



Preparing Your Child for First

Communion



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First Communion!

We all have different feelings, personal interpretations and ideas about when it should take place. Bethlehem Lutheran believes that this important decision is made by a parent(s) in consultation with the pastor. Hopefully the following information will help you determine the right time for your child to begin participation in the sacrament of communion as well as deepen the experience for those already receiving.



The ELCA has put together some guiding statements that are helpful in thinking about how people are welcomed into participation in the sacramental meal.

- The table is the Lord's Table, and Christ is the host at the meal. Although the church and its leaders are entrusted to be "stewards of God's mysteries" (1 Cor. 4:1), it is God who extends the invitation.
- No matter when participation in the sacrament begins, Holy Communion is seen as one of the gifts of grace given in baptism, rather than a separate gift that suggests an advanced level or fuller expression of the Christian identity.
- The sacrament of communion is seen as being freely given by God, not offered as a reward for the completion of requirements, but as a gift to trusting hearts within the community of God's people.
- At the same time, this gift is accompanied by catechesis and formation so as to deepen participation in the sacrament and enrich the Christian life. Such formation occurs both before and after participation begins. Adults preparing for baptism or affirmation of baptism receive instruction also for meaningful participation in the Lord's Supper. Children engage in formation that is appropriate to their age. When infants and very young children are communed, parents and sponsors receive instruction and the children continue to learn and grow throughout their development.

"But she doesn't understand!" is a common concern. Let's start with what she (and all of us) can understand.



1. God is Love
2. God gave us Jesus
3. Jesus is with us in this meal
- 4. COMMUNION IS SPECIAL!**

Now comes the hard part. Can we explain exactly how Jesus is with us in the meal, making communion special? No. How Jesus is with us through bread and wine is a mystery, but we know it is real and it is significant. The same can be true for your child. If she is taught that communion is special, she will believe that it is true.

In 1519 Martin Luther wrote a treatise on the Lord's Supper saying: *The blessing of this sacrament is fellowship and love, by which we are strengthened...* This fellowship and love has two parts – we experience it with God and with each other. You can come to the table as a beloved child of God, and as a sinner knowing our need for forgiveness and renewal. No one is above the other at the Lord's Supper – all are equal.





What can you do as you make this decision? Pray, contemplate and consider what fellowship and love mean to you. Feel free to ask questions. Open your heart to the Holy Spirit.

Baby/Preschool Age



Whether you have decided to pick a date for first communion, or your child is already communing or you are still in the decision process, you can teach your child about communion using the following techniques.

There are two age levels of techniques included here – Baby/Preschool and Elementary. As you know, there are many differences in abilities and you may need to adapt the techniques to fit the current needs of your child. Please read through both sections, regardless of your child's age, and use the concepts that will help your child prepare for or deepen the experience of communion.



During Worship

Make sure that your child is watching during the communion liturgy.

Whisper things like

Look, what is the pastor doing? He's getting ready for God's special meal!

Now she's holding the bread. Jesus said to break the bread and eat it.

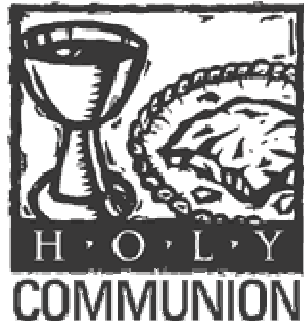
There is wine in that cup. Wine and grape juice are both made from grapes.

Jesus said that we should eat the bread and drink the wine to remember him. Communion is a celebration of God's love for us.

Let's fold our hands during the prayer.

On the way forward to the altar say

Our special communion plate is called a paten. The special cup is called a chalice. (The special bread is called a wafer.)



Watch how Mommy/Daddy holds her/his hand open to receive God's gift of bread.

After communion pray together.



Dear God, Thank you for sending Jesus to be with us in your special meal. Amen

At Home

Talk about meals.

What is your favorite meal? Can you remember any Bible stories with a meal?

What makes communion the same as a meal at home?

How is it different? Talk about gifts. Why do we give gifts? What was your favorite gift? How does it feel when you get a gift? Communion is a gift from God! Think of "gift" every time you hear Holy Communion.



Read the story of the last supper from a children's Bible.

Read *A Place for You* by Daniel Erlander.

Talk about communion on the way home from church. Ask if your child has any wonderings about this special meal.

As the time for first communion approaches, practice. Teach your child to open his hands to receive the bread or wafer and practice dipping into liquid in a cup. Tell him he can say Amen after receiving the bread and again after the wine. Remind him of the terms *wafer*, *paten* and *chalice*.



Elementary Age



During Worship

Make sure that your child is watching, listening and responding during the worship service, including the communion liturgy.

On the way forward to the altar ask if she remembers what the cup and plate are called – *chalice and paten*.

After communion pray together.

*Dear God, Thank you
for the gift of Jesus in
this special meal. Amen*



At Home

Talk about meals. What is your favorite meal? Can you remember any Bible stories with a



meal? What makes communion the same as a meal at home? How is it different? What other names for communion can you think of? *Lord's Supper, Eucharist, Last Supper*. Talk about gifts. Why do we give gifts? What was your favorite gift? How does it feel when you get a gift? Do you have to do anything before you get the gift? Communion is a gift from God! Think of "gift" every time you hear Holy Communion. Remind your child that communion is a celebration of God's love for us. He sent Jesus to save us from our sins. When we share Holy Communion God is saying to us that because Jesus died for us, God lets go of our sins. Now we can let go of them as well and live a good life.

If there are questions about "how," you can say that Martin Luther said that God comes to us everywhere and in everything, but in the sacraments God comes to us in a special way. The bread and the wine remain bread and wine, but in the communing they become "holy" or "special." It's a mystery!



Read and discuss the story of the last supper from the Bible.

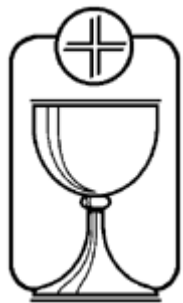
Read and discuss The Sacrament of Holy Communion from *Luther's Small Catechism*. This is printed in the back of the ELW (cranberry hymnal), or ask for a copy from the church office.

Read and discuss *A Place for You* by Daniel Erlander.



Help your child learn/practice the Lord's Prayer if she doesn't already know it.

Talk about communion on the way home from church. Ask if your child has any wonderings about this special meal.



As the time for first communion approaches, practice. Teach your child to open his hands to receive the bread or wafer and practice dipping into liquid in a cup. Tell him he can say Amen after receiving the bread and again after the wine. Remind him of the terms *wafer*, *paten* and *chalice*. Talk about your first communion. Ask other family members and friends about their first communion.

If you feel that the time is right for your child to begin receiving communion, the next step is to talk to the Pastor or Director of Children's Ministry.

If you are unsure, pray, contemplate and consider as you use the information in this booklet. Feel free to ask questions. Open your heart to the movement of the Holy Spirit.

If now is not the time, continue to use the information in this booklet and the worship booklets to enhance the worship experience for your family. Pray, contemplate and consider. Open your heart to the movement of the Holy Spirit.

God loves us all very much!!! God invited us to this very special meal. No one is telling you that your child "has" to come. Your child is **WELCOME** to come to the Lord's Table whenever the time is right for your family. The Bethlehem family looks forward to having your child join them at the table.

Most of all, **Jesus Christ is looking forward to having your child come to the table, often!**

