

Gates Presbyterian Church Rochester, NY

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# **Children & Communion**

**Gates Presbyterian Church** 

# Children & Communion at Gates Presbyterian Church

What You and Your Children Should Know

#### From the Pastors:

#### Dear Parents:

We are delighted that you are taking time to consider how to introduce your child to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. First experiences leave impressions that will last a lifetime for our children, and we want them to sense God's love and nurturing presence as the essence of the sacrament.

The early Church, following Jesus, took three primary material elements of life — water, bread, and wine — to become basic symbols of offering life to God as Jesus had offered his life. The waters of baptism are closely connected to the bread and wine of communion. In both we remember God's covenant of love and grace and promise to live new lives in Christ for witness and service in the world.

We believe that the sacrament of communion is a visible form of an invisible grace. It conveys something that words cannot express, therefore there is more to experience about communion than the words of this booklet can contain! Your child is welcome to receive the sacrament when you believe the time is right.

## Celebration of Communion at GPC

Talk with your children in advance about what to expect during communion at Gates Presbyterian Church. We typically celebrate communion the first Sunday of the month and on other holy days of the church calendar.

#### Invitation to the Table and Prayer of Thanksgiving

The Pastor's begin by reminding the people that God welcomes all to the table. During the prayer we thank and praise God, remember the ways Jesus shared his love. We ask the Holy Spirit to keep us faithful as Christ's body to do God's work in the world today.

#### **Words of Institution**

These are the words that capture what Jesus said at the Last Supper. They usually are from Matthew 26 or 1 Corinthians 11.

#### **Bread**

The bread expresses the unity of the body of Christ. Different kinds of bread are often used to express the cultures of our community. Gluten free wafers are available on each plate.

#### Cup

The cup is the symbol of the new covenant in Jesus Christ. In order to be mindful of the concerns for health and the conscience of all those in worship we use unfermented grape juice.

Most often we celebrate communion by passing the elements through the pews. It is customary to serve your neighbor first, before taking the element for yourself. Remember to make eye contact with your neighbor. When appropriate smile or share words such as "The Body of Christ broken for you" or "The Cup of Salvation for you." We hold the elements until all have been served.

Occasionally, we celebrate communion via "intinction." The ushers will invite those seated in your pew to come forward to tear a piece of bread from the loaf and dip it into the cup. You may partake individually and return to your seat.

## How Parents and Care Givers Can Prepare Their Children to Receive the Lord's Supper

When you decide that your child is ready to take part in communion, you will probably want to spend time teaching him or her about the Lord's Supper. Here are some suggestions:

- 1. Describe to your child in advance what happens in a communion service.
- 2. Point out various meanings of the Lord's Supper:
  - The Lord's Supper is a meal for God's people God's grace nourishes and refreshes us and is food for our souls.
  - The Lord's Supper is the church's "thanksgiving dinner"

     the church gives thanks for Jesus Christ and for the continuing blessings of the Holy Spirit.
  - The Lord's Supper is a sign of the church's unity and fellowship-we commune with each other and with God.
  - The Lord's Supper is a call to sacrificial service to give ourselves up to God, like Jesus did, in an act of praise and service.
  - In the Lord's Supper, the Spirit of Jesus is present and serves as host.
  - The Lord's Supper is a celebration that looks forward to the coming of God's kingdom.
- Talk to your children about Jesus sharing meals and feeding his followers, and read them passages from a Bible storybook.
- 4. Tell your children about some of your own experiences with communion-your first time to receive it, special services, etc.
- 5. Talk to your children about communion at mealtime. You can emphasize the family meal: the Lord's Supper is like a family table where the church gathers to share in the same bread and the same cup because the people in the church belong to each other and to God.

#### From . . .

"God's Family at the Table – A Guide for Parents":

"Children grow in their understanding of and commitment to the Christian faith through the nurture of parents and other caring adults. Since the children of Christian parents are members of God's family, it makes good theological sense to include them in the Lord's Supper. We know that in the Lord's Supper God blesses and renews the covenant family. Christ is present in the Lord's Supper to forgive our sins and to give us the gift of life anew. These blessings and gifts are given to our children as well as to us."

#### From . . .

The "Book of Order, Presbyterian Church USA":

"Baptizing children who are being nurtured and instructed in the significance of the invitation to the Table and the meaning of their response are invited to receive the Lord's Supper recognizing that their understanding of participation will vary according to their maturity." (W-2.4011)

"It is the responsibility of the whole congregation, particularly exercised through the session, to nurture those who are baptized to respond to the invitation to the Lord's Supper. When a person is baptized as a child, the session shall equip and support the parent(s) or those exercising parental responsibility for their task of nurturing the child for receiving the Lord's Supper." (W-4.2002).

# What Children Can Understand About the Lord's Supper

- Infants develop a sense of trust in their parents or guardians as their caregivers hold them, rock them, provide clean and warm clothing for them, and feed them. All of this builds a foundation for the child to trust God and to receive the Lord's Supper as an expression of God's trustworthiness.
- One to Three-Year-Olds are developing language skills, so parents or guardians can begin to talk with them about the communion service. These children can begin to understand that communion is a very special meal, God's meal. They can learn that communion helps us remember a time when Jesus shared a meal with his friends and that it is a time for thanking God for our blessings.
- Three to Five-Year-Olds will be curious about the physical aspects of communion – the table, the cups, the bread, etc.
   They can grasp the concept of the church as a family sharing a meal together.
- Six to Eight-Year-Olds are beginning to think historically. They can begin to grasp the relationship between the Last Supper and the communion service. These children are also developing the ability to think symbolically. They can begin to understand that the bread represents Jesus' love for us. They can see that in the Lord's Supper the minister and people are performing the same actions Jesus and the disciples performed at the Last Supper. They have a deeper understanding of the church as family. As a result, at this age they can also begin to feel excluded if they are not receiving communion.
- Older Children are beginning to be able to grasp more of the meaning found in the Lord's Supper. They are more skilled at abstract and symbolic thinking. They have good reading skills and can make clear sense of the prayers and words associated with the sacrament.



### When Is Your Child Ready?

The Lord's Supper not only nourishes, it also teaches, and we learn about communion by participating in it. Even very young children can sense that the Lord's Supper is a special meal to be received with respect, and they can share a deep sense of belonging to the forgiving, accepting, loving community of the church. Parents or guardians may decide when their children have reached this point and are ready to celebrate communion.