

Let The Children Come



A guide for parents and
adults in preparing children
for the

**Sacrament of
The Lord's Supper**

The Invitation ...

The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) invites all who have been baptized to partake of The Lord's Supper, Communion, the Eucharist, the meal served in the church for Christians:

"The invitation to The Lord's Supper is extended to all who have been baptized ... Baptized children who are being nurtured and instructed in the significance of the invitation to the table and the meaning of their response are invited to receive the Lord's Supper, recognizing that their understanding of participation will vary according to their maturity."

Book of Order
Section W-2.4011



This document has been prepared to help children, parents, and members of the congregation to be responsible in the nurture and instruction of all who gather at the Lord's table.

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper presents us with a special opportunity to work together in helping our children understand and benefit from their participation in Holy Communion.

All too often we as parents find ourselves making the decision about whether or not our children are ready for Communion while we are sitting in the pew and the elements are being passed, or we're invited forward. This is not the best time to make this decision. It should be made as a family and only after sufficient discussion.

Many people have asked me, “at what age should our child participate in Communion?” I usually say something like this: “There is no specific age at when it is ‘the right time.’ That is for you to decide as parents, and as a family. You want this to be meaningful to your child, and you want them to understand we are all welcome to the table.” When is the best time for your child? My hope is that this booklet will help you decide the answer to that question.

I also hope this will guide you in your family discussions and give you the “tools” necessary to make participation in Communion, also called The Lord’s Supper, meaningful for you and your family. We will start out by finding out more about what Communion is and what it means.

*“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them,
for the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these.”*
Matthew 19:14

What is a Sacrament?

“A sacrament is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.”

- A sacrament is a rite or action that makes present or effective the sacred or holy. For us as Presbyterians, and Christians, a sacrament is an act commanded by Jesus Christ.
- A sacrament is something common made sacred.
- A sacrament is also a sign of God’s grace and forgiveness to His people.
- And a sacrament is a celebration of the community of faith and in the setting where God’s word is read and proclaimed.
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In the protestant faith, we acknowledge two sacraments as valid: The Lord’s Supper and Baptism. In order to make sense of The Lord’s Supper (Communion), the meaning of baptism must be reviewed. Baptism points us to The Lord’s Supper and The Lord’s Supper points us to Baptism. Therefore, in baptism, we affirm that God puts His sign on us and makes us His own. We are baptized only once in the PCUSA, an act which marks our spiritual birth and opens us to God’s grace and His spirit.

What is The Lord's Supper?

When we come together around the Lord's Table, we share in an act common to all Christians. There are several names given to the act and these can help remind us of the different meanings.

The Eucharist

This is a Greek name, which means "thanksgiving." At the Eucharist, we can be joyful as we give thanks to God for the salvation we have been given in Jesus Christ. The symbolic meal becomes a way of saying "thank you" to God for the gift of new life in Christ.

The Lord's Supper

This term emphasizes the fact that we reenact something that Jesus did with His disciples. In addition, it celebrates the fact that God has made a new covenant in love.

Communion

"Com" means together. "Union" means as one. We believe that we are together in one spirit with other Christians in our own church, in other places, and in other times.

Understanding The Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper does not have just one meaning. Some of the many meanings are difficult to comprehend. In fact, no one claims to understand them all fully. However, there are some aspects of Communion that can be grasped even by very young children. Following are descriptions of what children of various ages can be expected to understand. Keep in mind that children mature intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually at different rates, and we should fit our expectations to each child's level of development.

Pre school - Kindergarten

Children in this age range enjoy celebrations! They can understand the sacraments as special events in the life of the church, and as important times for thinking about Jesus. They are aware of “families,” relating baptism to joining the church family, and The Lord’s Supper to eating a meal as a church family together.

Grades 1 - 2

Young elementary aged children are learning more and more about who Jesus is and what He did. They like stories. One story you can share with them is the story of the Last Supper in the New Testament. The Lord’s Supper comes from this event. They have the ability to understand that baptism and the Lord’s Supper are important parts of worship and what we believe. They understand that Jesus died for us, but probably do not understand fully the “why.”

Grades 3 - 5

Older elementary aged children can connect the whole story of the life of Jesus, including the sacraments. They are beginning to understand the symbols and become familiar with the words used at baptism and The Lord’s Supper. They know what it is to participate in a church and feel like the church is their extended family. I believe that they can understand that as a church family we celebrate Jesus together when we partake of the sacrament of Communion.



WELCOME TO THE TABLE

Preparing a child

All children need encouragement and support from parents and other adults as they grow in their understanding of The Lord's Supper. You might be thinking, "how can I be encouraging when I am so un-comfortable talking about a topic that seems so deep?" Our children do not need us to be theological experts. They need us to talk in simple terms about what our faith means to us, including participation in The Lord's Supper.

If you think your child is ready, or if your child begins asking questions, here are some suggestions for this special time:

1. Demonstrate to your child your faith commitment by regularly attending worship.
2. Spend time with your child talking about church and The Lord's Supper at your own dinner table. Talk about "belonging" to a family, to the community, and to the church.
3. Is your child participating during worship in the pew to their ability level? In other words, holding a bulletin, finding a hymn, passing the offering plate, etc. If he/she wants to participate in The Lord's Supper, he/she should participate in other aspects of worship now.
4. Help your child learn the Doxology, The Lord's Prayer, and other responses.
5. Consider sitting in the front of the church where children are able to see what is going on and feel more like they are part of the service.
6. Regular attendance in Sunday School will help your child learn more since we teach about the Bible stories, Jesus, God's love, and about the sacraments in class.
7. Read and talk about Bible stories in which Jesus shared a meal. Some suggestions are:

The Last Supper

Matthew 26: 17 - 30 , Mark 14: 17 - 26 ,
Luke 22: 7 - 39 , John 13: 1 - 30

Meals With Jesus

Matthew 9: 9 - 13 , Luke 7: 36 - 50, John 6: 1 - 15

Resurrection Meals

Luke 24: 13 - 49 , John 21: 1 - 14



There are many ways that the meaning of The Lord's Supper can be communicated. Learning about The Lord's Supper is a gradual process, indeed, a life-long process.

Parents and the congregation should always be aware of this as children prepare to come to the table. No one can understand it all at once, but if the learning is approached with care, with sensitivity, with encouragement, learning will be easier and deeper.

One of the best and most effective ways we learn about The Lord's Supper is by participating in it!

The Lord's Supper not only nourishes, it also teaches!
"Let the little children come, and let us begin to appreciate the joy of their wonder as they encounter the living Christ at His table!"

*This document was prepared by
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