**Communion**

By Dave Carley

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Synopsis:

The time is an era or two ago. Two “church ladies” are discussing their congregation’s pending vote on the ordination of women. Their husbands are against it and they aren’t too sure themselves – until they have a little epiphany over apple cider punch and celery squares.

The cast:

Helen – 40s

Mary Anne – 30s

The era:

Sometime in the not-so-distant past. The United Church of Canada first began ordaining women in 1936; most other denominations were later than that and, of course, one or two still haven’t quite seen the light as of 2010. As a result, it would be good to keep this piece relatively era-neutral, though some of Helen and Mary Anne’s attitudes (and the recipes) are clearly not of the last twenty or thirty years and the food itself is strictly 1950.

The locale:

A church kitchen, or parlour.

Production History:

*Communion* was first produced at Eastbound Theatre, Milford, Connecticut in 2011.

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*Offstage, faintly, the sound of a church service. Helen and Mary Anne are preparing food for a post-service reception. Mary Anne is making punch; Helen is making finger foods.*

*Music a bit louder. The women register it.*

HELEN: That’s the opening hymn.

MARY ANNE: I’m nowhere near ready.

HELEN: Me neither. Well, thank goodness you didn’t get the flu too. Jean and Barbara were supposed to bring squares and it would have been good to have coffee.

MARY ANNE: We’ll manage. Loaves and fishes.

HELEN: Apple cider punch and celery squares?

MARY ANNE: Hasn’t got quite the same ring. How’s your husband voting?

HELEN: Against.

MARY ANNE: Mine too. Did you discuss it with him?

HELEN: No.

MARY ANNE: I tried but Bruce just gets this look. “The disciples were all men, doesn’t that say everything?”

HELEN: Bill thinks women are too emotional.

MARY ANNE: I suppose we are.

HELEN: Bill kicked the car this morning. It wouldn’t start in the cold and he got out and kicked it.

MARY ANNE: *(Laughs.)* Lucky he doesn’t get emotional. Is that why you’re late?

HELEN: We had to walk. I didn’t say a word. I enjoyed the walk. He carried the foodbag.

MARY ANNE: Bruce would say that’s another reason why women shouldn’t be ordained.

HELEN: We can’t carry things?

MARY ANNE: We expect men to do things.

HELEN: So what’s in that anyway?

MARY ANNE: It’s apple cider punch, Bruce loves it and I thought if they had it at their meeting, well, it would mellow them a bit. It would be sad if there was –

HELEN: A rift. I know.

MARY ANNE: It’s four ounces apple cider, one twelve-ounce can apricot nectar, a bit of cranberry juice – two cups - a cup of sugar, you’re supposed to put in orange juice but I ran out of concentrate, oh and two sticks of cinnamon.

It’s supposed to simmer for 20 minutes so I thought I’d sneak back during the sermon and put it on. You want a sip of it cold?

HELEN: In a sec.

MARY ANNE: That looks good.

HELEN: It better be; Bill bellyached the whole way down. You know, that was another thing he said about women; he said women ministers would be complaining about the salary or the state of the manse but if I had a dollar for every time Bill complained about something, and if I had to give back a dollar every time I complained… well, I’d still have every dollar I got from Bill, and he’d be broke.

MARY ANNE: Except now.

HELEN: What do you mean.

MARY ANNE: You’re complaining now.

*(HELEN playfully swats at her.)*

But you’re right about the complaining. When Bruce gets so much as a sniffle… the whining, you wouldn’t believe. Your celery squares look good.

HELEN: Three ounces cottage cheese, two tablespoons butter, it says margarine but I hate the taste, a half teaspoon of onion juice, two teaspoons cream, real cream, a bit of dry mustard, salt and pepper.

MARY ANNE: Wait – no celery?

HELEN: No. It goes on crackers nicely.

MARY ANNE: It seems like false advertising.

HELEN: Yes. Well. We’re devious that way, aren’t we. We women.

MARY ANNE: And not technical. That’s another thing Bruce says. We don’t have an eye for detail.

HELEN: As if following that ridiculous recipe wasn’t technical enough. And why does a minister have to be technical anyway?

MARY ANNE: He has to understand the Board of Managers stuff.

HELEN: That’s just basic finance. You take in this much and you try to spend less and if you spend more you get the congregation to pony up extra at Easter. I’d love to hear them at this meeting. Jean was telling me her husband was voting in favour.

MARY ANNE: She’s got him whipped into shape.

HELEN: And I overheard Bill trying to swing Jim Bailey and he wasn’t getting too far…

MARY ANNE: But do you think –

HELEN: I don’t know. I actually think it might go through.

MARY ANNE: But how does it work – I mean, we’re just one church in hundreds.

HELEN: Next they all go to the general assembly and vote. So every congregation counts. Bill was on the phone last night trying to rally the troops. He sounded awful frustrated. He doesn’t usually kick his car, even when it won’t start. But there’s a lot of men that think because the sky didn’t fall when they gave women the vote that maybe the sky won’t fall either if they let us get ordained.

*(The hymn is over.)*

They must be on the prayer. They’re really barreling along.

MARY ANNE: I’m not going to get in there in time to leave before the sermon. I’ll get Bruce to give me the gist of it later. Though he usually falls asleep.

HELEN: And Bill, sometimes I don’t know what he’s hearing. When we talk about the sermon over lunch, it’s like he was listening to spacemen.

MARY ANNE: They’d have to build a new toilet.

HELEN: *(Ironic.)* Yes, that would be an awful nuisance.

MARY ANNE: *(Suspicious, will push it.)* And nicer curtains.

HELEN: Yes. And have you seen the cup the minister uses for his coffee? It’s chipped! A woman wouldn’t drink out of that. New cups. New dishes too. She won’t stand for this stuff.

MARY ANNE: And it’s true, the disciples were all men.

HELEN: If you ask me, that just means there were a lot of unemployed fellows hanging around in those days. All it took was Jesus going down to the sea and say, “Who’s with me?” and suddenly all these guys are traipsing about. The women were too busy keeping the homes going to be disciples.

MARY ANNE: There was an article in the church magazine; they’d have to do a lot of construction at the theology college to allow women students.

HELEN: More washrooms?

MARY ANNE: It keeps coming back to toilets.

HELEN: It boggles the mind.

MARY ANNE: *(Giggles.)* You’re bad. Still.

HELEN: In some religions, the women don’t even go to worship.

MARY ANNE: Look at us.

HELEN: We got as far as the church kitchen.

MARY ANNE: Still.

HELEN: I know.

MARY ANNE: It does seem –

HELEN: To be honest, getting communion from a woman, I don’t know, that might seem strange.

MARY ANNE: Yes.

HELEN: Going up and –

MARY ANNE: It would be a change, that’s for sure.

HELEN: Not because of that whole disciple being men thing. That’s just stupid. But I don’t know, it’s I don’t know/

MARY ANNE: It’s just what we’re used to. You’ve laid that out beautifully. It’s almost a shame anyone should eat one.

HELEN: This is going to sound odd… but … sometimes when I do this…

It feels a little – I can’t say it -

MARY ANNE: I know exactly what you mean –

HELEN: I almost feel -

MARY ANNE: When we’re sharing food -

HELEN: The pot lucks are the best.

MARY ANNE: When everyone brings something and we feed each other, it feels –

*(Pause.)*

HELEN: Well. I’m pretty much done. *(Pause.)* Mary Anne. Truthfully. Could you ever picture yourself up front –

MARY ANNE: Preaching?

HELEN: Or giving communion.

MARY ANNE: I’m *far* too emotional.

HELEN: Who’s the bad one now. So, are you ready for a taste?

MARY ANNE: Absolutely.

HELEN: Take this one. Here.

*(MARY ANNE puts her hands out, as a supplicant.)*

MARY ANNE: My hands are a bit wet.

HELEN: That’s OK.

*(MARY ANNE eats. HELEN might put it in her mouth.)*

MARY ANNE: It’s divine.

HELEN: Yes it is.

MARY ANNE: Taste my punch. Here. *(Dips a cup into the punch.)* Take this. Drink.

*(HELEN has a drink.)*

HELEN: Ohh. You’ll have to write out the recipe. Have another cracker.

MARY ANNE: Have some more punch. Drink.

HELEN: Eat.

MARY ANNE: Drink.

HELEN: Eat. Take this.

MARY ANNE: Take this and drink.

*(They pause. Realize what they’re doing.)*

MARY ANNE: I’m going to grab Bruce right after service and have a word with him before the meeting. I mean really have a word with him.

HELEN: I’m going to speak to Bill. Really speak.

MARY ANNE: Good. Now drink.

HELEN: *(With her last.)* Now eat.

**The End.**