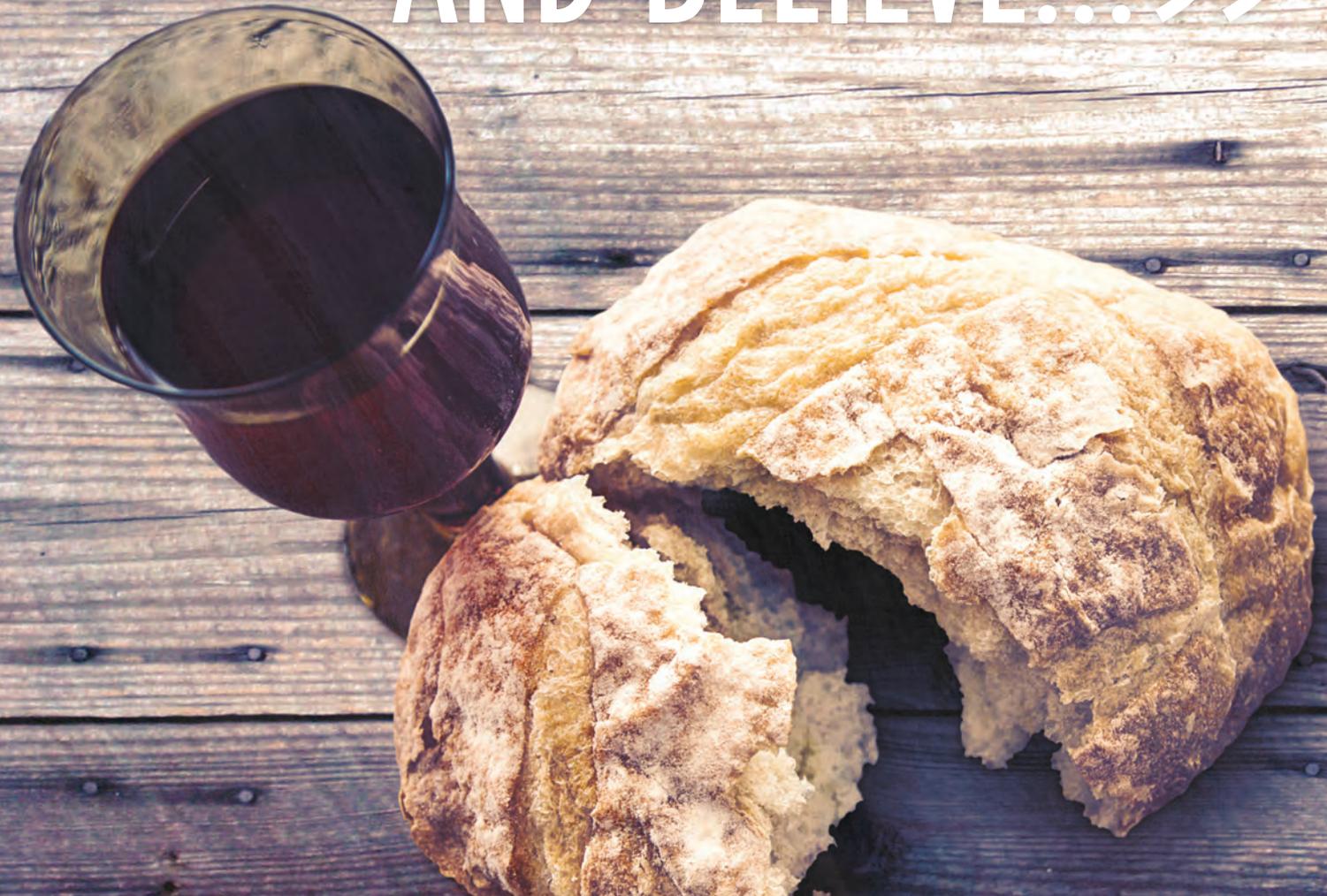


WELCOMING CHILDREN
TO THE LORD'S SUPPER

Toolkit

A USER'S GUIDE

“ TAKE, EAT,
REMEMBER,
AND BELIEVE... ”





HI!

You're holding in your hands a user's guide for the *Welcoming Children to the Lord's Supper* toolkit—an online resource that you can open at crcna.org/FaithFormation. This toolkit—like others assembled by the Faith Formation Ministry team—was created in collaboration *with* church leaders *for* church leaders to provide highly adaptable tools for discipleship.

Like the standard toolkits available at your local hardware store, each Faith Formation toolkit is:

- * **sturdy** (theologically sound),
- * **versatile** (containing highly adaptable tools that can be used in a variety of contexts), and
- * **well-organized** (providing easy access to every available tool).

Our toolkits also contain borrowed tools—those that have been freely shared by like-minded churches both down the street and across the globe.

We hope you'll use the tools in this kit the same way you use your tools at home: by selecting the right tool for the job, whether you're building something new or making adjustments to something old.

If there's a tool that you don't see in this kit, let us know and we'll try to find it for you. If you discover a new tool or a new use for an old tool, let us know that too and we'll see if we can add it. And, of course, we'd love to hear which tools in this kit you find especially helpful and how you're using them. Knock on our door anytime at faithformation@crcna.org.

—The Faith Formation Ministry Team

WELCOMING CHILDREN TO THE LORD'S SUPPER

Toolkit



whether you're a congregation that has been welcoming children to the Lord's table for a long time or a congregation that is just beginning to explore what including children might mean for your church, this toolkit is for you.

Think of the *Welcoming Children to the Lord's Supper* website as an online storage unit with a variety of "compartments." In those compartments are numerous options from which you can select the tools you need.

When you open up the toolkit for *Welcoming Children to the Lord's Supper* at crcna.org/FaithFormation you'll find the following (and more!):



- 
- * **FAQ's:** frequently asked questions about children at the table, along with helpful answers.
 - * **Pathways:** video conversations and print descriptions of the different journeys that several CRC congregations have taken—and are taking—as they consider how to welcome children to the table.
 - * **Resources for Families:** talking points to help parents and children discuss and prepare for the Lord's Supper, devotions, a printable bookmark to encourage conversation, and more.
 - * **Resources for Education:** intergenerational events that center on the Lord's Supper, children's ministry/Sunday school sessions on the Lord's Supper (preschool to middle school and large group/small group), courses on communion for children and families, and more.
 - * **Resources for Worship:** ideas for children's messages, ideas for inclusive communion, examples of blessings, children's profession of faith resources, and more.
 - * **Recommended Resources:** suggested books, as well as links to articles, reports, and webinars.
 - * **Study materials:** a free download of the small group study on 1 Corinthians 11, links to other resources for adult study.

New tools are always being added to the toolkit, so be sure to bookmark crcna.org/FaithFormation for easy access whenever you need a resource or want to share one.

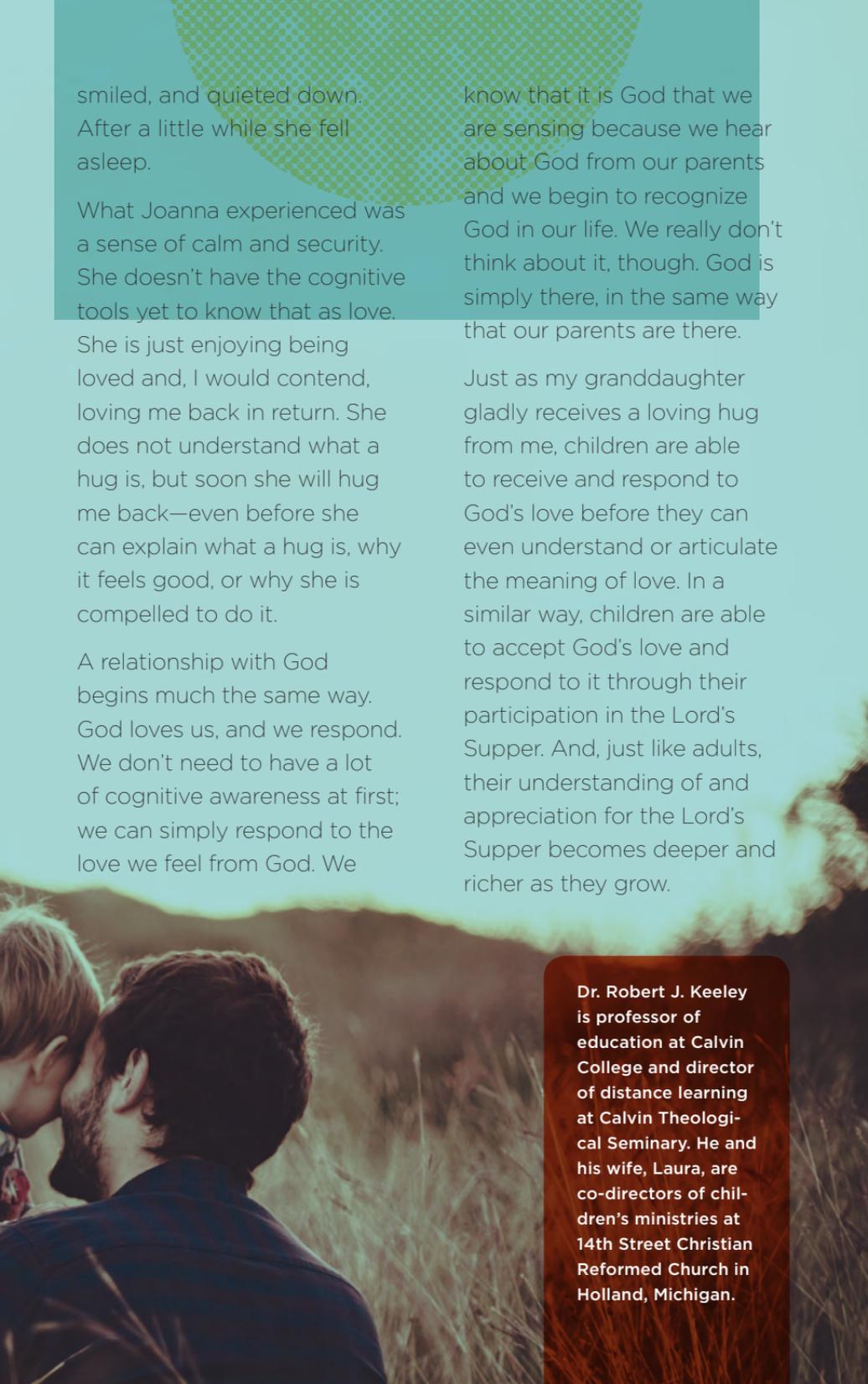
BELONGING AND RESPONDING

I recently became a grandfather, and I have enjoyed watching my granddaughter, Joanna, grow and change. At eight weeks old she is already able to do things she could not do just a few weeks ago. She is recognizing people—like me—smiling, and starting to control parts of her body. She will soon learn to reach for things instead of making random arm movements. She will learn to sit up without help. She will learn to crawl and walk. It seems as if I can almost see her grow and change as I watch.

Last night she was fussy. So after making sure she was well fed and had a clean diaper, I walked with her, holding her in my arms and singing to her. She looked at me,

*The Spiritual
Development of
Children and Their
Participation in the
Lord's Supper*

BY ROBERT J. KEELEY

A photograph of a man with a beard kissing a woman on the cheek. They are in a field of tall grass, and the background shows a bright sunset or sunrise over a horizon. The scene is warm and intimate.

smiled, and quieted down. After a little while she fell asleep.

What Joanna experienced was a sense of calm and security. She doesn't have the cognitive tools yet to know that as love.

She is just enjoying being loved and, I would contend, loving me back in return. She does not understand what a hug is, but soon she will hug me back—even before she can explain what a hug is, why it feels good, or why she is compelled to do it.

A relationship with God begins much the same way. God loves us, and we respond. We don't need to have a lot of cognitive awareness at first; we can simply respond to the love we feel from God. We

know that it is God that we are sensing because we hear about God from our parents and we begin to recognize God in our life. We really don't think about it, though. God is simply there, in the same way that our parents are there.

Just as my granddaughter gladly receives a loving hug from me, children are able to receive and respond to God's love before they can even understand or articulate the meaning of love. In a similar way, children are able to accept God's love and respond to it through their participation in the Lord's Supper. And, just like adults, their understanding of and appreciation for the Lord's Supper becomes deeper and richer as they grow.

Dr. Robert J. Keeley is professor of education at Calvin College and director of distance learning at Calvin Theological Seminary. He and his wife, Laura, are co-directors of children's ministries at 14th Street Christian Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan.

SPIRITUAL CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILDREN

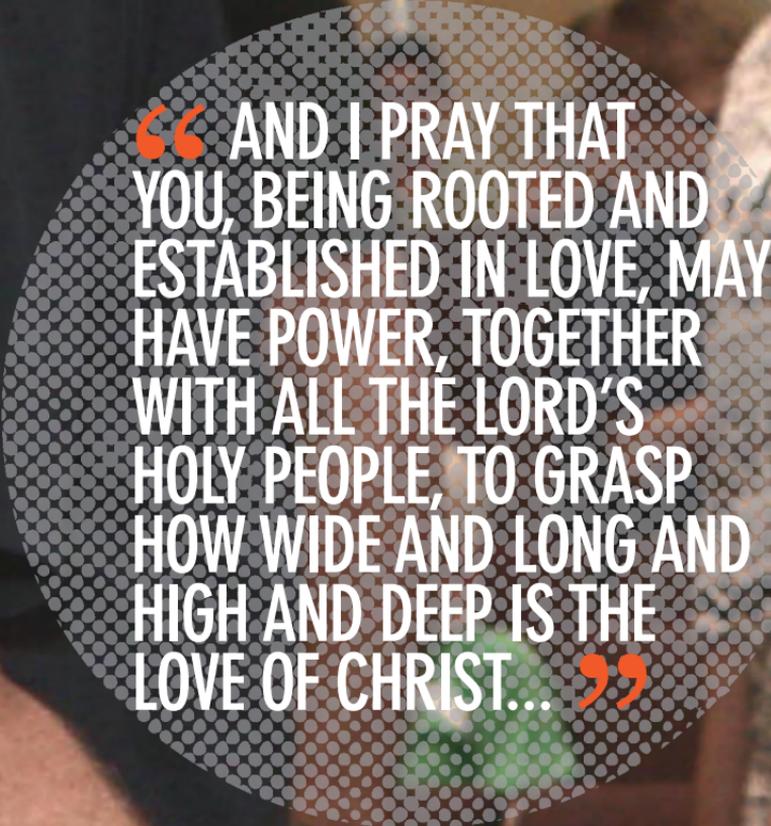
On the next few pages you'll find general descriptions of the spiritual characteristics of children at various stages, along with notes about how they might experience communion. Following that, you'll find a list of suggestions for enhancing the participation of children in the Lord's Supper. While each child's developmental path is unique, these general descriptions are designed to support congregational leaders, parents, and caregivers as together you seek to enfold and include children of all ages in the celebration of the Lord's Supper.



PRESCHOOLERS

1 Have a growing sense that God is very special and real.	2 Tend to have a literal concept of God, perhaps as a grandfather figure who lives “up there.”
3 Readily accept what you say about God.	4 Sense that God loves them and cares for them.
5 Enjoy Bible stories, especially about Jesus; want stories repeated . . . and repeated!	6 Can develop attitudes of trust and love toward Jesus and God.
7 Do not yet have a built-in control (conscience) that nudges them toward right behavior for its own sake; they generally do the “right thing” out of fear of punishment or to win approval.	8 Sense that church is a good place to be.
9 Can recite simple prayers ; may add their own ideas to form personal prayers.	<i>Experience communion as part of their worship experience, mimicking their parent’s faith—just as they do when they fold their hands in prayer, raise their hands in praise, or turn the pages of a Bible storybook.</i>

“THIS IS MY BODY GIVEN FOR YOU; DO THIS IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME.”



“ AND I PRAY THAT YOU, BEING ROOTED AND ESTABLISHED IN LOVE, MAY HAVE POWER, TOGETHER WITH ALL THE LORD’S HOLY PEOPLE, TO GRASP HOW WIDE AND LONG AND HIGH AND DEEP IS THE LOVE OF CHRIST... ”



5 AND 6 YEAR OLDS

1

Have a **very real spiritual nature**, a strong sense of who God is, and often relate to Jesus as their friend.

2

Are **aware of right and wrong** but are still likely to define "wrong" in terms of its immediate consequences ("Taking cookies is wrong if Mom catches me!"). They begin to experience guilt and understand the joy that comes with forgiveness.

3

Understand God's love and our response within the context of everyday experiences and, to some extent, within the context of God's family, the church. By and large they are still concrete thinkers.

4

Can be **delighted and awed** by Bible stories. They can use their imagination to ask questions about the Bible and God.

5

Can **express their love** for Jesus in their own words and actions.

Understand *that the bread and the wine or juice remind us of Jesus' body and blood and the celebration of communion reminds us that Jesus died on a cross and forgives our sins.*

IN THE SAME WAY, AFTER THE SAYING, "THIS CUP IS THE NE

7 AND 8 YEAR OLDS

1

Are **capable of understanding** basic salvation concepts and making a commitment to Jesus, but they may do so simply out of a desire to please their teachers or parents.

2

Often **express opinions and feelings** about God and church. They enjoy asking a great many "why" and "how" questions.

3

Often **include prayer** in their daily routines. Their prayers are frequently self-centered but are sincere and offered in faith.

4

Often still see issues in **black and white**.

Experience *communion as a reminder of Jesus' death and resurrection and understand that the celebration of communion is something that God's family does together as a way of remembering Jesus' gift of forgiveness.*

THE SUPPER HE TOOK THE CUP,
NEW COVENANT IN MY BLOOD,

9 AND 10 YEAR OLDS

1 Are developing a **conscience: a personal sense of right and wrong** that often expresses itself in judgments of what's "unfair" or unjust. They may be critical of adults who appear to be insincere in their faith.

2 May be able to deal, in a **limited way**, with moral questions in terms of motives and consequences. They are beginning to think about questions of ethics and morality in the context of love, loyalty, promises, and so on.

3 May show an increasing **concern** for people who are hungry, homeless, or poor.

4 Are **often open to learning** about other cultures and can be more accepting of differences in others, especially if they have personal experiences with people who are different from them.

5 Understand why we pray and are often able to make up spontaneous prayers.

6 Are **more inclined to look inward** than younger children and may ask questions and wonder about making a commitment to Christ.

Continue to deepen their understanding that the bread and the wine or juice are reminders of Jesus' body and blood given through his death on the cross. They're beginning to understand metaphors and symbols and can be more thoughtful in their experience of the sacrament.

WHICH IS POURED OUT
FOR YOU. ”

YOUNG TEENS

1 Are **moving from** doing good simply to avoid punishment or to return a favor to a more "conventional" level of faith and morality where the key is conforming to what the group or culture defines as "normal" and acceptable. They are developing their own beliefs and values in the context of peers, school, media, and church. Belonging to groups like the church and participating in its rituals and ministry become increasingly important.

2 Are **able to commit themselves** to Christ and to understand what it means to live a life of Christian gratitude and service. Public profession of faith is a very real possibility as some have arrived at the place of making commitments in their own right, apart from peers and parents.

3 Are **able to deal with moral questions** in terms of motives and consequences. They can think about questions of ethics and morality in the context of love, loyalty, promises, and so on.

4 Are **idealists, quick to point out faults and failures** at home and in the world, quick to spot injustice, and eager to become involved in worthy causes. They can be blind to how this idealism applies to their behavior.

5 **Need to know** they're important to God and to the church right now, not just when they get older.

6 **Often admire and seek to imitate** adult faith models as a way of establishing their own identity.

7 May be **struggling** with doubts and questions about their faith, feelings that often intensify with older adolescents. Their faith still likely reflects the faith of their parents, but they have begun to make it more personal and individual. Some may reject the faith of their parents and teachers out of rebellion or a desire to demonstrate that they think for themselves, but this is more likely with older adolescents.

8 **Resonate with** thinking about a God who knows and cares for them as individuals. As they are working on developing their identity, knowing that God knows and loves them personally is very important.

Able to use metaphors and understand symbolism. *Cognitively, many young teens have most of the same tools adults do to understand the richness of the sacrament. Most do not have the life experiences that adults do to help put this sacrament in the context of their lives or of the bigger salvation story.*

YOUR CHURCH CAN ENHANCE THE PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN/YOUNG TEENS DURING THE LORD'S SUPPER BY

including familiar songs with simple language and/or repeated phrases.

ENCOURAGING families with young children to sit near the front of the sanctuary for an unobstructed view of the communion table and the distribution of the elements.

ENCOURAGING people of all ages to come forward when it's time to receive the sacrament (if coming forward is your practice), and offering a blessing to those who aren't yet participating. If it's helpful, invite those who are there to receive a blessing to indicate such by folding their hands or holding them in front with palms up.



USING simple, understandable language for blessings when personally offering the elements: “God loves you, *[name of child]*” or “Jesus came for you too, *[name of child]*.”

USING child-friendly language to explain what is happening during the time of confession and assurance, and offering everyone a quiet moment during which they can tell God about the things for which they are sorry and ask for forgiveness.

USING simple language and concrete examples rather than abstract metaphors when presenting children’s messages. Visit crcna.org/FaithFormation for ideas for children’s messages.

EQUIPPING parents and caregivers to have conversations with their children about the “why” and the “how” of communion. Visit crcna.org/FaithFormation for family resources.

INCLUDING simple, repeated phrases or words in responsive readings during the Lord’s Supper so early readers can follow along and participate.

OFFERING a class on the sacraments that families can attend together. Visit crcna.org/FaithFormation for resources that other congregations are using with families.

INCLUDING children in some way in the preparation and/or distribution of the elements. Visit crcna.org/FaithFormation for ideas on how to do this.

PAYING attention to visuals. Children (and adults!) are very aware of their surroundings. Consider how you might visually add meaning to the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. Visit crcna.org/FaithFormation to see what some churches have done.



CHROM

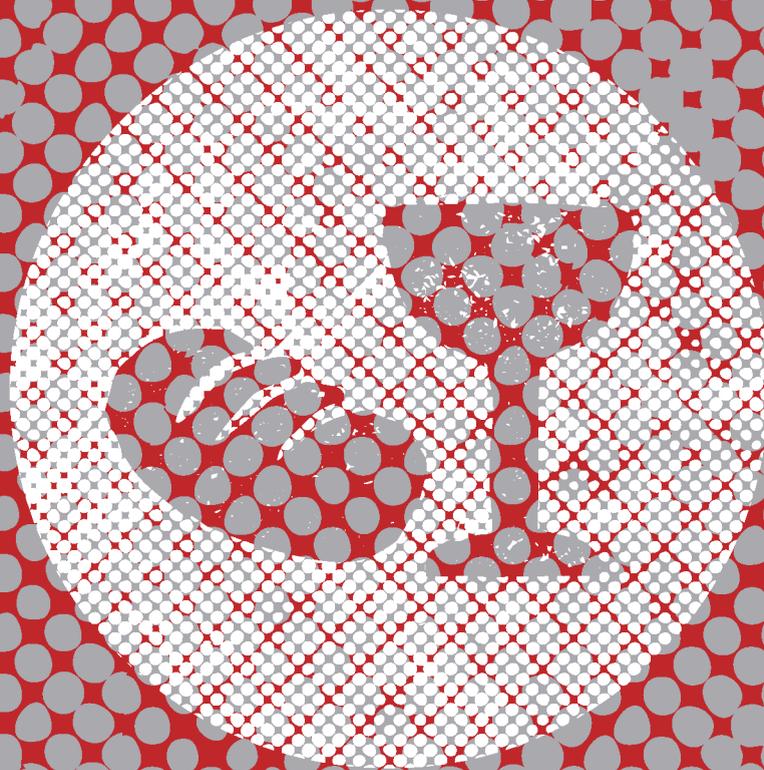




Toolkit

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1. A place to store tools
2. Software designed to help solve problems
3. An online site created by Faith Formation Ministries with the help of congregations to provide leaders with highly adaptable tools for discipleship.



The *Welcoming Children to the Lord's Supper* toolkit is an online destination filled with easily accessible resources for pastors, worship planners, children's ministry leaders, parents, and more. In addition to information about the toolkit contents, this User's Guide includes a reference chart on the spiritual development of children—a tool that you'll want to keep handy. Find the entire toolkit on our website.



Christian Reformed Church
**Faith Formation
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crcna.org/FaithFormation

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