

“The Faith Formation Committee and Cornerstone Church”
Article for Cornerstone CRC, Ann Arbor, MI

In 2007, Synod appointed a five-year study committee that we now call the Faith Formation Committee. Through the work of this committee, over the past few years our denomination has been involved in a rich process of reflection on more intentionally forming faith in our members. A conversation that began with particular questions surrounding admission of children to the Lord’s Supper has grown into a wide-ranging exploration of what it means to grow in faith through all stages of life. For a congregation like ours with persons from diverse denominational traditions as well as no faith backgrounds, the work of the Faith Formation Committee provides a helpful occasion for thinking and talking about some of the key deeply held beliefs that hold us together as a denominational family.

In the past, debates surrounding the idea of involving children at the Lord’s Table have mostly whittled the issue down to a choice between accepting or rejecting paedocommunion (which literally means “child communion”). Such simple formulations can be helpful, especially when introducing new concepts that are hard to understand, but they can also lead us to miss some important angles and questions we would otherwise have encountered along the way.

By listening to biblical scholars, pastoral leaders, and individuals and families in numerous CRC congregations as well as careful study of the Scriptures, the Faith Formation Committee is providing important guidance for churches seeking to disciple those who love and follow Christ. Rather than merely asking whether or not we should admit children to the Lord’s Supper, the committee began with more basic questions of how anyone comes to participate in the table of the Lord. Recognizing the absence of specific biblical stipulations about age requirements for taking part in communion, the committee has labored to discern important principles that ought to guide any faithful and joyful participation in God’s family. The following excerpt highlights the spirit of welcome as well as a quest for discernment that undergirds the committee’s proposal:

All baptized members are welcome to the Lord’s Supper for age- and ability-appropriate obedience to biblical commands about participation, under the supervision of the elders. The elders have responsibility to nurture grateful and obedient participation by providing encouragement, instruction, and accountability in the congregation. Requiring a formal public profession of faith prior to participation in the Lord’s Supper is one pastoral approach to consider, but is not required by Scripture or the confessions.

Inviting churches to implement a practice of age- and ability-appropriate participation represents an understanding of not only the Lord’s Supper but every aspect of church life that flows from our belonging in the body of Christ. Attention to faithful participation reminds people at all stages of life to consider anew what it means that we eat and drink and welcome others into a place of grace-shaped communion. To learn more about the work of the Faith Formation Committee and to read full-length reports, please visit the committee website at: www.crcna.org/pages/ffc_front.cfm.