

Children and the Lord's Supper
Grace Evangelical Presbyterian Church

When should children receive communion?

The sacrament of communion is to be received by those who are believers in Christ.

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord (1 Corinthians 11:26-27).

Thus, to come to the table in a *worthy manner*, a person must be one who sincerely *proclaims the Lord's death until he comes*. That is, the person who comes to the table understands the meaning of the death of Christ, and in eating and drinking is making the proclamation that Jesus is their Lord and Savior.

As applied to children, we would then expect that each child who receives communion:

- i. has understood the meaning of the gospel;
- ii. has examined him-/herself and discerned the existence of personal sin and hopelessness before God, as well as an indication of repentance for sin;
- iii. has acknowledged the sufficiency of Christ, a personal trust in Christ alone for salvation; and draws near with a true heart and full assurance of faith;
- iv. has understood the meaning of the sacrament;
- v. has accepted his/her place as a communing member in the family of God and desires to share his-/herself with the body of Christ;
- vi. has sincerely responded to the invitation given at the worship service to come and receive communion.

How do we discern whether these are true of a child at Grace EPC or whether he/she is simply coming to the table because this is what others are doing, or because they think this is what is expected of them?

To guide parents and children of Grace EPC concerning the participation of children in the Lord's Supper, the Session of Grace EPC has established that parents and children are to receive from the church during the child's 6th grade year specific instruction concerning communion.

- i. During this instruction, parents are to speak to their child about his/her understanding of the gospel, personal repentance and faith in Christ, and the meaning of communion.
- ii. Following the church's instruction, parents who discern that their child understands the gospel, expresses true repentance and faith in Christ,

understands the meaning and significance of communion, and is able to reverently listen to and understand the invitation to communion, they are to encourage their baptized child to receive the sacrament of communion. If the child has not yet been baptized, this ought to be done prior to receiving communion.

- iii. The elders of Grace EPC stand ready to assist parents in speaking to their child concerning these matters and helping to discern the readiness of their child to receive communion. The elders may also help parents in how they can encourage and instruct their child if they are not yet ready to receive communion.
- iv. If parents discern that their child does not understand the gospel or has not responded in repentance and faith, or does not understand the meaning or significance of communion, or is unable to reverently listen and respond to the invitation to communion, then parents should keep their child from participating in the Lord's supper.

Our conviction regarding our form of church government commits responsibility to the elders, as God's ordained shepherds of the church, to discern who ought to be received into membership to the local church and also admitted to the communion table. Since no one will know a child like his/her parents, we will rely heavily upon the testimony of Christian parents. Rather than seeing this process as hindering the spiritual growth and instruction of the child, it should be understood as an act of love and protection for the child that he/she will not take communion in an unworthy manner.