

# Nurturing Your Child's Faith

## Leading Your Child to the Lord's Table

### **“Let the Children Come to Me”**

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*(Matt. 19:14)*

When should our children start participating in the Lord's Supper? How do we know when they are ready? What can we do to prepare them? We offer this pamphlet to help you answer those questions. Feel free to discuss this information further with your elder or pastor.

#### **Children of the Covenant**

Children may attend the Lord's table not because of their good behavior, mastery of church teachings, or their high level of maturity. They belong there because God invites them. Through baptism God makes clear that he accepts and claims them as his own covenant children. Therefore the Bible teaches that children too may celebrate with us the saving grace of Jesus our Lord.

- In Matthew 26:27-28 Jesus tells his disciples: “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the, covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” As the covenant meal of the New Testament, all who are in Christ belong there.
- Peter confirms this in Acts 2:39: “The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

#### **Called to Confess**

God calls his covenant people, young and old, to respond to his gracious invitation by confessing his name. Because they share this obligation, the church asks children, after a brief time of preparation, to profess their faith before they participate in the Lord's Supper.

- Luke 22:19 records Jesus' command that we celebrate the Lord's Supper “in remembrance” of him. So when they participate, our children need to know what this covenant meal means.
- In John 6:35 Jesus declares, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” Faith, however simple, is required of those who participate.

### **Growing in Faith**

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#### **Stages of Spiritual Development**

At different ages our children experience and articulate their faith in different ways. We need to take this into account as we evaluate the sincerity and depth of their profession.

- Toddlers have a rough idea of God and who Jesus is. They experience God's love through their parents' love. They confess their faith through memorized phrases, simple prayers, and songs.
- Elementary school children begin to understand God's plan of salvation as expressed in the Apostles' Creed. They can relate the Ten Commandments to their own lives, and they can pray the Lord's Prayer with meaning. They experience God's love through teachers as well as parents. They can read

Scripture and pray on their own. They can confess their faith in their own words.

- Adolescents are able to question their faith and to investigate its implications. They can understand the principal teachings of the confessions and know the contours of a Christian lifestyle. Their experience of God will be mediated through peers and mentors as well as through parents and teachers. They can verbalize their beliefs, doubts, and basic commitments.
- Young adults are able to summarize and give assent to the confessions. They have their own walk with God and experience it in community with others. They can evaluate and make long-term commitments. In their confession they can articulate their faith in Christ, their agreement with the teachings of the church, and their commitment to the responsibilities of adult membership.

## **A Growing Understanding**

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Not only our children, but also our whole church continues to grow as the Spirit leads us into deeper insight into God's Word. One example of this is the growing recognition among us that our children rightfully belong with us at the Lord's table well before they have the ability to make an informed, mature commitment to the teachings of the church. After years of study, reflection, and debate, Synod 1988 adopted four declarations that modify and now guide our procedures to honor that biblical insight.

1. The church may admit those children to the Lord's table who evidence faith and can meaningfully participate.
2. The church should assure itself of such faith through the child's public profession.
3. Our children should be encouraged to make public profession of faith as soon as they are ready to do so.
4. Profession of faith does not yet require our children to accept adult responsibilities within the congregation. The church will continue to provide instruction in the Bible and the confessions. It will grant adult responsibilities when the child reaches age eighteen or as stipulated in the congregation's constitution.

### **Nurturing Our Children in the Faith**

As parents we can help our children on their spiritual journey as we seek to lead them to profess their faith and join us at the table of the Lord. We accomplish this when we

- show them unconditional love.
- model Christlike commitment and behavior.
- confess our own faith in simple, concrete ways.
- encourage our children to ask questions and raise questions ourselves.
- take time for family devotions, gearing them to the developmental level of our children.

- encourage active participation in devotions by inviting our children to read aloud, lead in prayer, initiate discussion, and suggest songs to sing together.
- introduce them to devotional books geared to their age level.
- encourage them to express their doubts and concerns, and, with older children, express our own as well.
- participate in worship and other church activities, and expect our children to do the same.
- express criticism of our church carefully, voicing it only in a loving, committed way and balancing it with appreciation for what's good.

### **Resources for Parents**

Excellent materials are available for helping us nurture our children's spiritual growth. We can mention only a few here.

- children's story Bibles.
- songbooks or any good collection of traditional or contemporary choruses, hymns, and Bible songs.
- devotional books (Faith Alive offers a whole range of these suitable for ages four through adult).
- church school papers and books. The *Walk With Me* and *Kid Connection* curriculums produced by Faith Alive Christian Resources offer your child handouts suitable for family worship that will reinforce what they have learned in class.

### **Say When**

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As a parent, God has put you in a unique position to determine your child's readiness to come to the Lord's table. Check from time to time to determine if your child

- expresses faith in and love for the Lord.
- shows an enduring desire to share in Lord's Supper.
- wants to participate for the right reasons.
- understands what the bread and the cup represent.
- is willing to make a profession of faith.

When your child comes to that point, it's time for you to help him or her to follow the simple process that the church has adopted (see "Sharing Their Faith" on the next page).

## Sharing Their Faith

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There are four steps to follow in leading your children to the table of the Lord. The first two we have already discussed.

1. Your child expresses an interest in participating in the Lord's Supper to you as parent(s) or to a church school teacher or a faith mentor within the church.
2. You discuss with her what the Lord's Supper means, and assess the motivation for participating. If you are convinced her desire is genuine, you contact your elder or pastor.
3. The elder and/or pastor meet with you and your child to hear his testimony and desire to participate in the Lord's Supper. They invite him to a short process of preparation offered by your church, geared to his age level. Should they feel he is not yet ready to make a public profession or to participate in the Lord's Supper, they will tell you why and help suggest ways of meeting their specific concern. If they agree that he is ready, they will recommend to the church council that your child be admitted to the table of the Lord.
4. Your child will make a simple and appropriate public profession of faith during a regular worship service. Your pastor will help you plan this joyous event.

The intent of the process adopted by our churches is certainly not to make it difficult for our children to participate with us at the Lord's table. It was adopted to ensure that it will be a meaningful and joyful experience for them, for you as parents, and for the congregation as a whole.

We hope this pamphlet has been useful to you. Please contact your elder or pastor for more information about the specific procedures your congregation follows. May God bless you richly as you continue to lead your child in the ways of his Kingdom.

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1-800-333-8300