

# Communion

## **Your Child & Communion (the Lord's Supper)**

### **The question**

"Can I take communion today?" A tray of bread is already coming down the row. You have only a few seconds to respond. What do you say? Who should take communion? As parents, we must give spiritual guidance to our children by being ready to respond to their questions about communion and their desire to participate in this worship activity of the church.

### **Who is invited?**

A simple answer to the question of who should participate is "all Christ-followers", that is, people who "confess Jesus Christ as Lord." Children who believe and confess that Jesus is Lord have an authentic faith. However, they may have a limited understanding of the meaning and depth of communion. Though children can participate, we highly encourage parents to insure their child understands its meaning and significance. Millersville does not promote a particular age when children are expected to participate in communion, rather we support parents in explaining and determining if a child is ready to partake in this personal act of faith.

### **What does communion mean?**

As Christ-followers, to participate in the Lord's Supper is to declare that God's gift of grace and forgiveness has been accepted and a personal relationship with Christ has been established.

Participants have a 360-degree perspective of salvation. Looking back, we are able to remember God's plan of salvation described in scripture, and our personal salvation story. Looking to the future, followers of Jesus anticipate Christ's triumphant return. Participating in the Lord's Supper expresses that memory and anticipation. In 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, the apostle Paul describes, "For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

### **What is taking communion in "a manner that is worthy"?**

While understanding that the meaning of communion involves a look backwards and forwards, it also involves a good look at the present. Paul writes further in 1 Corinthians 11:27-29, "Therefore, 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. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself." As Christ-followers, we are called to reflect upon the condition of our relationship with Christ and even our relationships with others (see Matthew 5:23-24). This involves self-examination, confession of sin and the recognition of forgiveness received.

### **Do I have to be baptized to take communion?**

No, baptism is not required to participate in communion. As a church, we recognize the importance of believer's baptism as a testimony to others of the individual's desire to be a

Christ-follower and the change in their life. In the New Testament a confession of faith was typically followed by immediate baptism (Acts 8:12;16:29-33). We encourage every Christ-follower to follow Jesus Christ's example (Matthew 3:13-17) in obedience by being baptized as an outward sign of the inward change in their life.

### **Giving guidance to our children**

There are times in life when the best learning experience is participation. Communion is a celebration that may be enriched by opportunities to learn before participation. The following are some basic steps to assist you in preparing a child for communion. They move through three stages: observation, involvement and participation. The following diagram illustrates this progression.

## **OBSERVATION >> INVOLVEMENT >> PARTICIPATION**

### ***Observation***

The most basic form of participation is watching others take part in communion. The observation stage engages children by raising questions (Exodus 12:26-27). Often the questions are asked during a service, a time when adequate answers cannot be given. Set aside another time to sit down with your children and answer their questions. It is particularly helpful to share what communion means to you.

### ***Involvement***

As observation increases understanding, the desire to participate may also increase. Make it a point to involve your children as they continue to learn. Before a communion service, lead them through a time of personal reflection just as you would engage in self-examination to prepare your own self. Help them understand both the seriousness and the celebration of thankfulness that accompanies forgiveness. Encourage them to ask questions of grandparents, pastor, teachers and others. Read the story of Jesus' Last Supper (Luke 22:7-20) and communion scriptures in the New Testament with them (1 Corinthians 11:11-22). During communion, allow them to handle communion trays as they are passed. Remember to encourage your child during this growing process. If children do not yet have the clear ability to express in adult language what communion means, that does not mean they lack understanding.

### ***Participation***

A child who has been involved in the previous stages will have shown whether they are ready to participate. The question, "Can I take communion today?" will not come as a surprise. You will be able to respond with confidence that your child has understood the significance and meaning of communion. At Millersville, the *invitation to participate in communion is open to all Christ-followers, young and old*. As the primary spiritual influence in your child's life, you are the accountability link between your child and the larger church family. You are best suited to determine if your child has made a genuine decision to follow Jesus Christ in their life. During worship, sit together and be the one to serve your child. Be sensitive and recognize that peer pressure may be a factor in wanting to participate, both for your child and other children. Remember that participation one time does not assume participation next time. Remember, your child's personal preparation rather than precedent is what the decision to participate rests upon. Just because they have taken communion before does not dictate whether they should take it this time.

### ***How do I Get Started?***

Feel free to use the guide below to facilitate a conversation with your children. If you would like further guidance, please don't hesitate to ask any of our staff!

## Communion



### 1. Communion in the Bible

- Jesus' Example:

The night before Jesus was crucified; he had a special last meal with his disciples. During the meal, Jesus took a piece of bread and broke it. He passed it around to the disciples and told them to eat it saying: "Take this and eat it. This is my body." (Matthew 26:26 NIV). Jesus did not mean it was literally his body, but that the bread represented his body that was soon going to be broken on the cross when he would die for their sins. Jesus then took a cup of juice and passed it around. He told his disciples to drink it and said - "All of you drink from it. This is my blood of the new covenant. It is poured out to forgive the sins of many." (Matthew 26:27-28 NIV). Again, Jesus didn't literally mean the juice was his blood, but it represented his blood that would be shed on the cross to forgive all of our sins.

- Early Church's Example:

The Christians in the early church often shared a common meal together when they met for worship. In I Corinthians 11:26, Paul gives instruction to the early church and encourages them to observe communion when he says - "When you eat the bread and drink the cup, you are announcing the Lord's death until he comes again." (NIV)

### 2. Communion is a Sacrament:

- Sacred moments to honor and remember what God has done
- An outward expression or symbol of an inward event (showing on the outside something that happened on the inside...in our hearts and minds)
- God offers a special blessing or gift during the sacraments – His grace "We have all received one blessing after another. God's grace is not limited." (John 1:16 NIV)

### 3. Why communion:

- We celebrate the Lord's Supper or communion to remember Christ's death on the cross
  - We celebrate the Lord's Supper to thank God for His grace and love shown to us in Jesus Christ.
  - Communion represents Christ's sacrifice on our behalf.
- "Then Jesus took bread. He gave thanks and broke it. He handed it to them and said, "This is my body. It is given for you. Every time you eat it, do it in memory of me." In the same way, after the supper he took the cup. He said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. It is poured out for you." (Luke 22:19-20 NIV). "When we give thanks for the cup at the Lord's Supper, aren't we

sharing in the blood of Christ? When we break the bread, aren't we sharing in the body of Christ?

Just as there is one loaf, so we who are many are one body. We all eat from the one loaf." (1 Corinthians 10:16-17 NIV)

#### **4. How do we participate in communion?**

- By coming prayerfully and thoughtfully
- By preparing ourselves to receive the bread and juice (elements)
  - Prepare your heart by seeking to see if there is any sin that needs to be forgiven
  - Prepare your mind by focusing on what Jesus Christ did for you and how much God loves you
  - Prepare your attitude by being humble and faithful
- By receiving with reverence and thanks