

remember our Lord Jesus we get closer to our fellow guests - and to our Host - Jesus Christ. To discern the body is ultimately to know and love Jesus and feel Christ's presence with us.

Q. How will I know when my children are ready to participate?

A. No definite rules can be given that fit each child - and each family - but here are several guidelines.

1. Children need to realize that communion is a very special time for a church and for those individuals who participate.

2. They need to be able to grasp the idea that the bread and cup represent more than just food to eat.

3. They need to have some understanding of repentance and forgiveness; that there is a difference between saying the words "I'm sorry" and being willing to change behavior.

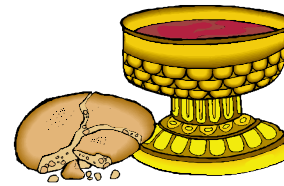
4. They need to really want to participate because they love Jesus and not for any other reason. It needs to be their decision with no prompting or pressure from parents. It must be based upon what they've seen of your faith.

Q. How will the church help parents in this process?

A. By providing regular opportunities for worship and communion services which will be designed for the whole family and by answering other questions you have. Please direct questions to the pastor, or a session member.

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This resource for parents is provided by the **Worship and Fellowship Division of Heartland Presbytery** help sessions carry out their responsibility to make certain "*that those baptized are nurtured in understanding the meaning of Baptism, of the Lord's supper, and of their interrelation.*" [B of O: W-4.0202]. Feel free to adapt it for your needs. For more extensive materials we recommend the PREM curriculum materials. }



## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON CHILDREN AND COMMUNION

by Thomas D. Thomas

Q. May children take communion\* in the Presbyterian Church?

A. In our denomination baptized children of the church are always included in the invitation to participate in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. [Book of Order: W-2.4011b]

Q. Why are baptized children permitted to partake of the Lord's Supper before they join the church?

A. There are two major reasons; the first relates to our understanding of baptism as the sign of the Holy Spirit by which we become part of the church, the body of Christ. Paul tells us that "*by one Spirit we were all baptized into one Body-Jews or Greeks, slaves or free-and all were made to drink of one Spirit.*" (I Corinthians 12:13) In the act of baptism we were all made part of the church; how can we prohibit any of God's children from joining in the most important thing we do together as Christians: the celebration of communion?

Q. But since little children aren't able to understand the importance of communion, wouldn't it be better to wait until they are old enough to attend communicants' classes and publicly confess their faith?

A. If our faith in Jesus were something that could be learned from books and teachers, that would be true. But the goal of faith is not to learn about God but to know and believe in the Lord. After Jesus' death two friends were walking along the road when they met a stranger and talked with him about the reported resurrection of the Master. They refused to believe that the report was true even when the stranger reminded them of Jesus' teachings on the subject. It was not until they sat down to dinner with the stranger and he blessed bread, broke it, and gave it to them that "*....their eyes were opened and they*

\* "Communion" and "The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper" are used as synonyms in this discussion.

*recognized him...."* (Luke 24:31) The second reason for permitting baptized children to take communion is our belief that only when we participate with the community of faith in the sacrament will we come to know and share that faith. As we gather to remember Jesus we are also introducing Jesus to our children.

Q. How can I introduce Jesus to my children through the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper?

A. If you understand clearly the action and meaning of the Lord's Supper you will be able to answer the questions your children have when they observe the sacrament, and that will help them become ready for full participation.

Q. Where can I learn the reasons for our actions during Communion?

A. I Corinthians 11:23-34 is the earliest and most complete account of how the sacrament was observed by the early church and is the basis for our actions when we celebrate the sacrament.

(You may want to read this passage now since the following questions are based on it.)

Q. Why do we celebrate the Lord's Supper?

A. Because we have been specifically commanded to do so by Jesus when He said, "Do this, remembering me." (I Corinthians 11:24,25)

Q. Who is invited to take communion?

A. Our Savior invites all those who trust in him to share the feast which He has prepared. "Behold I stand at the door and knock: if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me." (Revelation 3:20)

Q. Why do we have a Prayer of Thanksgiving after the invitation?

A. Because the first thing that Jesus did when he took the bread was give thanks for it (I Corinthians 11:24). Whenever we gather we must never forget to be thankful for what God has done for us.

Q. Why do we break a piece of bread as part of communion?

A. Jesus also broke the bread to remind us that he gave his body to be broken for us when he offered himself upon the cross. (I Corinthians 11:25)

Q. What did Jesus mean by saying "*This cup is a new covenant sealed in my blood*"? (I Corinthians 11:25)

A. The death and resurrection of Jesus made it possible for us to relate to God in a new way. No longer does our sinfulness isolate us from God, since in Jesus Christ, God came to earth (where we were), suffered and died for us. "*God so loved the world that He gave his only Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but shall have everlasting life.*" (John 3:16)

Q. How do we "*proclaim the Lord's death until he comes*" (I Corinthians 11:26) when we celebrate the Lord's Supper?

A. Every time we gather to celebrate the sacrament we remember that "*.... Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was risen on the third day*" (I Corinthians 15:3-4). As long as there is a church, that message will be proclaimed. Every time that bread and cup are shared we will celebrate God's overwhelming love.

Q. What preparation must we have before we partake of the Lord's Supper?

A. We are warned by Paul that we must test (v. 28) and examine (v. 31) ourselves before we eat our share of the bread and drink the cup. Before the first Lord's Supper, Jesus washed the disciples' feet as a sign that they were cleansed by Him. In our worship we publicly confess our sins and hear words of scripture reminding us of God's forgiveness before the Lord's Supper is served.

Q. We are warned of judgement if we eat and drink "*....without discerning the body.*" (v. 29) What does this mean?

A. Paul tells the Corinthians: "*Now you are Christ's body and individually members of Him.*" (I Corinthians 12:27). To discern the body is simply to see that you are part of the church, and so related to Christ and to each other. That is why we call the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper "Communion." For as we gather around the table to