord's Day, we may need to explain the events and teach the responses until all understand what they are doing; but we should soon come to the point where this is no longer necessary. If possible, we should make necessary explanations at the beginning and not during the prayers.
- Children (except the youngest) can be expected to participate and can be brought into the events at the meal. We should not talk down to them or make the prayers or events "for children." But they can learn the responses and songs and help in the preparations. The more the event is

made special and the more the meal is active, the more they will be drawn in.

- The Jewish people have a Sabbath custom of blessing the children individually before the meal. Such a custom has also been used by Christians and helps the festive nature of the meal. The children come to the father individually, he puts his hand on their heads and prays a simple blessing.
- We should not say a normal grace before serving the food if we have already used the prayers in this booklet to bless the bread and wine. The blessing of the bread and wine is grace for the meal.

All these practices will enable us to make the meal itself a genuine celebration, an event which glorifies the Lord for what he has done for us. But they can do so without taking away the human and natural qualities of a good meal that is a family event.

The next section describes the way in which Jesus celebrated the Sabbath meal. It is included here for background. The way the prayers and meals in this booklet are put together is modeled on the way Jesus and other Jews of his time held Sabbath opening and closing meals. It is also included because we can pick up some further customs for the celebration from what Jesus did. Moreover, the more we celebrate the same way Jesus and the people of his time did, the more the Scripture comes alive and we understand parts of it we never did before. It is for this reason as well that this booklet uses the Jewish prayer forms that we see used by the New Testament writers.

How Jesus Celebrated the Sabbath Meal

JESUS CELEBRATED THE SABBATH AND THE PASSOVER. After his resurrection, his followers celebrated meals (including the Lord's Supper or Eucharist) in a similar way, as we can see from the writings of the early Christians. The Scripture does not describe all that Jesus did, but it does tell us enough to let us know that he must have celebrated special meals in a manner similar to that of other Jews of his time. From Jewish writings of that period we can get a fuller picture of how Jesus must have celebrated the Sabbath.

Time: Jesus began the Sabbath at sundown. The day for him went from sundown to sundown, not from midnight to midnight. Modern people use the Roman custom of beginning the new day at midnight, but the Jews and early Christians began the day at sundown.

The meals: Jesus would have celebrated the opening of the Sabbath by a meal with his disciples (or, before his public ministry, with his family). The meal would have been a festive meal with wine, good food, special dishes. He would have begun the meal with a special grace. Before the grace there may have been time for prayer. During the meal there may have been joyful hymns of worship. To end the meal he would have concluded with a special grace.

Jesus would also have closed the Sabbath with a special meal. Like the opening meal it would have been at sundown and would have been a festive meal with special grace and prayers at the start and at the conclusion. It would not, however, have been as festive as the opening meal. After the closing meal, the Sabbath celebration was ended and normal work was permitted.

The blessings: Jesus would have used the normal Jewish form of blessing. A Jewish blessing was a prayer of praise to God that began with the phrase “Blessed are you, Lord our God...” An example is the blessing of the bread at the beginning of the meal: “Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who have brought forth bread from the earth.” After the opening phrase, each blessing mentions something God did or said that shows that the person, item, or event to be blessed has come from God or that the event being done is in accordance with his will. The blessing could be a short sentence, like the above blessing of the bread, or a longer one.

A blessing results in the dedication (consecration, sanctification) of whatever is being blessed to God. First Timothy 4:4–5 probably refers to a blessing prayer when it says:

Everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving; for then it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.

When the Jewish blessing prayer was translated into Greek, a different form words was sometimes used. The blessing for bread might be translated, “We thank you, Lord our God, for having brought forth bread from the earth, and we ask you to bless it so that it might strengthen us.” Such a translation expresses two aspects of the Jewish blessing. The blessing is a thanksgiving. To bless God for something is to thank him for it. This is probably the reason 1 Timothy 4:4 uses the word “thanksgiving” for the prayer. It is also a prayer for whatever is being blessed.

In order to use the prayers in this booklet well, we need to understanding the Jewish form of blessing prayers. When the Jewish prayer blesses God for anything, it is the same as asking God to bless the object of the prayer. Even though there is no explicit request in the prayer, the prayer is understood as the way something is dedicated to God and his blessing is requested. For that reason to say the blessing prayers in this booklet and then to add to it another prayer to bless the food (a grace) is based on a confusion.

A blessing is also a way of offering something to God. When Jesus took the bread and held it a hand’s breadth from the table, he was offering the bread to God. The blessing prayer acknowledged God’s creation of the bread and thanked him for it as a way of expressing the offering. The blessing of the bread and wine at the beginning of the meal was, in fact, a kind of first–fruits offering of the whole meal. Just as the first–fruits of the harvest were offered to God as a way of offering the whole harvest to him, so the first cup of wine and the first loaf of bread were offered as a way of offering the whole meal (cf. Rom 11:16).

The form of Jewish prayer sometimes seems strange to us, but once we understand it, we can see a great deal of significance to it and we can also understand more of the Scriptures. Moreover, it is the way Jesus prayed.

Jesus would have prayed two types of blessings in connection with the Sabbath meals. The first would have been a blessing to set aside the Sabbath at the opening meal and to complete the setting aside of it at the closing meal. The second type of blessing is that over the food, consisting of a “grace” before the meal and after the meal.

The way the blessing (grace) was said: On a festive occasion, Jesus would have blessed both a cup of wine and a loaf of bread before the meal to consecrate (make special) the meal, and he would have blessed a cup of wine at the end (the cup of blessing 1 Cor 10:16) as a final thanksgiving. When we see a phrase like “took the bread, blessed it and broke it” in Scripture, we know the phrase refers to a meal blessing.

Jesus would have blessed the wine at the beginning of the meal in the following way:

- The one serving would have held for him a cup of wine mixed with water.
- Jesus would have taken the cup in both his hands as he sat.
- He would have then held the cup in his right hand a hand’s breadth above the table.
- He would have looked up to heaven and said the blessing.
- The blessing would probably have been the one line, “Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who have created the fruit of the vine.”
- He would have said the blessing “for all,” that is, in the name of all, and they would have said “Amen” at the end to make the prayer their own. He would not have concluded with “Amen” himself if he was presiding.
- He would have drunk out of the cup and then passed it around. The drinking of the cup would have meant partaking in the blessing. All would have been silent while the cup was being passed around.
- He would have used his right hand to lift the cup and pass it around, and those who received it would have received it with their right hand because the right hand was the hand of honor.

Jesus would have blessed the bread at the beginning of the meal in the following way:

- He would have taken a small loaf of bread in his hand as he sat.

- He would have held the loaf, looked up to heaven, and said the blessing.
- The blessing would probably have been, “Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.”
- He would have said the blessing for all, and they would have said “Amen” at the end to make the prayer their own.
- He would have broken off pieces of bread at least the size of an olive, and he would have given them to all who were at the table. The pieces of bread would have been passed hand to hand to those further away from Jesus. Everyone would have been silent during the distribution of the bread. The pieces would have been given and received with the right hand, the hand of honor.
- He would have broken off a piece for himself last of all and then eaten it.
- Then the others would have eaten their pieces of the blessed loaf. This would have meant partaking in this blessing.

For the final blessing, the thanksgiving after the meal, he would have blessed the wine somewhat differently than he had at the beginning of the meal:

- After taking the cup in both hands and before taking it in his right hand for the blessing, he would have spoken the exhortation, “Blessed be our God of whose bounty we have partaken” and those who were participating would have responded by affirming that they were ready to bless God.
- He would then have held the cup in his right hand, as he did earlier, and said three blessings. The following are the concluding lines of the three blessings which were used in Jesus’ time
 1. “Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who feeds the whole world with goodness, with grace, and with mercy.”
 2. “We thank you, Lord our God, that you have caused us to inherit a good and pleasant land.”
 3. “Have mercy, Lord our God, on Israel, your people, and on Jerusalem, your city, and upon Zion, the dwelling place of your glory, and upon your altar and upon your temple. Blessed are you O Lord, you who builds Jerusalem.”

This final cup of wine would have been known as the cup of blessing or thanksgiving (see 1 Cor 10:16 for the cup at a similar meal).

The use of bread and wine: The blessing of the meal normally made use of bread and wine. Other foods could be blessed (anything good could be blessed), but the blessing of wine and bread opened festive meals and the blessing of wine

closed them. Wine was the festive drink, but it had many religious uses. It was probably given by the Lord as a consolation to the human race for the effect of the Fall on the human race's relation to the ground (Gn 5:29 and 9:20). As Psalm 104:15 says, the Lord gave wine "to make the heart of men cheerful." The Jewish people used wine for offerings, for consoling mourners, and for festive meals, like the Sabbath meals. Bread was the staple food, used at every meal. As Psalm 104:15 says, "The Lord gave bread to strengthen men's hearts." Bread was blessed and then broken and distributed at the beginning of every meal and hence was a blessing for both festive and ordinary meals. Both bread and wine expressed God's provision for man and were probably chosen for the blessings because of their significance.

The Lord's Day Celebration

“Leader” is the head of the household, most commonly the father of the family. “Assistant” is either the person next in authority or next eldest to the leader, most commonly the mother of the family. “Group” is all the household members and any guests who may be present. When the letters “G,” “A,” and “L” appear in parentheses, it indicates that the reading may be done responsively as marked if more group participation is desired.

Opening Ceremony

The Lighting of the Candle

The Assistant usually presides over the Lighting of the Candle. For a shortened form of the ceremony the passage from John 1:1–5 may be omitted.

- ASSISTANT: In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the Word was God.
- (G:) All things were made through him and without him nothing was made that has been made.
- (A:) In him was life and the life was the light of men.
- (G:) The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. (*John 1:1–5*)
- ASSISTANT: Heavenly Father, in honor of your Son, Light of the World and Author of Life, we are about to kindle the light for the Lord's Day. On this day, you raised your son Jesus from the dead and began the new creation. May our celebration of his resurrection this day be filled with your peace and heavenly blessing. Be gracious to us and cause your Holy Spirit to dwell more richly among us.

Father of Mercy, continue your loving kindness toward us. Make us worthy to walk in the way of your son, loyal to your teaching and unwavering in love and service. Keep far from us all anxiety, darkness, and gloom; and grant that peace, light, and joy ever abide among us.

GROUP: For in you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light.

The Assistant lights the candle and recites the following blessing:

ASSISTANT: Blessed are you, Lord our God, who created light on the first day and raised your son, the Light of the World, to begin the new creation.

Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who gives us joy as we kindle the light for the Lord's Day.

GROUP: Amen.

For a shorter form of the ceremony, the following set of exhortations and responses may be omitted.

LEADER: Let us trust in the Lord and in his saving help.

GROUP: The Lord is my light and my salvation.

LEADER: Let us receive his life and rejoice in his presence.

GROUP: He is the true light that enlightens every man.

LEADER: Let us keep his commandments and walk in his ways.

GROUP: His Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

LEADER: Let us proclaim his goodness and show forth his glory.

GROUP: We are the light of the world and the salt of the earth.

The Blessing of the Meal and the Setting-Aside of the Day

Opening Proclamation. *The following blessing is a proclamation to introduce the meal and normally would be said entirely by the Leaders but can also be read responsively, as indicated.*

LEADER: Brothers and sisters, this is the Lord's Day.

(G:) Let us welcome it in joy and peace.

(L): Today we set aside the concerns on the week that we may honor the Lord and celebrate his resurrection. Today we cease from our work in order to worship God and remember the eternal life to which he Has called us.

(G:) The Lord himself is with us to refresh and strengthen us.

(L): Let us welcome God among us and give him glory.

(G:) Let us love one another in Christ.

(L): May the Holy Spirit be with us to deepen our devotion to the Lord, and to increase our zeal for the way of life he has given us.

A song or a time of praise may be inserted here.

Blessing of the Wine

The Leader pours a cup of wine and recites the following blessings with the cup raised:

LEADER: Let us praise God with this symbol of joy and thank him for the blessings of the past week — for health, strength, and wisdom; for our life together in NN;* for the discipline of our trials and temptations; for the happiness that has come to us out of our work.

Let us thank him this day especially for the great blessings he has bestowed on us in Christ. From his fullness, we have all received

* Here insert the name of your church, community, prayer group, and/or family.

grace upon grace. We who were dead through sin have been brought to life together with Christ and raised up with him and made to sit in heavenly places with him. Lord our God, you have brought us into the rest of Christ.

GROUP: Now we live with him through the Holy Spirit and we look for the day when we will dwell with him in your everlasting kingdom.

LEADER: Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has created the fruit of the vine.

GROUP: Amen.

The Setting—Aside of the Day. *This blessing welcomes the day and consecrates it to the celebration of the Lord's resurrection.*

Leader: Blessed are you, Lord our God, for the true rest you have given us in your son Jesus and for this day, which is a commemoration of his redeeming work. We celebrate this day with gladness and consecrate it to the celebration of his resurrection and of the new creation founded in him. Look graciously upon your servants and show us your glory. Blessed are you, Lord our God, who favor the people in the days set aside in your honor.

GROUP: Amen.

The Leader drinks from the cup and passes it to the others present.

Blessing of the Bread. *The Leader takes bread and recites the following blessing:*

LEADER: The eyes of all look to you, O Lord, and you give them their food in due season.

GROUP: You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing.

LEADER: Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.

GROUP: Amen.

The Leader distributes the bread to the others present and begins the meal.

Blessings after the Meal

The Leader pours another cup of wine and recites the following blessings with the cup raised:

LEADER: Let us bless the Lord.

GROUP: Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time forth and forever.

LEADER: Let us bless our God, of whose bounty we have partaken.

GROUP: Blessed be our God, of whose bounty we have partaken and through whose goodness we live.

LEADER: Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who feeds the whole world with your goodness, with grace, with steadfast love and mercy. Through your great goodness, food has never failed us. May it not fail us forever and ever for your great name's sake, since you nourish and sustain all beings and do good to all, and provide food for all your creatures whom you have created. Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who gives food to all.

GROUP: Blessed be his name forever.

LEADER: Blessed are you, Lord our God, for by your great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe, for giving us new life in your Son.

GROUP: Blessed be his name forever.

LEADER: Have mercy, Lord our God, upon your people who belong to your Son, the dwelling place of your Holy Spirit. Grant that the Christian people throughout the world may attain the unity for which Jesus prayed on the eve of his sacrifice and that we in NN may be a sign of that unity and means of its growth. May all your people be renewed in the power of your Holy Spirit, so that we might be without spot

or blemish and ready for your return. Blessed are you, Lord our God,
King of the Universe, ruler and builder of your people.

GROUP: Blessed be his name forever.

The leader drinks from the cup, passes it, and recites the final blessing.

LEADER: May the Lord bless you and keep you; may the Lord make his face
to shine upon you and be gracious to you; may the Lord lift up his
countenance upon you and give you peace. (*Numbers 6:24–26*)

GROUP: Amen.

Closing Ceremony (Sunday Evening)

Blessing before the Meal

The ceremony may begin with a song or a time of praise. The following prayer, the Song of Zechariah, may be included at this point, or the Leader may decide to move directly to the next prayer.

LEADER: Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has visited and redeemed his people,
and has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David,
as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,
that we should be saved from our enemies,
and from the hand of all who hate us;
to perform the mercy promised to our fathers,
and to remember his holy covenant,
the oath which he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us
that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
might serve him without fear,
in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.
For the day has dawned upon us from on high
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace. (*Luke 1:68–79*)

The Leader pours a cup of wine and recites the following blessing:

LEADER: Behold, God is my salvation.

GROUP: I will trust and will not be afraid.

LEADER: For God the Lord is my strength and song.

GROUP: And he has become my salvation.

LEADER: Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.

Salvation belongs to the Lord.

GROUP: Your blessing be upon your people.

LEADER: The Lord of Hosts is with us.

GROUP: The God of Jacob is our refuge.

LEADER: God's people had light and joy and gladness and honor.

GROUP: So be it with us.

LEADER: I will lift the cup of salvation and call upon the Name of the Lord.

Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who have created the fruit of the vine.

GROUP: Amen.

The leader drinks from the cup, passes it, and takes the bread. He then recites the following blessing:

LEADER: Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who bring forth bread from the earth.

GROUP: Amen.

The Leader distributes the bread to the others present and begins the meal.

Prayer after the Meal
(the Concluding of the Day)

The Leader pours a cup of wine, lifts it, and recites the following blessing:

LEADER: Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who sanctify us through faith in the resurrection of Christ and bless us in this day set apart to celebrate his victory.

Blessed are you, Lord our God, who have given us new life in your Son.

GROUP: Amen.

The leader drinks from the cup, passes it, and recites the following prayer while the cup is being passed.

LEADER: Faithful Father in Heaven, grant that we may begin the working days which draw near to us in peace; freed from all sin and transgression, filled with the joy of your Holy Spirit, and following in the ways of your Son Jesus. May we be fully clothed in him, the New Man, created after your likeness in true righteousness and holiness.

Father of Mercy, bless and prosper the work of our hands. Make us fruitful in every good work, unwearied in well-doing, knowing that in Christ our labor is not in vain. May all that we do, in word or deed, be to the praise of your glory through Jesus your Son.

Our God and King, guide and defend the people called by your Name. Strengthen and prosper all who cherish thoughts of good towards your people, and fulfill their purposes, but frustrate those who devise evil plans against your people, and make their designs of no effect; as it is said, "Take counsel together, but it will come to nothing; speak a word, but it will not stand, for God is with us" (Is 8:10).

Open to us, Father of Mercies and Lord of Forgiveness, in this week and in the weeks to come, the gates of heavenly help and rejoicing, of holiness and peace, of the study of your teaching and of prayer. In us also let the Scripture be fulfilled:

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who heralds peace, brings happiness, proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns." (Is 52:7)

GROUP: Amen.

The leader extinguishes the Lord's Day candle, if it has been left burning throughout the day. A song may be sung to conclude.

Seasonal Blessing Prayers

The following can be used as the blessing over the wine for the appropriate season.

Beginning of the Blessing (All Seasons)

The Leader pours a cup of wine and recites the following blessings with the cup raised:

LEADER: Let us praise God with this symbol of joy and thank him for the blessings of the past week — for health, strength, and wisdom; for our life together in N; for the discipline of our trials and temptations; for the happiness that has come to us out of our work.

The Forty Days

LEADER: Let us thank him this day especially for the victory over sin that he won for us upon the cross and for this season in which we turn our eyes to him with renewed fervor, hungering and thirsting for righteousness. Lord our God, we have gasted this week that we might seek your face.

GROUP: And now we eat and drink with joy as we celebrate your salvation.

Easter Season — between Easter and Pentecost

LEADER: Let us thank him this day especially for the great victory he has won for us in Christ. By his resurrection he has triumphed over sin, conquered death, degeated Satan, and won for us the riches of an eternal inheritance. We who were perishing through sin have been brought to life together with Christ and raised up with him and made

to sit in heavenly places with him. Lord our God, you have given us a new birth through the resurrection of Christ.

GROUP: Now we live with him through the Holy Spirit and we look for the day when we will dwell with him in your everlasting Kingdom.

Advent

LEADER: Let us thank him this day especially for the salvation we receive in Christ. By his coming in the flesh he ransomed us from sin and the power of death, and by his coming again he will renew all things, destroy every evil, and establish the eternal reign of God on earth. Lord our God, you have made us your sons through Jesus Christ.

GROUP: Now we live with him through the Holy Spirit and we look for the day when we will dwell with him in your everlasting kingdom.

Christmas Season — between Christmas and Epiphany

LEADER: Let us thank him this day especially for the great blessings he has bestowed on us in Christ. In him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, reconciling earth to heaven, and imparting to us the fullness of life. In him the Word became flesh, enabling men and women of flesh to become children of God. Lord our God, you have revealed to us your glory in Jesus your Son and have made us partakers of the divine nature.

GROUP: Now we live with him through the Holy Spirit, and we look for the day when we will dwell with him in your everlasting kingdom.

Concluding Blessing (All Seasons)

LEADER: Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has created the fruit of the vine.

GROUP: Amen.