

# CHILDREN AND COMMUNION



While each child's developmental path is unique, there are common patterns in how children's understanding of the Lord's Supper typically unfolds. As you explore these patterns, refer also to *Spiritual Characteristics of Children and Teens* ([tinyurl.com/FFMspirchar](http://tinyurl.com/FFMspirchar)).

**Preschoolers** experience communion as part of their worship experience, mimicking their parents' 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.

**5- and 6-year olds** are able to understand that the bread and the wine or juice remind us of Jesus' body and blood. They understand that the celebration of communion reminds us that Jesus died on a cross and forgives our sins.

**7- and 8-year olds** experience communion as a reminder of Jesus' death and resurrection and are able to understand that the celebration of communion is something that God's family does together as a way of remembering Jesus' gift of forgiveness.

**9- and 10-year olds** 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.

**Young teens** are 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 yet have the life experiences that adults do to help put this sacrament in the context of their lives or of the bigger salvation story.

**Children and teens with intellectual disabilities** may have varying levels of understanding of the meaning of the Lord's Supper, but should always be warmly welcomed to participate. This excerpt from *Expressing Faith in Jesus: Church Membership for People with Intellectual Disabilities* (FaithAliveResources.org) is helpful:

“Neither Scripture nor our own experience tells us that God distributes the gifts of salvation only to people who have a certain level of intelligence. The kind of knowing that faith requires is an intimate, trusting, person-to-person sort of knowing not confined by the speed or breadth of one's intelligence. Our friends with intellectual disabilities often show a high level of trust, exhibiting the simple faith that Jesus acknowledged when he blessed the children whom the disciples had intended to turn away. . . . Their faith is nurtured by relationships that reflect the love of Jesus.”

# ENHANCING THE PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG TEENS

Here are some important ways your church can enhance the participation of children and young teens during the Lord's Supper.

- \* Include **familiar songs** with simple language and/or repeated phrases.
- \* Encourage 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.
- \* Use child-friendly language to **frame what is happening** during the time of confession and assurance. Offer everyone a quiet moment to tell God about the things they're sorry for and to ask for forgiveness.
- \* In **children's messages** on communion Sundays, use simple language and concrete examples rather than abstract metaphors.
- \* Include simple, repeated phrases or words in **responsive readings** during the Lord's Supper so that early readers can follow along and participate.
- \* Include children in some way in the **preparation and/or distribution** of the elements.
- \* **Invite people of all ages to come forward** (if that's your practice) when it is time to receive the sacrament, and offer a blessing to those who are not yet participating. To help the communion servers, invite those who would like to receive a blessing to hold their hands in front of them with palms up or to make a similar gesture.
- \* Choose **simple language for blessings** when personally offering the elements: "God loves you, [*name*]" or "Jesus came for you too, [*name*]."
- \* **Pay 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.
- \* **Equip parents and caregivers** to have conversations with children about the "why" and "how" of communion.
- \* **Offer a class** on the sacraments that families can attend together.

## Learn More

For dozens of other resources and ideas, as well as examples of how churches have done the above, visit the *Welcoming Children to the Lord's Supper Toolkit* at [crcna.org/FaithFormation/toolkits](http://crcna.org/FaithFormation/toolkits).

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