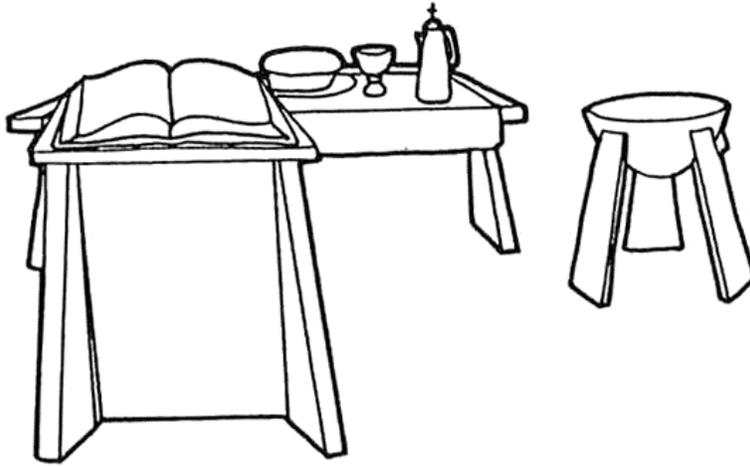


A resource for parents and children

We Come to Your Table



A Booklet for Families on the Sacrament of Communion

This booklet was originally prepared by Rosemary S. Turner when she was serving as director of Christian education at Immanuel Congregational Church in Hartford, Connecticut. It has been edited and adapted for use by Kathy Jo Blaske for congregations of Albany Synod, Reformed Church in America. The illustrations by James R. Esther were original to *Understanding Worship in the RCA*, © Reformed Church Press 1988, and are used with permission. The Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyrighted in 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, and are used by permission. Use and reproduction of this booklet within RCA congregations is encouraged in order that all God's children will grow as they participate in the sacraments of baptism and Communion. This resource was originally published in 1991, and was updated in 2012.

The Family, Children, and Communion

This booklet has been prepared as a resource for families. It may be used in preparing children for coming to the Lord's Table for the first time. It is also to be used in continually nurturing children for meaningful life-long participation in the sacraments. The church calls on the family to be involved in this process because it believes that the family is a most important context for the Christian growth of children.

As parents, we are communicators of faithful living. The family is the initial context where the meaning of love, the experience of giving, sharing, and forgiving are learned. By our attitudes, words, and actions we have great influence on the faith development of our children.

Our children need to hear and see what our faith means to us. By participating with our children in the life of the church, we express our faith and grow as we do. There is a process by which faith grows. Families play an important role. Children do things before they can verbalize their understanding. Children adopt the behavior of others, especially that of their parents. It is common,

for example, if parents pray before meals, that their children will do so as well. In the same way young children will participate in religious celebrations.

The ability to express faith through words will gradually follow behavior. As the children grow, they will begin to ask the question “Why?” Why do we pray before meals? Why do we worship on Sunday? Why do we share bread and juice together? This intellectual search for meaning and understanding grows out of these experiences. This is the key to the children’s presence at the Jewish Passover meal, where the child’s questions prompt the family’s retelling of the story of their deliverance.

Words and actions are both important means of expressing faith. The experience of worship is of primary importance to children’s faith.

Children can experience the richness of the sacrament long before they can verbalize its meaning. The learning process moves quite naturally from doing to reflection, from devotion to doctrine, from practice to growing understanding.

Children have faith. Children are an important part of the body of Christ. By participating in the sacrament, children can experience that they belong, that they are a part of a church family that is celebrating Jesus’ life. By sharing bread with one another they are being nourished in faith.

At this table the whole people of God, including the young, receive God’s gift of love in Jesus, are nourished in the faith, and are challenged to be disciples.

As parents we ask: How can we help our children understand Communion? Perhaps we are thinking, “I’m not even sure I understand everything about Communion myself.”

We do have many meanings to share with our children. The sacrament is rich in meaning. We have much to give them as they grow in their understanding of Communion. This booklet will highlight some of the themes of the sacrament that can be shared with children.

No matter how young or old we are, there is always room for growth in understanding. We continue to grow in our understanding of what Communion means all through our lives.

Baptism and Communion: Sacraments of Identity and Community

Baptism celebrates one’s belonging to the family of God. In the baptismal service a person’s identity is proclaimed.

This is a child of God.

We as parents and congregation give thanks to God for the gift of new life in the community. We give witness to the fact that we are related to the new person and have a responsibility nurturing this little one in faith. We recognize the child’s need for a community of faith. We make promises that we will help this child grow in the knowledge and love of Jesus, to help this child understand his or her identity as a child of God.

As well as witnessing to the relationship between the child and the congregation, baptism is about God’s relationship to the child. Before the child is born, God already claims, accepts, and loves this child.

Baptism is a visible reminder that our salvation comes as a gift of a loving God who chose us before we chose him, who has loved us unconditionally with a love that will not let us go.

God initiates this covenantal relationship. His people give themselves in response to this gift. Throughout life this covenant relationship grows.



Our responsibility, as parents and congregation, is to help the child live that gift, to live that identity, to live that baptism. Baptism is a beginning. The calling is to a lifelong pilgrimage. We grow continually. The God who claims us in baptism is present, constantly loving us throughout life. Although we stumble and fall, we are picked up, forgiven, and called to continue. The child will grow gradually in understanding of God's gifts of forgiveness, love, and strength. Such is the process of sanctification.

Communion is also a sacrament that celebrates our belonging. Communion expresses our identity. In this sacrament we are reminded that, together, we are the body of Christ.

We Are the Body of Christ

We receive God's gifts of life, love, and forgiveness in order that we may be and become Christ's people in the world. Communion is a sacrament of love. We are nurtured in love and care for one another as we participate in the sacrament. Christ welcomes us to the table, where, in remembrance, communion, and hope, we celebrate God's constant love.

As we live together, witnessing God's love among ourselves and to others, we are the body of Christ. God's grace works through us to invite and welcome all to the table. Participation in the sacrament of Communion, in itself, helps to nurture the faith and fulfill our baptismal vows.

"Abide in me as I abide in you...I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit" (John 15:4-5a).

Communion Is...

The following are themes of Communion that families can share together. Some will include questions to help further explore the theme.

A Gracious Invitation from Jesus Christ

The risen Christ is present as the host at this celebration. We are invited by Christ to share at the table. Jesus wants to nourish us with his life, his love, his forgiveness, and his strength.

While they were eating, Jesus took the bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to his friends. Take it. This is my body. And Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of me."

As a family, talk about the invitation to Communion. Just as Jesus welcomed children to himself in the gospel of Mark, Jesus welcomes children to participate in Communion. He chose bread and wine to be a sign to us of his presence and love.

As a family, talk about ways you can prepare to come to the table.

- With memories of Jesus' loving and forgiving actions.
- With thanks for ways in which family and friends care for us.
- With joy to express God's love for others.

Worship

The early church celebrated Communion on each Lord's Day. It was an indispensable part of Christian worship. Whereas the sermon and scripture were the Word spoken and heard, the sacrament was the Word in visible form, graphically representing the good news of God's Word.

Communion Is About...

Celebrating

The people of God gather to worship. They hear words of welcome, which set the tone for celebrating. Through songs and prayers the community praises God.

Giving Thanks

Another word for Communion is Eucharist. It is a Greek word that means “joyful thanksgiving.” In the Communion service the people gather to say thanks. We remember God’s goodness. We thank God for this world, the people in it, and all the other signs of his love that surround us. We also thank God for Jesus Christ, for his life, death, and resurrection, and for the love he showed for all people.

Making Peace

In the service of worship the people ask God for forgiveness for not living by God’s ways. We hear God’s call to forgive one another. We hear God’s words of assurance. Together we pray the Lord’s Prayer addressing God as our Father and each other as brothers and sisters. We share with one another the sign of peace. We depart to live and work for peace day by day.

Listening

We come to worship to listen to God’s Word. The scripture readings are more than words— they’re a living link with our God who is present through the Spirit to guide his people, to communicate his love.

Caring

The invitation of Communion is a call to grow in love. We respond to God’s care for us with a promise to care for one another.

In our prayers we express our concerns and joys for our family, our community, and our world.

Sharing

One way we respond to God’s love is by offering gifts of money to be shared with others. We respond in other ways, too...by being kind to others, by helping those in need.

Past, Present, and Future

By talking and eating with his disciples, Jesus instructed his followers in the practice of Communion. As we eat and drink during Communion, we remember Jesus as our friend and God’s child. In the present, we can feel the love of God through family and friends. We are sure

that the Spirit will help us spread God’s love and care to all people, now and always. We come to Communion with joy.

Sharing a Meal

We gather to share in the meal. We eat and drink together, as one family. We experience Communion as a celebrative meal, a sacrament, which cannot be expressed fully by words.

Transformation

From wheat into bread, from grapes into wine, from ordinary lives into grace-filled lives, from individuals into the one family of God. This is the meaning of Communion. We are changed by love.

Going Forth to Make a Better World

Nourished by bread and juice of the grape, as sisters and brothers we are sent out into the world with a mission. Sustained by God's love, we go forth to share that love with others.

Many themes emerge from our experience of Communion. It's about belonging, celebrating, remembering, making peace, listening, caring, giving thanks, sharing a meal, and going forth to make a better world. It's about God's love for us and our love for all God's people. Children's understandings of the different meanings will grow gradually.



Sharing a Meal

There is more to meals than eating food. Meals are perhaps the most commonly shared experience of community life.

The family meal experience is a way our children learn what it is to gather together around a table in the presence of God and learn to grow in love. There are times when families celebrate a special occasion. There are times when, during a meal together, we are able to forgive a hurt or ask for forgiveness. There are ordinary times when we listen to each member of the family, caring about their day, their ups and downs. There are times when our meal is a celebration of the fact that we are a family and each of us is important.

As a family, recall some special meals you have shared. What are some of the elements of that specialness? What makes your family meal a celebration?

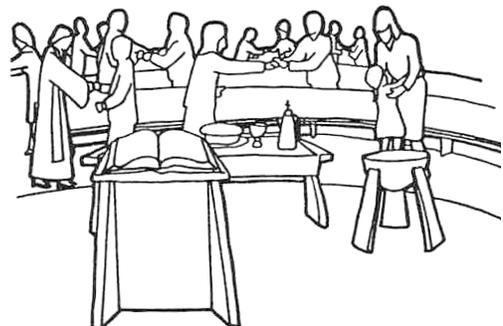
1. Eating with others was a very important part of the ministry of Jesus.
2. In the sharing of food, Jesus also shared company, ideas, and teaching. Jesus did a lot of forgiving and healing during meals.

As a family, read about some of the meals Jesus shared:

- Feeding the 5,000 John 6:1-15
- A meal with Levi and friends Mark 2:13-17
- Meal in the house of Simon the Pharisee Luke 7:36-50
- The last supper Luke 22:14-20
- Breaking bread in Emmaus Luke 24:13-35
- Fish and bread by the lakeside John 21:1-14

The early church continued to eat community meals together and remember Jesus. As they ate together, recalling the many occasions when Jesus had broken bread with them before his death, they knew that he was with them still.

As a family, talk about the church's celebration of Communion. What happens at Communion? What are your feelings about Communion? In what ways do you sense the presence of Jesus Christ?



So the people of the church remembered. Today the church family gathers to continue the meals that Jesus had with his friends.

This is a time of joy and thanksgiving, when we remember how Jesus lived and what he taught us about God. Our church family gathers for Communion. A little bit of bread and grape juice is served to the congregation. And, as we eat, we remember Jesus and feel that God is still with us in a special way and will continue to be with us tomorrow and the days and months and years after that.

Do you know what? Everyone in the church is like a big family. When we have Communion, we know that all over the world, wherever there are followers of Jesus, they, too, share Communion. Jesus' friends paused to remember how Jesus came to teach about God's love. When you see the table in front of your church set up with bread and grape juice, you'll know the time for Communion has come again...a time to remember how Jesus loved and taught God's people.

Ideas for Family Projects Make Banners, Posters, or Mobiles

Make a family banner, poster, or mobile to illustrate one or more of the themes of Communion. A banner can be made from various materials: burlap or felt for the background; felt and other materials for color, contrast, and illustration. A poster can be made easily from materials found in your home. Tag board, heavy paper, or cardboard can be used for the background. Magazines and newspaper pictures, as well as family drawings, can be used to illustrate the poster.

A mobile can be made that shows the relationship of baptism and Communion through symbols.

- *Shell*: baptism celebrates our belonging to God's family.
- *Bread and cup*: Communion helps us grow in our relationship with God and one another.
- *Cross and butterfly*: Communion is a time to remember Jesus' love, his life, death and resurrection.
- *Grapes and wheat*: These are harvested and become one loaf, one cup. We are gathered to become one people.
- *People*: Communion is our unity with God and one another and our call to be his people.
- *Joy*: Communion is a joyful celebration when we thank God for all his gifts to us, especially the gift of Jesus Christ.

Make a "Do This in Memory of Me" Mural

Depict scenes from Jesus' life and our lives illustrating the things Jesus taught us to do to live fully in the new covenant.

The center of your mural could be a picture of the last supper and/or a picture of people today celebrating the Lord's Supper.

Bake Bread Together

Plan a family bread-making day, with everyone participating in the various steps of the process.

Prayer:

Loving God, Creator of us all, we thank you for those who planted, tended, and harvested the grain, those who ground it into flour, and those who packaged and provided the flour for us to make into bread. As we enjoy the taste of this bread and the fun of sharing it with others, we give thanks to you. Amen.

"Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Corinthians 10:17).

A Thankful Song

Text: Mary Rumsey

To God, who gives our daily bread,
A thankful song we'll raise,
And pray that he, who sends us food,
May fill our hearts with praise.

From *The Whole World Singing*, compiled by Edith L. Thomas, Friendship Press, 1950.

Thanksgiving Canon

Traditional American

For all your goodness, Lord, we give you thanks.
Thanks for the food we eat, and for the friends we meet;
for each new day we greet, we give you thanks.

From *God's People Pray Songbook*, Augsburg Publishing House, 1984.

Welcome

Richard Avery, Donald Marsh

Welcome! Welcome! Sweet it is to be together,
Living side by side through all kinds of weather,
To learn to love, to watch and see what God can do
Through you and me when we work together as a family.
Holy, holy, glory be to God and welcome!
Welcome! Welcome! Welcome! Peace be to you!

From *God's People Songbook*, Augsburg Publishing House, 1980. Words and music ©1970, Hope Publishing Company. All rights reserved. Used by permission. For any further reproduction, please contact Hope Publishing Company.

Communion: A Call to Unity

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you...that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 15:12, 17:21).

