

Children at the Lord's Table



The Presbyterian Church of Palm Harbor
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CHILDREN AT THE LORD'S TABLE

Introduction

Welcome to the Presbyterian Church of Palm Harbor (PCPH)! In keeping with our biblical heritage of “reformed and always reforming according to the Word of God,” the pastor and elders of PCPH welcome your children to the Lord’s Table (Communion, Eucharist, Lord’s Supper). It is our goal that this pamphlet gives a brief explanation, as well as suggested ways for a parent to talk with their child about the Lord’s Supper. This pamphlet is consistent and in keeping with the biblical theology of our denomination—the Presbyterian Church (USA), which acknowledges and welcomes children to the Lord’s Table.

Why We Welcome Children

1. The explanation begins with covenant

We are a covenant people. God’s covenantal promises were established with Abraham and Sarah (see Gen, 12-13, 15, 17.1-16) and find their fulfillment (Jer. 31.31-34) in Jesus Christ (Mt 26.28; Mk 14.24; Lk 22.20). Children were **always** included in God’s covenant community. They belong at the Table because God invites them. Furthermore, the Bible teaches us that children, too, may celebrate the saving grace of Jesus our Lord.

2. The explanation finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ

In God’s world, children are not second-class citizens in the covenant community, rather they are joined to the Body of Christ according to the promises God makes to them at their baptism (Col 3.3). Our Book of Order states, “Around the Table of the Lord, God’s people are in communion with Christ and with all who belong to Christ. Reconciliation with Christ compels reconciliation with one another. *All the baptized faithful are to be welcomed to the Table, and none shall be excluded because of race, sex, age, economic status, social class, handicapping condition, difference of culture or language, or any barrier created by human injustice*” (italics added; p. 96).

Make a “Do This in Memory of Me” Mural

Depict scenes from Jesus’ life and our lives illustrating the things Jesus taught us to do to live fully in the new covenant. The center of your mural could be a picture of the last supper and/or a picture of people today celebrating the Lord’s Supper.

Bake Bread Together

Plan a family bread-making day, with everyone participating in the various steps of the process. “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Corinthians 10:17).

We can help!

Please know you we are willing to walk along with you in the conversations you are having or would like to have about your child celebrating at the Lord’s Table with the community of PCPH.

Talking With Your Child About The Lord's Supper (cont.)

Start with what is right in front of you

Every time you eat, you have the opportunity to recall God's grace to you. Whether it's breakfast, lunch or dinner or even an afternoon snack, you can share how what you're doing is similar to what's happening when God feeds us at the Lord's Table.

Use one idea at a time

Over the course of time, you'll have many conversations with your children about the Lord's Supper. Great! Best advice: focus on one idea at a time—one meaning, one image, one question.

Share the experience

Follow-up is essential and formative! After your child celebrates the Lord's Supper with the entire church, talk about it. "What happened?" "What did it feel like?" "How were you aware that Jesus was present?" "What was it like to participate with everyone else there?"

Ideas For Family Projects

Make Banners, Posters or Mobiles

Make a family banner, poster or mobile to illustrate one or more of the themes of Communion. A banner can be made from various materials: burlap or felt for the background; felt and other materials for color, contrast and illustration. A poster can be made easily from materials found in your home. Tag board, heavy paper or cardboard can be used for the background. Magazines and newspaper pictures, as well as family drawings, can be used to illustrate the poster.

3. Jesus himself embraced children

¹³ "People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, '*Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.*' ¹⁵ Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.' ¹⁶ And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them" (Mark 10.13-16, TNIV, *italics* added).

4. Because children belong to God's covenant community

At their baptism, infants/children are not only received as "visible members of Christ's Church" and promised to always be united with him (Rom 6.5), they also, by God's grace alone, receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2.38) who promises to be at work in their whole life (Eph 5.18).

Like baptism, the Lord's Supper is one of the two sacraments instituted by Jesus himself. These sacraments are the results of God's action and God's words: "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me" (Lk 22.19). We believe these sacraments to be signs (water, bread & cup) and seals (work of the Holy Spirit in our lives) of the promises God makes to all in the covenant community through the working of the Holy Spirit.

While it is true that no one fully understands or grasps the mysterious way in which the sacraments 'work,' our response is to accept them by faith. Even John Calvin, the 16th century pastor-theologian wrote: "And to speak more plainly, I rather experience [the Lord's Supper] than understand it" (Institutes of the Christian Religion, 4.17.32). The Supper then is not a 'goal' or 'reward' of profession of Christian faith by a child. Through the Holy Spirit, the child is led to prepare for the day she publicly declares: "Jesus Christ is Lord." (1 Cor 12.3). In short, the Supper is a means of grace that nourishes our lives: both for the one who has already professed faith in Jesus Christ and the baptized child. When all is said and done, the Lord's Table is another way in which God shows how great is his love for us!

What about Self-Examination?

In the past, objections to children at the Table have arisen over a faulty interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11:17-34.

Historically, Corinth was a congregation “plagued with elitist dissension” (Reformed Worship, June 2005) where the poor were being overlooked. It was a community of “factionalism and lovelessness” (Reformed Worship, June 1989) where believers so often looked first to their own needs. Hence, Paul’s written instruction: “So then whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord” (1 Cor 11.27, TNIV).

This command centers on the community, not—as so often misunderstood—the individual. Paul is saying: ‘If you all are celebrating the Supper yet there remain divisions, schisms or factions in the community, you all are sinning against Jesus Christ himself.’ That is, you are living in an “unworthy manner.”

And Paul’s second instruction:

“Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves” (1 Cor 11.28-29, TNIV).

Again, this is a command to the community, not the individual. Paul was urging the congregation at Corinth to examine themselves in relation to their brothers and sisters in the community to make sure it was just that: a community of people united in Jesus Christ who were sharing in the Supper. In “discerning the body of Christ” Paul means that the corporate body of Christ is called to correct the mistreatment of fellow Christians. This had been happening in Corinth (see 1 Cor 11.18).

Talking With Your Child About The Lord’s Supper

If your child is asking questions about the Lord’s Supper, if they’re talking more about their love for Jesus or how much Jesus loves them, take the opportunity to talk with them about it. Your child doesn’t need to understand everything there is to know about the Lord’s Supper (no one does!) in order to participate in it. Below are some possible ways to begin a conversation:

Tell the Story!

Story is a great way to help children discover. There are several biblical stories which are connected to the themes of the Lord’s Supper. *The Last Supper* (Mt 26.17-30; Lk 22.7-23) can be used to explore the idea of communion as remembering Jesus, just as he asked. Children are capable of seeing and hearing connections between what happens in the stories and what happens during the Lord’s Supper. *The Road To Emmaus* (Lk 24. 13-35) helps children learn about the presence of Jesus Christ in the Lord’s Supper. The beautiful promises God makes about a new heaven and earth (Rev 21.1-5) can be helpful in teaching your child about hope, that all things will be made new just as the Bible says.

Use what’s familiar

A good image to begin with is the family meal. Or, perhaps your child has attended an awards banquet of some sort where there is a shared meal and an honored guest. Both can be ways to begin the conversation about the Lord’s Supper.

Look for teachable moments

Take advantage of regular moments that can form connections to the Lord’s Supper. For example, if your family likes to talk about their vacations from the past, this can be a great opportunity to talk about how the Church recalls Jesus’ life, death and resurrection when the Lord’s Supper is celebrated.