



Emmanuel
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

 YOUR CHILDREN AND COMMUNION

A Note to Parents

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We are very happy to have you and your family in our fellowship. We pray regularly that your children will experience the love of Christ in our midst, and that they will grow strong in faith-generated obedience and understanding while you are with us.

Some of you have asked us about our approach to receiving children to the Lord's Table. What follows is a brief summary of our philosophy and practice.

We think of our children as “little insiders.”

We are committed to covenantal theology. What this means with respect to the children of believers is that they belong inside the church. When we baptize a child we are both welcoming that child into membership and ratifying the insider status that that child already possesses (in 1 Corinthians 7 Paul calls covenant children “holy”). When Peter said on the Day of Pentecost, “the promise is to you and to your children after you” (language that echoes God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 17), he was reminding us that the Lord loves our children and intends for us to treat them as little “insiders”. We treat them, in other words, as little Christians, inviting them to call God “Father” as soon as they can talk.

This is not to deny their desperate need for regeneration (at some point they must pass from death to life by the power of the Spirit). But it is to affirm that God's ordinary process for conversion, when viewed from our point of view (we cannot see the precise moment of new birth), is to bring the child to him through the means he has given to the church.

As our children grow and as we are faithful in our covenant responsibilities, we look for a continual process of repenting and trust as their universes expand and the meaning of God's law and gospel takes on new dimensions. There are often crisis moments for covenant kids but those crises belong to a continuum (very much as our crises of faith do). That continuum begins at birth, is punctuated in the life of the church by baptism and confirmation, and is moved along by the Holy Spirit as we (the church and the parents) nurture our children through the age appropriate ministry of Word and sacrament.

We receive them to the Lord's Table as early as possible.

What this covenantal model means in our practice is that we admit them as soon as possible to the Lord's Table. Because they are already "insiders" by virtue of their baptism, we give them the benefit of the doubt. We welcome and encourage their interest in the Lord, eager to fan "dimly burning wicks" into flame. Because the Lord's Supper is a means of grace, we do not see it as something from which we must keep our children until they fully understand, but more as something that we give them so that they might understand better.

There must of course be some level of understanding (see below) but it is in our practice minimal. After all, if the Lord's Supper is a means of grace (and it is), we do not want to deprive our spiritually growing covenant children of it any longer than is absolutely necessary.

To receive your child to the Lord's Table is, in our understanding, to receive that child as a full communing membership in the church. For that reason a typical examination for communion will include efforts to determine if your child has a credible profession of faith and can affirm the five membership vows that all members must affirm when they join the church.

What qualifies your children to take the Lord's Supper?

- ♦ They must be baptized.
- ♦ They need not be a certain age.
- ♦ They need to be received as communing members by the elders on the basis of an age appropriate profession of faith. (See below)

What do you need to do to bring your children to the Lord's Supper in the first place?

- ♦ Be on the lookout for saving faith in them.
- ♦ Bring them to the elders for examination as soon as you believe that they have a credible (though age appropriate) understanding of and trust in the gospel.
- ♦ Trust the session to discern if your children are ready. [If the session concurs with your judgment, we will then receive your children to the Lord's Table (baptizing him or her, if that is necessary) at public worship. We will ask them to give a brief, age appropriate, testimony at the time (either orally or in writing).
- ♦ Make a big deal of their first communion—calligraphy, cake, balloons, party, hurrahs!

What do you need to do after the elders have received your children as communing members?

- ◆ Assume a solemn weekly responsibility to prepare them before each communion—helping them to confess any sins that need confessing and reminding them that Jesus died for those sins and will give them help through his Holy Spirit to be better.
- ◆ When your communing children reach 6th or 7th grade, enroll them in our communicants class as a refresher and a deepener in what it means to be a disciple of Christ. At that time, we will look for them to share their faith more fully with the congregation—either orally or in writing.

What do the elders look for when we examine your children?

- ◆ We look for your children’s ability to distinguish between symbol and reality. In other words they should understand that the cup “stands for” the blood of Jesus and that the bread “stands for” the body of Christ. They should understand that eating and drinking the elements is how we say that we believe that Jesus died for us and lives inside of us.
- ◆ We look for a credible profession of faith. We all (including our children) need to be able to participate “in a worthy manner” and “discern the body” as we do (see 1 Corinthians 11:27 and 11:29).

This includes a number of things:

- ◆ The willingness to acknowledge that they are sinners and that sin damages their relationship to God (vow #1—“Is God happy when you are mean to your sister?”)
- ◆ Trust in Jesus as their Savior (vow #2). They need to believe that the death of Jesus was for them. (“Mary, does God forgive you for being bad today? What did Jesus do to forgive you?”)
- ◆ A determination, with the help of Jesus, to follow him and love his people (vows #3-#5— “Tommy, do you want to mind your mommy and daddy better? Do you want to listen better to your Sunday School teachers and your teachers at school? Let’s ask Jesus to help you.”)