

Your Child and the Lord's Supper

"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them,
for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."

Mark 10:14

A SIGNIFICANT SUPPER

Ever since that memorable night in the Upper Room, Christians have been gathering together to receive the Lord's Body and Blood. This Supper is one of the most profound expressions of our union with Jesus and our separation from the world. When we eat the bread and drink the cup we are essentially professing our faith; we "proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26).

This visible declaration of faith in Christ is celebrated monthly at Tabernacle as a regular reminder of the sacrifice once made for all our sins, our ongoing communion with our Lord and each other, and our future gathering at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. In light of its significance in the Christian's life, the Lord is indeed gracious in His invitation to "take and eat, all of you."

This invitation includes our children. The point at which a child is ready to receive the Lord's Supper is a defining moment in his or her life. It is the point at which your child is ready to profess his faith publicly before the Session, the Church, and, ultimately, the world. It is also the point at which the Church rejoices to see the faithfulness of God in bringing salvation to those who, as baptized children of the covenant, had received the sign of the covenant.

WHEN IS YOUR CHILD READY?

God's work is unique in each of us. Rather than propose a "one-size-fits-all" structure for introducing our children to the Lord's Supper, we prefer to treat this question on an individual basis. Typically, your child should be old enough to understand not only the fact that "Yes, Jesus loves me," but also that the demonstration of that love was on the cross and that our sins were what necessitated His sacrifice.

As parents*, you should not only be hearing about your child's faith, but witnessing it. Does your child, in his own way, seek to serve your family? Does she respond well to your discipline? Is there a desire to please you and the Lord? Until you see this sort of "fruit," it is best to wait.

Above all, your child should demonstrate a hunger for the Supper. When we receive the bread and the cup, we are called to "discern the Lord's body" (1 Corinthians 11:29). This means that it is no empty ritual we are going through. Faith and understanding are required. It is probably a good time to consider whether or not your child is ready when he starts to show an interest in and desire for the Supper.

Ordinarily, this might take place sometime between the ages of ten and twelve. Some children, even siblings, will be ready sooner and some later. Remember, it is the Spirit's timing, and not yours or your child's, which is at work here.



WHAT'S NEXT?

Once you think your child might be ready to profess his or her faith and receive the Lord's Supper, let one of the staff or elders know. We will rejoice together that your child is growing in the Lord and perhaps ready to make his faith public!

A couple of the elders will then want to sit down with you and your child to explain what's next. After hearing the evidence of God's grace in your child, you will be given a workbook for children entitled, *Understanding Your Faith*, which you will study together. This will provide you and your child a structured context in which to discuss the fundamentals of Christianity and the Gospel. Parents are privileged to be the primary spiritual instructors for their children, and this workbook will help you fulfill your special calling.

Once the workbook is completed, the elders will want to have a wrap-up time with you and your child. We will gently ask your child some questions about his faith and what he knows about the Gospel and the Lord's Supper. If your child appears ready, together we'll look forward to his or her first communion!

FIRST COMMUNION

What a special day! During the worship service, your child will be asked to make the same membership vows that you did, expressing his or her belief in the Gospel and desire to serve and bless the church. While previously a member through birth and baptism, your child will now be considered a fully participating member of the church. This means he will now have the privilege of congregational voting rights, which you will need to oversee.

The Book of Church Order, Ch. 57-5

- A. Do you acknowledge yourselves to be sinners in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure, and without hope save in His sovereign mercy?
- B. Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation as He is offered in the Gospel?
- C. Do you now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes the followers of Christ?
- D. Do you promise to support the church in its worship and work to the best of your ability?
- E. Do you submit yourselves to the government and discipline of the church, and promise to study its purity and peace?

After taking the membership vows, your child is welcome, as a communing member of the church, to come and receive Christ's body and blood. From that moment on, we pray that your child will continue to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18), and will one day mature into one who will "declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come" (Psalm 71:18).

WHAT IF MY CHILD NEEDS TO BE BAPTIZED?

For families who believe the Bible teaches that baptism should wait until a child is ready to profess his or her faith, the process is essentially the same. The only difference is that, during the worship service, we will also rejoice to apply the sign of baptism to your child in addition to welcoming him to the Lord's Supper.

IN THE FUTURE...

When the time is right, sometime during middle school or high school, we would like your child to take the New Members class at Tabernacle. Even though he or she is already a

member, there is still room for growth and understanding of what that membership is all about. Consider this participation an indication of your child's sincerity in their commitment to the church. We look forward to having your child(ren) with us!

CONCLUSION

We hope this process will allow our covenant children (and their parents!) to see more of the grace of Jesus and the work of the Gospel in their young hearts. It is with confident hope that we anticipate the welcoming and receiving of all our children to the Lord's Supper and into their full participation as members of Christ's Church.

Please contact us if you have any questions about the Lord's Supper.

**Tabernacle welcomes single parent households and situations where only one parent is exercising Christian faith. This is in accord with 1 Corinthians 7:14.*

We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD,
his power, and the wonders he has done.
He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel,
which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children,
so the next generation would know them,
even the children yet to be born,
and they in turn would tell their children.
Then they would put their trust in God
and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands.
Psalm 78:4-7



tab-pres.org | 540.932.1778