



— A Parents' Guide —

CHILDREN & COMMUNION



PALMA CEIA
Presbyterian Church

WHAT YOU AND YOUR CHILDREN SHOULD KNOW

From the Pastors

Dear Parents,

We are delighted that you are taking time to consider how to introduce your child to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. First experiences leave impressions that will last a lifetime for our children, and we want them to sense God's love and nurturing presence as the essence of the sacrament.

In the early church, communion was offered to those who wanted to discover the meaning of Christianity. It was an introduction to the faith for inquirers, a sustenance in the faith for believers, and a strengthening of the community for the congregation.

Your child is welcome to receive the sacrament when you believe the time is right. To assist you, our church has prepared this booklet to use as a resource for your family.



From the Session:

From...

"God's Family at the Table - A Guide for Parents": "Children grow in their understanding of and commitment to the Christian faith through the nurture of parents and other caring adults. Since the children of Christian parents are members of God's

family, it makes good theological sense to include them in the Lord's Supper. We know that in the Lord's Supper God blesses and renews the covenant family. Christ is present in the Lord's Supper to forgive our sins and to give us the gift of life anew. These blessings and gifts are given to our children as well as to us."

From...

The "Book of Order, Presbyterian Church USA": "Baptized children who are being nurtured and instructed in the significance of the invitation to the Table and the meaning of their response are invited to receive the Lord's Supper recognizing that their understanding of participation will vary according to their maturity." (W-2.4011) "It is the responsibility of the whole congregation, particularly exercised through the session, to nurture those who are baptized to respond to the invitation to the Lord's Supper. When a person is baptized as a child, the session shall equip and support the parent(s) or those exercising parental responsibility for their task of nurturing the child for receiving the Lord's Supper." (W-4.2002).

When is Communion Served at Palma Ceia?

Communion is served on Epiphany Sunday, the first Sunday in Lent, the Sunday after Easter, the last Sunday in June and August, World Communion in October, All Saints, the first Sunday in Advent, and whenever Vespers takes place in the Chapel on Sunday nights. On the Sunday mornings communion is served, children are invited to remain in the worship space for "Stay Together Sundays" in order to participate in communion with their family. Childcare is always available in the nursery if needed.

BECOMING DISCIPLES IN GOD'S LOVE

What Children Can Understand

Infants develop a sense of trust in their parents or guardians as their caregivers hold them, rock them, provide clean and warm clothing for them, and feed them. All of this builds a foundation for the child to trust God and to receive the Lord's Supper as an expression of God's trustworthiness.

One to Three-Year-Olds are developing language skills. Parents or guardians can begin to talk with them about the communion service. These children can begin to understand that communion is a very special meal, God's meal. They can learn that communion helps us remember a time when Jesus shared a meal with his friends and that it is a time for thanking God for Christ's continued presence with us.

Three to Five-Year-Olds will be curious about the physical aspects of communion - the table, the cups, the bread, etc. They can grasp the concept of the church as a family sharing a meal together.

Six to Eight-Year-Olds are beginning to think historically. They can begin to grasp the relationship between the Last Supper and the communion service. These children are also developing the ability to think symbolically. They can begin to understand that the bread represents Jesus' love for us. They can see that in the Lord's Supper the minister and people are performing the same actions Jesus and the disciples performed at the Last Supper. They have a deeper understanding of the church as family. As a result, at this age they can also begin to feel excluded if they are not receiving communion.

Older Children are beginning to be able to grasp more of the meanings found in the Lord's Supper. They are more skilled at abstract and symbolic thinking. They have good reading skills and can make clear sense of the prayers and words associated with the sacrament.

When Is Your Child Ready?

The Lord's Supper not only nourishes, it also teaches, and we learn about communion by participating in it. Even very young children can sense that the Lord's Supper is a special meal to be received with respect, and they can share a deep sense of belonging to the forgiving, accepting, loving community of the church. Parents or guardians may decide when their children have reached this point and are ready to celebrate communion.

With excerpts from *Gifts of God: The Sacraments*, A Study Guide for the Gifts of God: written by Rev. David Gambrell, associate for worship, office of Theology and Worship, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).





How Parents and Guardians Can Prepare Their Children to Receive the Lord's Supper

When you decide that your child is ready to take part in communion, you will probably want to spend time teaching him or her about the Lord's Supper. *Here are some suggestions:*

1. Take some time at home to describe to your child in advance what happens in a communion service.
2. Point out various meanings of the Lord's Supper:
 - The Lord's Supper is a meal for God's people – God's grace nourishes and refreshes us and is food for our souls.
 - The Lord's Supper is the church's "thanksgiving dinner." The church gives thanks for Jesus Christ and for the continuing blessings of the Holy Spirit.
 - The Lord's Supper is a sign of the church's unity and fellowship—we commune with each other and with God.
 - The Lord's Supper is a call to sacrificial service – to give ourselves up to God, like Jesus did, in an act of praise and service.
 - In the Lord's Supper, the spirit of Jesus is present and serves as host.
 - The Lord's Supper is a celebration that looks forward to the coming of God's kingdom.
3. Talk to your children about Jesus sharing meals and feeding his followers, and read them passages from a Bible.
4. Tell your children about some of your own experiences with communion—your first time to receive it, special services, etc.

5. Talk to your children about communion at mealtime. You can emphasize the family meal: the Lord's Supper is like a family table where the church gathers to share in the same bread and the same cup because the people in the church belong to each other and to God.

Communion Education at Palma Ceia

Palma Ceia Presbyterian Church offers the following ways of educating children about Communion:

Sharing meals and communion is an ongoing theme for lessons in Faith Formation and in Godly Play ministries during the school year and in the summer.

A three week series is offered to parents of second grade children for Worship education with strong sacrament components. These children are invited to participate in preparing the elements in October and the communion liturgy. They are invited to process with the elements on World Communion Sunday.

Youth in the Confirmation Class explore for a deep understanding communion in their study of the sacraments.

For questions regarding communion, please contact Director of Children and Families, Allison Kelly, Allison@palmacea.org or call 813-253-6047, ext. 225.