



Welcome to the
Lord's Table!

HOLY COMMUNION WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

Peace Lutheran Church
Dresser, Wisconsin

A WORD ABOUT CHILDREN AND COMMUNION

Here at Peace Lutheran Church we invite baptized Christians of any age to receive the sacrament of Holy Communion. We believe that such an invitation is in keeping both with the teachings of Scripture and our Lutheran heritage for the following reasons.

1. The Bible itself places no age restrictions on those who receive the sacrament. In fact, the Scriptures are completely silent on this matter and give us no guidance as to the age when a person should begin to commune. Paul does advise us to “examine ourselves” and “discern the body” before communing in 1 Corinthians 11:28-29 but this has to be understood in the context of all that Paul is saying in chapter 11. In the verses immediately preceding this advice

(1 Corinthians 11:17-27) Paul has been rebuking the Corinthians over the divisions and class distinctions they have made among themselves which divide the body of Christ and keep some from sharing in the meal. His point here is to say that those who are “worthy” of the sacrament are those who desire to be a part of the body of Christ in unity with their fellow believers. The “worthy” believe that this is a family meal that draws them closer together and makes them one. The “unworthy” are those who seek to create divisions within the body and exclude some from sharing in the meal. When understood in this way, why would we deny the meal to those among us who so earnestly desire to be a part of the family and share in its most important celebration?

2. It's very clear from the Gospels that Jesus loved children, welcomed them into his kingdom, and commended their faith. *"Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it."* (Mark 10:14-15) Jesus delighted in the children who came to him, treated them with the same grace with which he treated everyone, and held their faith up as an example to be followed.

3. Holy Communion, like Baptism, is a gift of God's grace. Neither sacrament is something we have to work for, earn, merit, deserve, or even understand in order to receive and enjoy its benefits in our lives. These things are gifts of grace - given because God loves us and desires to live in a personal and intimate relationship with us. In fact, as Lutherans, we refer to the sacraments and the Word as the “means of grace.” They are the vehicles through which God sends his grace into our lives and gives us life and salvation. Neither sacrament is something we do for God. Both are things God does for us. And God does them purely out of love. God doesn't require a certain level of understanding or maturity before either gift is received but promises to give us forgiveness of sins, life and salvation through them no matter how young or old we may be.

4. In regards to sharing in the sacrament, Luther says in The Small Catechism that, “...that person is well prepared and worthy who believes these words, ‘given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.’” He goes on to add that “the words ‘for you’ require simply a believing heart.” It is, in fact, the “believing heart” of children that Jesus is commending to us and encouraging us to follow in Mark 10.

5. The policy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America on this matter is outlined in the policy statement, The Use of the Means of Grace, (adopted in 1997) and says, “Admission to the sacrament is by invitation of the Lord, presented through the church to those who are baptized.” The policy goes on to say, “Baptized children begin to commune on a regular basis at a time determined through mutual conversation that includes the pastor, the child, and the parents or sponsors involved, within the accepted practices of the congregation. Ordinarily this beginning will occur only when children can eat and drink and can start to respond to the gift of Christ in the Supper.... In all cases, participation in Holy Communion is accompanied by catechesis (teaching) appropriate to the age of the communicant. When infants and young children are communed, the parents and sponsors receive instruction and the children are taught throughout their development. Catechesis (teaching), continuing throughout the life of the believer, emphasizes the sacrament as gift, given to faith by and for participation in the community. Such faith is not simply knowledge or intellectual understanding but trust in God's promises given in the Lord's Supper for the support of the baptized.... There is no command from our Lord regarding the age at which people should be baptized or first communed. Our practice is defined by Christ's command (“Do this”), Christ's twin promises of his presence for us

and for our need, and the importance of good order in the church.... Congregations of this church may establish policies regarding the age of admission to Holy Communion.”

When do children begin to receive Communion?

At Peace we do not have a set age or grade level at which children begin to participate in Communion. The decision to begin receiving this sacrament is made through mutual conversation between the pastor, the child, and the child’s parents, sponsors, or guardians.

How will I know when my child is ready?

From birth, parents bring their children with them to the altar each Sunday to receive a blessing. At some point children begin to reach for the bread as it is passed, extending their hands as they see those around them doing. Or they begin to ask, “Why can’t I have some of Jesus’ bread?” When children do this they are already telling us that they understand some important things about Holy Communion. They want to do what the rest of the family of God is doing; they know they want to belong to the body of Christ. It is only natural that they do not want to be excluded from something so important in the life of the congregation. We believe that a child’s desire to eat with the family of God is a sign of readiness to receive the sacrament.

What do I do when my child is ready and reaches out to take the bread?

Help your child to take the bread. Little children are not ready for anything but the simplest explanations. As the occasion arises tell them that God feeds us in this special meal because God loves us. Explain that eating together makes us a part of God’s family.

When do children learn about Communion?

Fifth graders have a different understanding of the Lord’s Supper than a 3 year old. Younger children have different insights than 60 year olds. As we grow in years, maturity and life experiences deepen and change our understanding of the gift of Christ’s body and blood. We each need an understanding of the sacrament appropriate to our age. Early learning about Communion is best done at home with help that is provided in this pamphlet. Other materials are also available to help parents and children talk about the sacrament at home. Peace offers a special class for students in the 5th grade which seeks to deepen their understanding of Holy Communion. Learning about the sacrament is a part of Confirmation instruction. Adults need to seek Bible classes and forums that will help them grow in their understanding of this gift of grace.

TEACHING ABOUT HOLY COMMUNION IN THE HOME

We teach about the sacrament continuously. By our weekly participation we show how important it is to our life of faith. We can share what we understand and believe about Communion as we talk on the way home from the worship service each Sunday. Older children can share their insights. Young children can be encouraged to share what they already know, believe, or suspect about this gift.

Here are some suggested ways to talk about Communion with children of differing levels of maturity.

1. Communion is a celebration, a kind of party, a special meal to celebrate God's love for us and our love for God. When we have special meals at home we sometimes use special dishes, special foods, flowers, and candles. What are some celebrations that we have at home? How do we decorate to show that we are eating a special meal? How is the altar or table in church decorated to show that Holy Communion is a special meal and a celebration? Draw a picture of a special celebration meal at home. What will you put on the table? Draw a picture of the Holy Communion celebration in church. What will you put on the table?
2. Do you know why your parents make sure you have good food to eat? It is because they love you and they want you to grow up strong and healthy. Jesus feeds us at the Communion table because he loves us. Jesus wants us to grow up strong in our faith and our love for him. The food we eat at Communion helps our faith and our love to grow.
3. When we eat together it is a special family time. Who is at the table? Who is in our family? When we eat the bread and drink the wine at Communion we are a part of the family of God. Who is with you in God's family?
4. When we do something that makes our parents angry it feels good when they hug us and tell us that they love us - it means that everything is all right again. Communion is like those hugs. It tells us that God forgives us and loves us - that everything is all right again.
5. When we receive the sacrament we remember that Jesus gave his life for us on the cross. Jesus shares his life with us each time we eat the bread and drink the wine. That is why we say that we eat his body and drink his blood. It is our way of saying that Jesus gives us life. An old custom when receiving the bread is to hold out your hands one on top of the other at right angles to each other so that your hands make the shape of a cross. This reminds us that the life Jesus gave on the cross he now gives to us through his body and blood.
6. You might explain Communion as a special time in the service. When we commune we know that Jesus is very near. Other people at Communion may want to be quiet or pray. We don't want to disturb them. When you join these people at Communion you will want to have the same happy but quiet attitude.
7. Explain that Jesus comes to us in a special way in the bread and the wine. For this reason you will not want to be noisy or grab at the bread. Hold your hands out and wait quietly until the bread is put into them.

VERY SMALL CHILDREN AND COMMUNION

Very small children can share your bread with you. Most small children prefer to receive only the bread. They have little interest in the wine. As they become older they may ask to taste the wine. Explain to them that it may seem a little sour or bitter at first.

Some congregations do not yet commune all God's children. When you are visiting other congregations it may be helpful to tell your child in advance that, just as different families have different customs, so do different congregations. Be sure to explain that, even though they may not receive Communion in some congregations, all God's children are welcome and loved whenever and wherever the family of God gathers.

A Very Special Gift

Holy Communion is a very special gift. Here at Peace we celebrate this meal at every worship service of the congregation because we believe that as we share the sacrament together, we are drawn into a personal and intimate relationship both with God and with one another. In the meal, God brings his grace into our lives and shares with us God's gifts of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. We are delighted to welcome children to the Table so they may receive these gifts, as well.

At every age we thank and praise God for this gift of grace!

