

the solemnity and the celebration of thankfulness that accompanies forgiveness. Encourage them to ask questions of grandparents, pastor, teachers and others. Read the Passover stories (Exod. 12 and Luke 22:7-20) and communion scriptures in the New Testament with them (1 Cor. 11:11-22). Remember to encourage them. Jesus welcomed children (Mark 10:13-16).

INVOLVEMENT As understanding increases, the desire to participate may also increase. This desire is an open door to one of the most formative discipleship stages in the life of a believer. Children often understand much more than adults realize. If children do not yet have the clear ability to express in adult language what communion means, that does not mean they lack understanding. A child can be given opportunities to express understanding in nonverbal or developmentally appropriate ways such as:

- Celebrate a foot washing or hand washing ceremony to clarify the importance of right relationships with God and each other. (*A Swim and a Snack?*)
- Share a Passover meal together to understand the origins and context of communion. (*Communion Shapes Character*, pp 264-267)
- Study *First Steps For Kids* to clarify their faith decision and strengthen their assurance of salvation. Have them write, draw, or create a song as their expression of gratitude to Jesus.

Each of these actions should be explained as steps that prepare a child for participation.

PARTICIPATION A child who has been involved in the stages of observation, inclusion and involvement 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.

This still leaves the challenge of “how will a child participate?” Mennonite Brethren churches have the freedom to locally determine who may participate in communion. Some churches invite only baptized believers to participate. Others invite all believers. Accountability to one’s congregation is an important part of this decision, so guidance of the local church in this matter is critical.

The invitation to participate in communion is often open to non-baptized believers. As someone responsible for the spiritual care and nurture of your child, you are

the accountability link between your child and the larger church family. 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. Personal preparation rather than precedent is what the decision to participate rests upon.

Where Do I Go For Further Guidance?

This pamphlet is only a first step. Discuss your questions with your pastor. Ask for teaching and guidance for yourself and your children. Make use of the resources listed below and talk with others about how they have guided their children through these decisions.

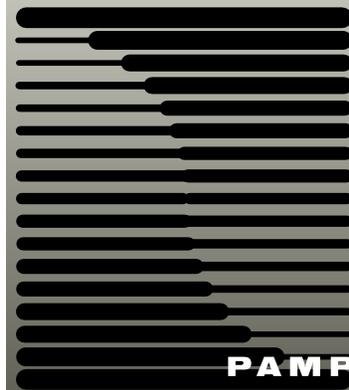
Helpful resources

- A Swim and a Snack?* Resources for baptism and communion services, Kindred Productions, 2002
- Confession Of Faith: Commentary And Pastoral Application*. Kindred Productions, 2000.
- Dahl, Wes. *Faith Walk*. Kindred Productions, 1998.
- Dick, Lorraine. *First Steps for Kids*. Kindred Productions, 1995.
- Do You Think? Conversation Starters for Communion*, Kindred Productions, 2002.
- Esau, Dave. “The Lord’s Supper: Who’s Invited?” *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, September 8, 2000.
- Kalmar, Laura *Communion: helping kids understand communion*. Kindred Productions, 2002.
- Krieder, Eleanor. *Communion Shapes Character*. Herald Press, 1997.

1. Ray Bystrom, Baptism and Membership Pamphlet. Board of Faith and Life, 2000.
2. Concept by Dave Esau and Lorraine Dick, contributors to *A Swim and a Snack? Resources for baptism and communion services*, 2002.

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Children and Communion



MENNONITE BRETHREN

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Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith: Article 9: Lord's Supper

MEANING The church observes the Lord's Supper, as instituted by Christ. The Supper points to Christ, whose body was broken for us and whose blood was shed to assure salvation for believers and to establish the new covenant. In the Supper the church identifies with the life of Christ given for the redemption of humanity and proclaims the Lord's death until He comes. The Supper expresses the fellowship and unity of all believers with Christ. It is a supper of remembrance, celebration and praise, which strengthens believers for true discipleship and service.

PRACTICE In preparation for the fellowship of the Lord's Supper, all believers examine themselves. All those who understand its meaning, confess Jesus Christ as Lord in word and life, are accountable to their congregation and are living in right relationship with God and others are invited to participate in the Lord's Supper. The normal pattern in the New Testament was that baptism preceded participation in the Lord's Supper.

Matthew 26:26-30; Acts 2:41-42; I Corinthians 10:16-17; I Corinthians 11:23-32.

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 is invited to the Lord's Table?

Those who give spiritual guidance to children must be ready to respond to children's questions about communion and their desire to participate in this regular worship activity of the church.

Who Is Invited?

A simple answer to the question of who is invited is "all believers", that is, people who "confess Jesus Christ as Lord in word and life". Additionally we emphasize that participants "understand its meaning", and are "accountable to their congregation". Children who believe and confess that Jesus is Lord have an authentic faith. However, they may have a limited understanding of the meaning of communion or what accountability to a congregation involves.

What Does Communion Mean?

Mennonite Brethren understand the Lord's Supper to be a "sign". To participate in the Lord's Supper is to declare that God's gift of grace and forgiveness has been accepted and a covenant relationship with Christ and his Body, the church, has been established.

Participants have a 360° perspective of salvation. Looking back, we are able to remember the salvation history 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.

What Is "Accountability To Their Congregation"?

While understanding that the meaning of communion involves a look backwards and forwards, understanding accountability involves a good look at the present. Believers are called to reflect upon their spiritual walk and their relationship with Christ and the church. This involves self-examination, confession and the recognition of forgiveness received. Ultimately this self-awareness is best declared by the step of baptism.

Practice Of Communion

The normal pattern in the New Testament was that baptism preceded participation in the Lord's Supper. Our churches have emphasized the importance of adult believer's baptism, so communion has generally been an adult celebration. In the New Testament a confession of faith was immediately followed by baptism (Acts 16:29-33). Does that mean only those who have been baptized can partake? The New Testament does not speak to this situation¹ and requires that we practice discernment when we invite non-baptized believers to the Lord's Table.

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 four stages: observation, inclusion, involvement and participation.² The following diagram illustrates this progression.



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

INCLUSION As observation increases understanding, make a point of including your children. Allow them to handle communion trays and make a point of speaking words of blessing to them. 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