Hispanic Free-form Communion Prayer

Rather than liturgies written in a worship book or bulletin, many congregations in the United Church of Christ use Holy Communion prayers that are extemporaneous. One of those congregations is La Iglesia Unida de Cristo Buenas Nuevas in Cleveland, Ohio.

Buenas Nuevas follows a regular pattern in its celebration of Holy Communion, but one that is not fully written or read. At least four elements, however, are basic to the rite: Jesus’ words of institution, a communion prayer, sharing of elements, and a concluding prayer of thanksgiving.

The institution is usually read from the Bible (1 Corinthians 11:23–26) or repeated from memory by the pastor. During this time, usually the bread is broken and the cup lifted.

In most instances, the communion prayer is improvised. Praying from the heart rather than from out of a book is common practice in Hispanic congregations. This prayer usually refers not only to the reality of the crucifixion of Christ, but also to the suffering of Hispanic communities. The prayer often asks God to bless the elements and the community gathered. The communion prayer blends traditional language with context-specific phrases that reflect the life of the congregation that is participating. When asked to say such a prayer, one of the pastors said the following prayer. It is in both Spanish and English.

O Dios que nos llamas de diferentes lugares a participar en esta mesa;
recordamos el sufrimiento de tu amado hijo Jesucristo.
Su sufrimiento continúa en el sufrimiento de nuestro pueblo.
Sus luchas por ser fiel a tu voluntad son también nuestras luchas cotidianas.
Al participar de estos elementos,
recordamos que tu cuerpo fue partido y tu sangre derramada por nosotros y nosotras.
Recordamos también la sangre de nuestro pueblo
que lucha cada día en el campo, en las fábricas,
y en nuestra sociedad para ser proveedores y proveedoras
de sus familias en la misma medida en que
Tú provees para nosotros estos elementos.
Que ellos sean un recordatorio de tu gracia y de tu amor
inigualable por nosotros y nosotras.
En Jesucristo oramos. Amén.

O God, who calls us from different places to participate at this table,
we are reminded of the suffering of your beloved son, Jesus Christ.
His suffering continues in the suffering of our people.
His struggles to remain faithful to your will
continue in our daily struggles to be faithful.
As we partake in these elements,
we are mindful of Jesus’ body broken for us and the blood shed for us.
Keep us also mindful of the blood of our people
who struggle everyday in the fields, in the factories,
and in our society.
In the same way you have provided for us,
sustain those who labor without rest in order to provide for their families,
Bless these elements. May they remind us
of your grace and steadfast love for all people.
In Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

The sharing of the elements is an invitation to participate in both Christ's suffering and the people’s suffering. Such suffering feeds the flame of hope for God’s action and redemption. Finally, the thanksgiving prayer is also a free or improvised prayer. In it, the pastor gives thanks to God for the invitation to sit around Christ’s table and for the gift of the meal.

Book of Worship also suggests another detailed outline that pastors may draw upon as they pray their own prayers for Communion (page 72).