

Children's Profession of Faith

A Guidebook for Pastors and Elders

1

A Growing Understanding

Heading Back

Not only our children, but also our church as a whole continues to develop as the Spirit leads us into deeper insight into God's Word. One example 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. God includes our children in his covenant claim. They too should share in this covenant celebration.

In this we actually return to the practice of the early Reformed churches. Children were admitted to the Lord's table as young as age ten. They were prepared for this by receiving instruction in the Apostles' Creed, the Decalogue, the Lord's Prayer, and the meaning of the sacraments. They celebrated their first communion upon making a public profession of their faith.

In subsequent centuries, admission to the Lord's table has been increasingly delayed. Public profession of faith has grown into a kind of graduation from formal instruction in the confessions of the church. It has become the means for young adults to pledge their agreement with church doctrine, and the way for them to express their willingness to assume adult responsibilities. After two decades of study, reflection, and debate, Synod 1988 adopted four declarations that shift our practice back to a more biblical approach. It renews our appreciation of what it means that our children share fully in the covenantal obligations and blessings that God has given to us. Synod declared that

- a. The church is warranted in admitting to the Lord's Supper covenant children who give evidence of faith and are able to discern the body and remember and proclaim the death of Jesus in celebrating the Lord's Supper.
- b. The church is to assure itself of such faith through a public profession of faith on the part of covenant children.
- c. Covenant children should be encouraged to make profession of faith as soon as they exhibit faith and are able to discern the body and remember and proclaim the death of Jesus in celebrating the Lord's Supper.
- d. The profession of faith of covenant children required for admission to the Lord's Supper is not necessarily an acceptance of adult responsibilities within a congregation; therefore
 1. the church shall continue to instruct these children in the Word and in the

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Reformed confessions;

2. adult responsibilities of membership are to be granted by the church council and assumed by professing individuals at age eighteen or as granted by the Articles of Incorporation of the congregation.

—*Acts of Synod 1988*, pp. 558-560

Finding Our Way

The Synod of 1991 dealt with a number of requests to clarify these four declarations of the Synod of 1988. Two basic concerns needed to be addressed. The first was more practical, the second more theological.

On the practical side, the change of direction set by Synod 1988 left churches wondering how they should specifically implement it. They received little guidance about the way they should proceed. At what age could children meet the guidelines? How should council determine the readiness of children who wished to participate? How would their public profession differ from that of older children? How and when would children who made an early profession commit themselves to the creeds and confessions? Would there be three types of CRC membership: baptized, confessing members *without* rights, and confessing members *with* rights?

The theological question Synod 1991 faced focused on Synod 1988's decision that children should make a public profession of their faith before they are admitted to the Lord's table. Many argued that the biblical evidence presented to that synod did not support such a requirement. They insisted that covenant status alone was sufficient to permit children to participate in communion. In response to these unresolved questions, Synod 1991 appointed a committee "to clarify the requirement of public profession of faith for admission to the Lord's Supper on the part of younger covenant children" (*Acts of Synod 1991*, p. 785).

This study committee reported to Synod 1993. But because Synod 1993 could not resolve these issues, it recommitted the matter back to the committee. In its report to the Synod of 1995, the study committee split evenly on the theological issue and presented opposing recommendations. One side argued that children need to make a public profession of faith before being allowed to participate at the Lord's table, the other that this should not be a requirement, but that congregations should be allowed to decide the issue for themselves.

Synod 1995 ultimately decided that a public profession by younger children was required. It adopted a four-step approach to help churches clarify and implement the decision of Synod 1988. The next two sections of this pamphlet discuss the biblical considerations that guided the decision of Synod 1995 and the four-step procedure it adopted.

2

Biblical Underpinnings

In coming to its four-step approach, Synod 1995 did not adopt any specific recommendations dealing with the biblical evidence presented to it. However, its decisions clearly reflected the views of its advisory committee, which advanced two key biblical principles.

Called into Covenant

The first guiding principle that led to the position adopted by synod is that children may attend the Lord's table. This is not because of their good behavior, mastery of church teachings, or their high level of maturity. They may participate because God invites them. Synod quoted a ground from one of the recommendations adopted by the Synod of 1988: "the Bible makes clear that participation in the Lord's Supper is a result of status in the covenant (Matt. 26:28; Luke 22:20; cf. Ex. 12; 13; 24:4-11; 1 Cor. 10:1-4; Eph. 2:11-13)."

A closer look at passages such as these bears this out:

- Exodus 12:24-28 expressly commands that children attend the Old Testament covenant meal. Parents must teach them its ongoing meaning and significance.
- 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

The second biblical principle asserts that God calls his covenant people, young and old, to respond to his gracious invitation by confessing his name. The committee agreed with the Synod of 1988 that an act of faith on the part of those participating is also required. The committee listed the following texts in support of its position:

- 1 Corinthians 11:23-29 tells us that those who participate in the Lord's Supper must do so in *remembrance* of him. Furthermore, by participating in this sacrament they *proclaim* Jesus' death. Also, Paul urges the importance of *self-examination*, so that those who participate will not bring judgment on themselves. These three elements—remembering, proclaiming, and self-examination—are actions based on and requiring faith.
- 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.
- Luke 22:19 records Jesus' command that we celebrate the Lord's Supper "in remembrance" of him. This confirms that when they participate, our children need to know what this covenant meal means.

A passage not quoted by Synod 1988 that is instructive in this context is Romans 10:9. Paul tells us, "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Our good confession is a necessary fruit of God's saving work in us.

3

Synod's Answer

A Four-Step Process

Based on its agreement with these two principles, Synod 1995 adopted a four-step procedure that it encourages the churches to implement. The steps are:

Step 1: The child expresses interest in participating in the Lord's Supper to his/her parent(s) or perhaps to a church-school teacher or another faith mentor within the church.

Step 2: The parent(s) discusses with the child the meaning of the sacrament and assesses the motivation of the child for participating. Convinced that this inquiry arises from a genuine stirring of the Spirit in the heart of the child, the parent(s) contacts an elder and/or pastor.

Step 3: The elder and/or pastor meets with the child and parent(s) to hear the testimony of the child with respect to his/her faith and desire to participate in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. It is recommended that the child then participate in a short process of preparation for profession of faith taught by a pastor, elder, church-school teacher, or potential faith mentor. This training will focus on the nature and meaning of the sacrament and on a basic explication of the Apostles' Creed, Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer. It will be carried out at the cognitive level appropriate to the child. When satisfied with the faith commitment of the child, the elder and/or pastor will recommend to the council that this child be admitted to the table of the Lord. If the elder or pastor is unable to make such a recommendation, he will provide clear counsel and advice to the child and parent(s) on how to address the area(s) of concern. It may also be helpful to assign an adult faith mentor to nurture a child toward full adult responsibilities in the church after he/she is recommended for profession.

Step 4: The child makes a public profession of faith in a simple and appropriate manner during a regular worship service. Since baptism is commemorated during a worship service, the appropriation of the baptismal promises should also be celebrated during a public worship service. Furthermore, a regular worship setting offers an opportunity for the people of God to celebrate a child's first communion and to make public promises of support.

—*Acts of Synod 1995, p. 719-720*

Related Decisions

Synod 1995 adopted a number of recommendations to support this four-step process, the first, "that the modified trial form of 1989 . . . be accepted as a suggested form for public profession of faith by children" (*Acts of Synod 1995, p. 720*). In its revision of Church Order Article 59, Synod 1995 retains the stipulation that "members by baptism shall be admitted to the Lord's Supper upon a public profession of their faith in Christ *with the use of the prescribed form(s)*" (p. 762, emphasis added). This appears to restrict the options a local church has to that of using this newly adopted form or the ones already in use, which are geared for older members who make public profession. Whether that was synod's intent is an open question. The form for public profession of faith by children is reproduced on p. 11. You are free to reproduce it for use in your church.

Synod left open to the local churches the way in which they deal with securing adult commitments from those who have been admitted to the table of the Lord as children. It decided

that each congregation devise an appropriate means for securing a commitment to the creeds of the Christian Reformed Church and to the responsibilities of adult membership in the local congregation from confessing members who, having attained the age of 18, have not yet made such a commitment.

—*Acts of Synod 1995*, p. 720

On p. 16 you will find some suggestions for how congregations can do that in a meaningful way.

Synod also decided to retain only two types of church membership:

Membership in the Christian Reformed Church [is to] be counted in two categories:

- a. Baptized members—persons who have been baptized but not admitted to the Lord's Supper.
- b. Confessing members—persons who have been admitted to the Lord's Supper on the basis of a personal expression of their faith ("profession of faith"). Confessing members who have reached the age of 18 and who have made a commitment to the creeds of the Christian Reformed Church and the responsibilities of adult membership in the church shall be accorded the full rights and privileges of such membership.

—*Acts of Synod 1995*, p. 720

Synod made changes to Article 59 of the Church Order to bring it into line with its decisions. It also added a supplement to Article 66a, to clarify what happens when members transfer from one congregation to another:

When a church council transfers memberships, it would note for the receiving church whether the confessing members have assented to the creeds of the Christian Reformed Church and accepted the responsibilities of adult membership.

—*Acts of Synod 1995*, p. 721

4

Meeting with the Parents and the Child

Setting the Stage

Because parents and their children may not be aware of the changes recommended by synod, it will be important for you as leaders to spread the word. You may be able to find a variety of ways to educate and encourage them to make the most of the new opportunities they have to respond to the invitation of the Lord to our covenant children.

One good way to do this is to give parents the pamphlet entitled *Nurturing Your Child's Faith: Leading Your Child to the Lord's Table*, which gives the biblical basis, the steps to follow, and some ideas and resources to support parents in their task of nurturing their children's faith.

You may wish to decide on a specific, appropriate time to give this pamphlet to parents, so that it will become standard practice in your church to alert parents to their responsibility in leading their children to the table of the Lord. An obvious choice would be when parents contact you to request the admission of their child to the Lord's Supper. But you may want them to start thinking about this much earlier. You could give it to them already when they present their child for baptism. Other appropriate times would be when children start school, or reach a certain age or specific level of church education. Family visiting also provides an excellent opportunity to present the pamphlet and discuss the matter at greater length. You are the best judge of the best time(s) to share this with parents. In any event, it is important for pastors and elders to frequently remind parents of their obligation to lead their children to the Lord, and to encourage them to make the most of their opportunity to help their children grow up in faith.

Responding to Their Request

When parents make the pastor or elder aware of a child's desire to participate in the Lord's Supper, it is appropriate to

- *schedule a meeting* between the child, parents, an elder, and/or the pastor.
- *provide lots of reassurance* because such a meeting can be intimidating for a child. Make it abundantly clear that the intent of the meeting is not a grilling session or theological examination. You are there to hear the child's testimony and her desire to participate in communion. Let the child know that it's a wonderful privilege that you really look forward to.
- *touch base with the child informally* as often as you can before your meeting. Tell him that you're delighted and that you are eagerly anticipating your visit.

Hearing the Child's Testimony

When you make your visit with the parents and the child be sensitive to the different stages of spiritual development. At different ages our children experience and articulate their faith in different ways. You need to take this into account as you

evaluate the sincerity and depth of the child's testimony and subsequent confession. You can expect more from an older child than a younger one. But remember that participation in the Lord's Supper should not depend on the level of spiritual maturity the child has reached. It depends on the presence and genuineness of that faith at whatever level it happens to be.

Here is a brief sketch of what to expect from children at different ages. But remember that children are individuals and they all mature at different rates. Chronological age is not always an accurate indicator of spiritual development.

- 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 simple terms, 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. For this reason, the church conveys the privileges and duties of adult membership on confessing members when they reach this age.

Here are some suggestions for conducting your visit:

- Set a relaxed, positive tone from the start.
- Take some time for small talk, making sure to include the child.
- "Change gears" by reading a Scripture passage (from a current translation) focusing on our Good Shepherd and his invitation to us. Possibilities include John 10:11-15; Matthew 11:25-30; or John 3:16-18. Discuss the passage briefly, then open with prayer.
- Ask the parents to say why they think their child should come to the Lord's table.
- Ask the child if she believes, and to tell in her own words what she believes. Use some "fill-in" questions to give her a chance to elaborate: Who is Jesus? What has he done for you? What will he do?
- Ask the child what the Lord's Supper means: Why do you want to participate? What do you expect from it? What do the bread and the cup mean?
- Ask the child if he knows what public profession of faith is and whether he is

willing to do so before attending the Lord's Supper. Also check on his willingness to prepare for this by following the preparation course your church offers. You may need to provide some information and reassurance. Especially younger children may not be very familiar with this, and we fear what we do not know.

- If you have any specific concerns that would need to be met before the child is ready to proceed, be sure to put those in the right context. Share your joy that he wants to take this step. Remind him you're there to help him make it. Then tell him what he needs to do to be really ready, and offer to help him do so in any way you can.
- If you feel able to give a positive response, express your joy, list the steps that come next, and close in a prayer of thanksgiving.
- Stay in touch with the parents and the child before, during, and after the public profession. Informal contacts after a worship service or a quick phone call show that you genuinely care. That speaks volumes to kids about Jesus' love for them.

5

Preparing for the Public Profession

The purpose of preparation is not to cram years of church education into a few brief sessions. Synod specified that it be carried out “at the cognitive level appropriate to the child,” and that it should “focus on the nature and meaning of the sacrament and on a basic explication of the Apostles’ Creed, Ten Commandments, and the Lord’s Prayer” (*Acts of Synod 1995*, p. 720).

Precisely how this preparation will take place is up to the local church to decide. It could be offered to the child individually, by a pastor, elder, youth leader, mentor, or church education teacher. Or it could take place in a group session if scheduling allows. Whether to offer one or more sessions depends a great deal on how knowledgeable the child already is and on the level of knowledge your council feels is necessary for the child to participate meaningfully.

An excellent tool for helping children prepare to profess their faith is the booklet *Q&A: A Summary of Biblical Teachings* (available from Faith Alive Christian Resources). This booklet, written for children, uses questions and answers to present an overview of our faith and to specifically focus on the areas stipulated by synod. Also available from Faith Alive is the study *I Believe: Getting Ready to Profess My Faith*, a guide to help mentors prepare young teens to grow in and express their faith.

Learning to speak of her faith in her own words is an important aspect of a child’s preparation for public profession and communion. One excellent way of accomplishing this is to use the leading phrases found in the downloadable child’s profession of faith keepsake, *I Love You, Lord*, that you may wish to present when she makes her profession.

The keepsake prompts the child to write down simple statements of what his baptism means, who Jesus is, and what the Lord’s Supper is about. In the preparation class he could receive a copy of these prompts on a separate sheet, perhaps writing down his initial answers, then updating them as he progresses through the preparatory session(s). These answers could then be recorded in his keepsake once he receives it at his public profession. This approach would also help to keep the session(s) focused on public profession and Lord’s Supper attendance.

6

Celebrating the Child's Public Profession

Introductions

When covenant children are ready to publicly profess their faith and join us at the Lord's table, it is important that we set the stage for a joyous celebration of these events. Appropriate introductions are in order to allow this to happen.

If your church is new to the practice of encouraging younger children to profess their faith and participate at the Lord's table, it is important to introduce the congregation to it. Make sure that the issue is presented, discussed, and approved well before the actual date of the public profession. Nothing should impair the unity and joy of the congregation in celebrating this joyous event with the children.

The children should also receive a personal introduction. This could be done by the pastor, worship leader, elder, parents, or a mentor. Relevant facts about their lives could be included, especially events that reflect God's presence, guidance, or work in them. Alternatively, a Bible passage chosen especially for each child could be read.

Appropriate Involvement

How can our children best make their profession in the actual worship service? Much depends on their age, their level of spiritual maturity, and their personality. Some children will be scared stiff despite our best attempts to put them at ease. Others will feel quite free. Others might be too uninhibited. Here are some suggestions for how they can respond appropriately as they become progressively older.

- If they are very young or timid, they could say a simple "yes" in response to the questions in the form, if the questions are rephrased to call for that answer.
- They could read their responses to the questions from a card.
- They could include the responses they gave based on the opening phrases from the keepsake.
- They could memorize their responses and recite them. (If you go this route be sure that the pastor has a copy. They may require some prompting.)
- They could answer the questions in their own words.
- They could use the questions in the form to give a more extensive testimony of their faith. In this case the pastor or worship leader should help in the preparation and provide lots of guidance as to content, style, and length.

In addition to their public profession, the children could participate in the rest of the service as well, reading Scripture or leading in prayer, a litany, or a responsive reading. If they are very brave you might also invite them to the front, along with their parents, to receive their first communion around the communion table.

Worship Suggestions

Before we look at some models for a suitable order of worship, here are some general suggestions for making this a festive event that involves the congregation in welcoming the child to the Lord's table.

- Announce the child's public profession at least a week prior to the occasion and remember her in prayer.
- Schedule this event for a communion service so that the child can immediately participate after having made public profession.
- Sing the child's favorite song together during worship.
- Have the congregation stand and say the Apostles' Creed together with the child or sing a song of faith together.
- Encourage the child, his parents, or his mentor to take a role in the service, reading an appropriate psalm, leading in prayer, or leading in a responsive reading.
- Present the keepsake and an appropriate gift.
- Have the pastor or service leader specifically welcome the child at the beginning of the communion celebration. If the child is bold enough, invite him or her, together with parents, mentor, and/or friends, to go to the communion table to participate.
- Provide a cake to celebrate the event before or after the service.

Form for Profession of Faith of Children

Synod 1995 approved the following form for use in the public profession of faith by children. Feel free to reproduce it in whatever format best suits your worship service.

Brothers and sisters in the Lord:

Today we are happy to celebrate God's grace in the lives of [names]. When they were baptized, they were welcomed into the covenant family of God. Now they want to join that family at the Lord's table. So today they will respond in faith to God's promises in baptism, tell us of their faith in the Lord Jesus, and commit themselves to grow in that faith.

The Questions

Q. Whom do you trust as the Savior from your sin and the Lord of your life?
A. I believe in Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord.

Q. Do you know that you belong to the family of God through your baptism?
A. I do.

Q. Will you continue to learn more about God and his Word, and will you continue to serve him with us in your life and worship?
A. I will.

Q. Will you allow us, your church family, to encourage you in your faith and hold you responsible to your commitment to Jesus and his church?
A. I will.

Alternate Questions

Q. Do you believe in Jesus as your Savior and Lord?
A. Yes, I believe that God sent him to die for all my sin and that he lives as the Lord of my life.

Q. What does your baptism mean to you?
A. That I am a member of God's family.

Q. Do you desire to grow in your faith in God and service to him?
A. Yes, by learning more about God's Word, worshiping God with his people, and serving God with my life.

Q. If you begin to weaken in faith and commitment, will you allow us as your church family to call you back to a strong relationship with Jesus and his church?
A. Yes, I will always need your help and prayers.

Q. Congregation of Jesus Christ, will you welcome [names] to the table of the Lord and continue to support him/her/them with your prayers and help him/her/them grow by the example of your discipleship?

A. I/we will, God helping me/us.

The questions may also be stated in such a way that the child gives a memorized answer or gives the answer in his/her own words.

Examples:

I love Jesus who has paid for my sins on the cross.

I want Jesus to lead me and guide me.

I know that I belong to God's family through baptism.

I want to learn more about God and his Word and serve God with my life and worship.

Welcome

[names], because you have responded to your baptism by telling us of your personal faith in Jesus Christ, we now welcome you to join the family of God at the table of the Lord. Strengthened by this heavenly food and drink, we will travel together on the journey of faith that brings us to the promised land of God's kingdom.

Prayer

Our covenant God, we thank you for leading [names], your children, to the faith they expressed today. May the fellowship of the Lord's table strengthen them in faith and service to you. Help them to continue to learn more about you through your Word and to grow in faith and love with all your people. Bring us all, one day, to that great wedding feast, where, clothed in the white robes of Christ's righteousness, we will eat and drink with him in the heavenly kingdom forever. Amen.

Hymn

—Acts of Synod 1995, p. 715-716

Service Models

Following are two samples of orders of service used by churches in which a child made public profession and was welcomed to the table of the Lord.

Service 1

Gathering and Welcome

Call to Worship: Matthew 11:25-30

God's Greeting:

Pastor: We gather in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

PEOPLE: Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth.

Pastor: Grace to you . . .

PEOPLE: Amen.

Mutual Greeting

Song of Praise: "How Lovely Is Your Dwelling" *Psalter Hymnal* 243

Confessing and Receiving Forgiveness

Call to Confession: Isaiah 55:1-2, 6-7

Confession of Sin: "Forgive Our Sins as We Forgive" *PsH* 266

Assurance of Pardon: Ephesians 2:8-10

Song: "And Can It Be" *PsH* 267:1, 2, 4

Directives for Living: Ephesians 4:17-24; 5:1-2

Song of Rededication: "When We Walk with the Lord" *PsH* 548

Public Profession of Faith

Form for Public Profession of Faith of Children

Song: "As Moses Raised the Serpent Up" *PsH* 219

The Word of God

Prayer for Illumination

Scripture: Psalm 23 (read by child making profession)

Text: Psalm 23:6

Message: "Goodness and Love: Our Shepherd's Arms"

Song: "The Lord, My Shepherd, Rules My Life" *PsH* 23

Congregational Prayer

The Lord's Supper

Form for the Celebration of Lord's Supper

Song during distribution: "Lift Up Your Hearts" *PsH* 309

Song of Thanksgiving: "Come, Praise the Lord, My Soul" *PsH* 103:1, 5

Offering
Parting Song: "Tell Your Children" *PsH* 588
God's Blessing

Service 2

Gathering and Welcome

Gathering Songs:
"Enter His Gates," M. Heinrichs, Marcyne Heinrichs (CAPAC)
"Jubilate Deo," F. Dunn, Maranatha Music
Welcome and God's Greeting
We Greet Each Other
Songs of Praise:
"Sing Unto the Lord," anonymous, Integrity's Hosanna! Music
"I Will Celebrate," L. Duvall, Grace Fellowship/Maranatha Music
"When the Spirit of the Lord," anonymous, Maranatha Music

Confessing and Receiving Forgiveness

Reading: Psalm 51:1-12
We Confess Our Sin: "Create in Me a Clean Heart," anonymous, Maranatha Music
Made Right with God: 1 John 3:16-24
Song: "Jesus Put This Song into Our Hearts," G. Kendrick, Thankyou Music

Public Profession of Faith

Form for Public Profession of Faith of Children
Song: "Oh How Good Is Christ the Lord" *Psalter Hymnal* 401

The Word of God

Scripture: Matthew 18:1-14, focus on v. 10
Message: "So Who Gets God's Attention?"
Prayer
Song of Response: "How Great Is the Love of the Father" *PsH* 231

The Lord's Supper

Preparation: John 6:35-40 (read by the child making profession)
1 Corinthians 11:23-26 (read or recited by pastor)
Matthew 26:26-29 (read or recited by pastor)
Invitation
Thanksgiving Prayer
Sharing of the Bread: Isaiah 53:1-6 (read by relative of child making profession)
Sharing of the Cup: "What Wondrous Love Is This" *Songs for LiFE* 169
Song of Praise: "Oh, How He Loves You and Me" *Songs for LiFE* 163
Offertory
God's Blessing
Parting Song: "I Will Bless the Lord," F. Hernandez, Candle Company Music

7

Towards an Adult Commitment

Mentoring Models

The third step to a child's participation in communion adopted by Synod 1995 suggests that "it may also be helpful to assign an adult faith mentor to nurture a child toward full adult responsibilities in the church after he/she is recommended for profession." Because faith is often more "caught than taught," such a mentor or sponsor can be an invaluable model, advisor, and "sounding board" for the child. Synod did not specify how this might work. But a number of churches have established a mentoring program and report excellent results. Both the child and the adult sponsor have experienced their relationship as a real blessing.

Some churches assign a mentor before the child has made public profession. This provides an additional resource for her to draw on during the time of preparation and celebration of her public profession. The selection of a mentor must be carefully administered. The parents, the child, and the church should all have their input. Guidelines must be carefully formulated, spelled out, and followed so that everyone knows what to expect and so that no violations of bonds of trust occur. The mentor should be a person whom the child respects, who demonstrates a dedicated walk with God, and who can talk about faith at a level the child understands. The mentor also needs to be a good listener who can enable the child to talk about his doubts, fears, triumphs, and joys.

Meetings of mentor and child might be as frequent as once per week if the mentor is assigned the task of preparing the child for public profession of faith. Or they may be as infrequent as a few times per year after the child has made public profession. The mentor's role is to stay in touch and show genuine interest in the child's spiritual development. The mentor models a Christ-committed lifestyle and gives advice and encouragement where needed.

The mentor will want to include questions like the following in conversations with the child:

- Are you still attending church and participating in the Lord's Supper?
- Are you reading your Bible and talking to God in prayer?
- Is it hard for you to act like a Christian? If so, why?
- Are your friendships helping you live a committed lifestyle?
- Are you participating in church education, and how is that going?
- Are there any doubts or concerns you need to deal with? Can you use some help?
- Do you feel at home in church? With what it does? With what it teaches?
- Are you beginning to develop some idea of areas of service God is calling you to?

The mentorship might end when the child reaches age eighteen and affirms his agreement with the confessions and his readiness to assume adult responsibilities in the church. In cases where a solid bond has formed, though, the relationship

might well extend beyond that time. Eventually, as mature brothers or sisters in Christ, they may continue to support each other in their spiritual life and growth.

Adult Commitment

Synod 1995 also requires each congregation “to devise an appropriate means for securing a commitment to the creeds of the Christian Reformed Church and to the responsibilities of adult membership” (*Acts of Synod 1995*, p. 720). This should happen by the time a child reaches age eighteen. Synod did not specify how this commitment should be expressed. Here are some ways in which churches have begun to do this.

- The clerk of council sends a letter asking the confessing member to confirm her agreement with the creeds and her desire to take on adult privileges and responsibilities. She signs the letter and returns it to the church. Upon receipt, a note is put in the bulletin welcoming her to adult status in the fellowship.
- A small committee of council sets up a meeting with her and reports back to the council. Council then grants adult status and an appropriate note is put in the bulletin. Thanksgiving is offered in congregational prayer and appropriate petitions made for the ongoing work of God’s Spirit in her life.
- She meets with council and special note is taken in a worship service. She is asked to reaffirm her faith and to affirm her agreement with the teachings of the creeds and her acceptance of adult responsibilities. The form for public profession of faith is modified for this purpose. She is also invited to give a personal testimony of her faith and of God’s work in her life. Appropriate prayers and congregational responses are included.

Such approaches form a continuum. While some churches will want to place a lot of emphasis on this stage of the child’s spiritual journey, others will want to place the stress on the earlier public profession. As leaders you will need to assess what procedure will be the most pastorally wise in your church. Whatever you choose, be sure to set a policy that will be consistent and that will allow your members to know what to expect. Your leadership will be very significant as you guide this important process.

May the Lord bless you richly in your important task of leading children into a loving, committed, mature relationship with their Savior and Lord.