

## ***Is My Child Ready to Receive Holy Communion?***

Previous to 1970 most Lutheran congregations did not communion children until after they were confirmed around age 14. Then many started moving first communion to about age 10, which was the ELCA accepted practice in 1989. After years of study and conversation, in 1997 the ELCA issued a new First Communion guideline as part of a larger document on the centrality of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion in the life of faith.<sup>1</sup> This document lifts up a biblically based Lutheran understanding of the Sacraments intended to help us avoid a “legalistic” and “mechanical” approach to how parents, pastors, and congregations raise up our children in the Christian faith. Regarding Holy Communion the statement recognizes that:

- “Baptized children may begin to commune on a regular basis at a time determined through mutual conversation that includes the pastor, the child, and the parents or sponsors involved, within the accepted practices of the congregation.”<sup>2</sup>
- “Ordinarily this beginning will occur only when children can eat and drink, and can start to respond to the gift of Christ in the Supper.”<sup>3</sup>
- “In all cases, participation in Holy Communion is accompanied by (instruction) appropriate to the age of the communicant.”<sup>4</sup>
- “There is no command from our Lord regarding the age at which people should be baptized or first communed. Our practice is defined by Christ’s command (“Do this”), Christ’s twin promises of his presence for us and for our need, and the importance of good order in the Church. In all communion practices congregations strive to avoid both reducing the Lord’s Supper to an act effective by its mere performance without faith and narrowing faith to intellectual understanding of Christ’s presence and gifts.”<sup>5</sup>

At Faith Lutheran we have a large variety of practice in children communing. Parents play the major role in discerning the readiness of their children. Parents can also play a guiding role in preparing their children to come to the table. You can obtain a copy from Pastor Mark of the welcome book, *A Place for You*, by Rev. Daniel Erlander, for parents or grandparents to read with children in order to prepare them for coming to the Lord’s Table. Pastor Mark is then available for further conversation as might be needed regarding any questions that arise about communion in general and receiving communion for the first time.

The following questions can help you determine the readiness of you and your child to receive her or his first Holy Communion:

- Has your child been baptized?
- Is your child comfortable in various locations around the church, including the Altar?
- Is your child asking questions about Holy Communion?
- Does your child extend his or her hands for the bread, when at the altar for a blessing?
- Does your child recognize the pastor and seem to be able to interact well enough to receive the elements (bread and wine)?
- Is your child aware enough of others in the congregation and their needs to show a degree of respect for their communion experience?
- Are you prepared to help make the process positive?
- Are you prepared to continue to fulfill the promises you made at your child’s baptism to bring him or her regularly to the Lord’s Table?

Some children seem ready at a very early age to participate, while others may not be interested until they are older. Some also decide to only receive the bread, which is quite appropriate too. Pastor Mark is quite willing to help parents in the discernment process.

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1 The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament, Augsburg Fortress, 1997

2 Ibid. p. 41

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid. p. 42

5 Ibid. p. 43