

Preparing Children for Communion -

A Guideline for Parents and Godparents

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Jesus invites - Am I invited too?



To the parents, Godparents or guardian of the Child

1. Why Communion with Children?

Many people think that confirmation is the prerequisite for participation in Communion. This is not so - it actually is baptism. For one thousand two hundred years it was the custom for all baptized people, including children to take part in Communion. Then the Roman Church developed the doctrine of Transubstantiation (which is the belief that, during the institution by the priest the bread and wine change their substance, and physically become Body and Blood of Christ). It was feared, that children through their clumsiness could drop the bread, and thus “throw away” the body of Christ. So in 1215 it was decided that children must be seven years old before partaking. Soon after this the age limit was raised to 14.

Although Luther rejected this doctrine, the age restriction remained, but for a different reason. The split of the Roman Church into Catholic, Reformed and Lutheran streams resulted in three doctrines of Communion. Before Communion each church wanted to make sure that the participants had their particular understanding of Communion. Children would not understand these differences, and so could not participate.

The eastern Orthodox churches, that had separated from the Roman Church long before 1215, never abolished the participation of all baptized including infants in Communion.

Over the past few decades more and more western Churches, also from the Lutheran Tradition, have lifted the age restriction, and have affirmed that baptism is the only prerequisite for participation in Communion.

We baptise babies, after parents and godparents have promised that they will bring them up in the Christian faith. We do not insist that children first believe before they may be baptized. Rather, we rely on God’s promise in baptism and then instruct them as they grow up, leading them into the Christian faith.

The same approach is now taken with Communion. Rather than expecting the children to understand before they may participate, we let them participate and explain to them, as they grow up in participating in Communion what Communion means.

Does this mean that confirmation is no longer necessary?

Admission to Communion always has been only one aspect of confirmation. The main purpose of confirmation is still to educate young Christians in the Christian faith, so that they can stand on their own feet and confess, themselves, in front of the congregation that they believe in Christ as Lord.

Confirmation means that the young person now confirms the faith that parents confessed on his/her behalf at baptism.

2. **The Synod of ELCSA (N-T) (now NELCSA) in October 1999** agreed that children may receive Communion. The congregations should be prepared for this, and how it is introduced should be decided by each congregation (See the submission of the Theological Study Commission ¹)

This booklet is designed to help in this regard. It can be used by adults who take children to Communion, as well as the children who are being prepared to participate in Communion.

3. **Children are very open** to symbolic and sacramental acts. This is because they are much more aware of the invisible, the inexplicable. This is why Jesus said: “ Anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it. (Mark 10,15)

We hope that this new (old!) approach will result in Communion becoming very special for the generation that grows up with it - even more important than it has been for us!

4. **Practical considerations**

In the beginning there will be some congregations that have not even discussed the issue, while others have already implemented Communion with children. Church Council suggests the following to avoid confusion.

When parents take their small children to participate in Communion, they themselves break their bread and share it with the children, with the words: The body of Christ, given for you. When the chalice comes, they give it to the child with the words: The blood of Christ, shed for you.

When the parents do not give their small children Communion, the Pastor will bless them instead, as is customary at present.

Older children who wish to receive Communion, are requested to hold out their open hands for both the bread and the cup. Thus the Pastor knows that they want to receive Communion. If they do not hold out their hands, they will receive a blessing instead.

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From the submission: "...The pronouncement of God's unconditional love, which we receive in His Word, in Baptism and in Holy Communion, has a profound effect on our life in its many contexts. This is also true for children, who can distinguish between the celebration of Holy Communion and an ordinary meal and who can understand that the outward signs of Holy Communion, bread and wine, are a gift of the presence of Jesus Christ. There is no *theological* reason to exclude baptised children from participating in the Holy Communion of the congregation, even though, according to our church order, the *general* admittance is bound to the confirmation.

(More in "Credo", compiled by Georg Scriba, 1997, page 33)

This booklet attempts to prepare children in an appropriate manner for Communion. By no means does it claim to be comprehensive - much more can and must be said about Communion. This is merely a beginning!

Stories from the Bible are used to highlight certain aspects of Communion. The child that appears in most pictures wants to invite your child to come along and listen to the stories. The text beneath the picture can be read by the child. An adult can elaborate on each picture, telling the fuller story.

1. The Passover lamb - Christ, the Lamb of God (John 1,36)

Most children know the story of the Exodus from Egypt.

God wants to set free the Israelites, who are living amongst the Egyptians as their slaves. How can they be distinguished from the Egyptians, so that the angel of death will pass them by? A sign is needed.

The Israelites are instructed to celebrate the first Passover festival. Each family must slaughter a lamb, and paint the door posts of their homes with the blood of the lamb. This sign shows that God's people live in that house. Thus the blood becomes their protection against death and destruction. (Exodus 12). (Hence the name "Passover - the angel of death passed over them)

In John 6 Jesus says: "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁵⁵For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. ⁵⁶Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him."

Thus the blood of Christ becomes our protection.

Application: Through baptism I belong to Christ and his people. When I celebrate Communion it becomes clear that I am under the protection of Christ, the lamb of God. Satan has no power over me.

(In the Jewish tradition the Passover meal, which is celebrated by the whole family, is started off by the youngest member of the family asking the father: What is the meaning of this celebration? Then the father starts telling the story. Old and young are part of the celebration.)

2. The Scapegoat - and Jesus bearing the sins of the world. (John 1,29)

In Leviticus 16,21 we read about the annual day of Atonement. As part of this festival a goat is brought to the temple. As the whole nation gathers, and each person confesses their sins, the High priest places his hands on the head of the goat. Thus the sins of the people are transferred to the goat. This is then led out into the desert, carrying with it the sins of the people. There it dies, and the sins die with it.

In John 1,29 John the Baptist cries out: "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

At Communion we hear the words of Jesus: This is my body given for you, this is my blood shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus bore our sins and died for us. At Communion we celebrate that our sins are atoned by Jesus. We are set free.

3. Christ celebrates Communion with his Disciples (Mark 14,12-25)

On the night of his betrayal, during the Passover meal, Jesus institutes Communion as a celebration of the new covenant. The disciples do not understand what it is about - they will only realize later.

Jesus gathers all around him: Judas the traitor, the proud Peter - all twelve of them are there. And they all receive Communion.

Through this meal Jesus strengthens his disciples, so that they will be able to survive the looming crisis. And he binds them together in this meal, so that they will find each other again, after the terrible night, during which they would all be scattered. Then he gives his life for them, and, every time they celebrate Communion, they are reminded of this.

Through Communion Jesus strengthens the congregation and binds it together - the weak and the strong. He celebrates with all of them!

4. The Gospel for children: Let the little children come to me (Mark 10,13ff)

This text is traditionally read during Baptism. It makes sense also to read it in connection with Communion. We should receive Communion as little children do: they are open for the mystery of the celebration. They receive it as something coming from Jesus. In Communion we experience that Jesus really loves us and cares for us. May we as adults continue to learn from the little children!

5. You too are invited - Christ celebrates with his congregation.

Communion means that the redeemed celebrate with their Redeemer. We celebrate that Christ gave himself for us, so that we might live. We celebrate that we belong together and support one another. We are encouraged to celebrate Communion often. We need it so that we may grow as Christians.

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Horst Müller, Pietermaritzburg March 2001

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God sets his people free



A long time ago God's people lived in Egypt.
They were slaves.
They had to work very hard.
They were beaten with whips.
The Egyptians shouted at them.
For all their hard work, they did not get money.
All they got was a little bit of bad food.

So they cried to God: Please, help us!

God sent Moses to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt.

“Let God’s people go!”, Moses said.

But Pharaoh refused.

His heart was as hard as stone.

God sent many plagues.

Every time Moses said: “Let God’s people go!”

Still Pharaoh refused.

Now the last, terrible plague would come:

In the whole land the oldest child in every family
and also among the animals would die.



But God did not want this to happen to his people.
He wanted to protect them and set them free!



So God's people were told:
Each family must slaughter a lamb
and prepare it to be eaten.
The blood of the lamb must be painted
on the door frame of their house.

This was the sign:
God's people live in this house!
So the people in this house would be safe!



Many, many years later,
Jesus Christ, God's own son,
came to the people.

When John the Baptist saw Jesus, he cried out:
"Look, the lamb of God,
who takes away the sin of the world!"

He knew:
This lamb will keep us safe.
Jesus will die, so that we can live!

Have you been baptised?



When were you baptized? _____

Where were you baptized? _____

Who are your God parents? _____

At your baptism Jesus said that you belong to him.
You are part of God's people.

At Communion you celebrate with all God's people
that Jesus, the Lamb of God, died for you
and keeps you safe!

The sin is carried away



In old times, Israel celebrated a big festival every year. God's people loved the festival of Atonement.

On that day they would gather at the temple. A goat was brought to the Highpriest.

He put his hands on the goat.

While he did that, the people prayed and told God what they had done wrong.

All the sins were placed on the goat.

It was called the Scape goat.

The animal was then led into the desert, taking along all the sin of God's people!

Do you remember what John the Baptist said
when he first saw Jesus?



“Look, the lamb of God,
who takes away the sin of the world!”

Jesus takes all our sin on himself.
He is our scapegoat!

When we celebrate Communion we put all our sins
on Jesus. We may know:

All my sins are forgiven.
Jesus has taken them away!

Jesus celebrates Communion



When Jesus celebrated Communion with his disciples, they did not understand. They did not know that Jesus would die for them.

Only after Easter did they know a bit more. Then they celebrated Communion often. They could not see Jesus any more. But Jesus said that he was there when they celebrated Communion. This made them very glad and gave them courage.

When we celebrate Communion, we know:
Jesus is celebrating with us. He is here too!

Let the children come!

One day mothers brought their children to Jesus.
The disciples did not like it. They said:

“Go away! The children are disturbing Jesus!
He is too busy.

They do not understand what Jesus is saying.
They are in our way! Go away!”



When Jesus heard this, he scolded the disciples:
“Do not send the children away! Let them come to me!
They understand me much better than you!
They accept what I say to them!”

At Communion Jesus says to you: “Come to me!”
He wants to show you that he loves you.
He has got time for you!

You are invited too!

You belong to Jesus Christ.
He loves you!

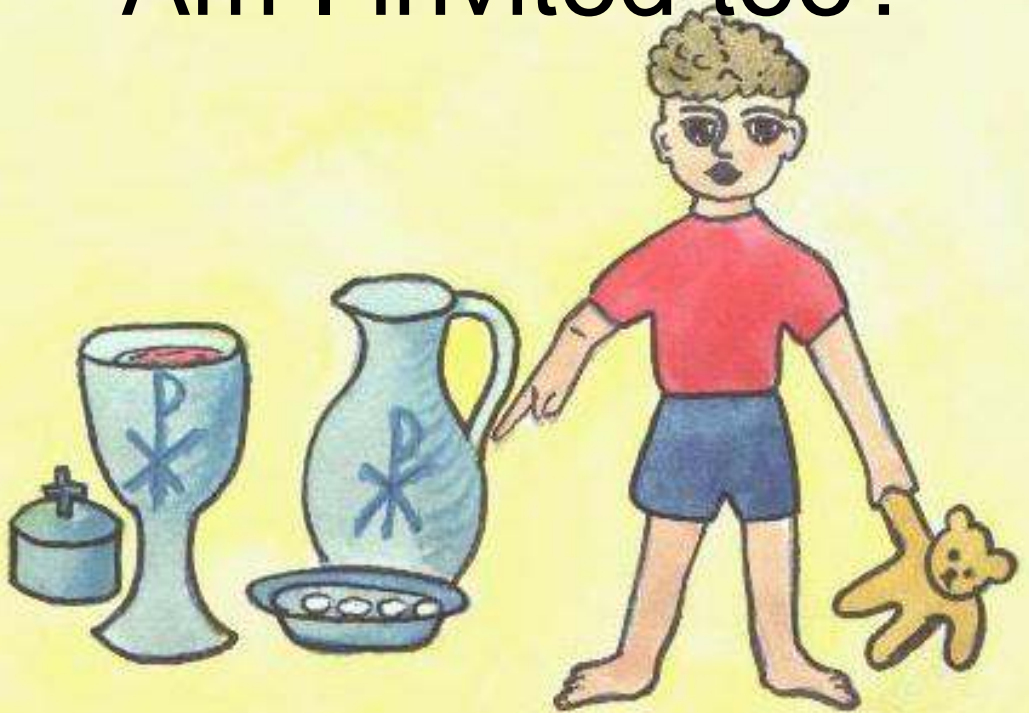
You may come to Communion.
There you can hear, taste and see that you are
God's child.

You are part of the family of Jesus Christ!



Do you want to come to Communion?
Tell Mom or Dad.

Am I invited too?



Yes, you are!
You belong to Christ and his people.
Jesus invites you too!