

Come to the Table

A brief guide to discussing communion as a family

Holy Communion. The Lord's Supper. The Eucharist.

Different names for the same feast – a meal shared by Christians around the world, now and at all times – and one of the most powerful practices in our faith. At First Church, we welcome all who have faith in Jesus Christ to join this monthly sacrament.

Parents may ask – does this include children? Our answer is a resounding yes! The constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) welcomes “baptized children who are being nurtured and instructed in the significance of the invitation to the table.”

So how can you help your children understand the significance of the Lord's Supper? This brief guide answers many questions and provides suggestions for discussion at home. More detailed materials will be available shortly at firstchurchlf.org and you can address additional questions to any pastor.

Why do we take communion?

Communion is a way to meet God and one another. The bread and wine represent Christ and make his presence real to us at the table (Presbyterians do not believe that these elements literally become Christ.).

Jesus dined with everyone – even those considered outcasts – as a way to show people that all are welcome in God's realm. So we also understand that this meal is a foretaste of the feast all God has prepared for us in heaven. Because of this, we understand that we commune with Christians everywhere to celebrate that we are one “body of Christ.”

What does the Bible say?

The gospel writers all describe the Passover meal that Jesus shared with his disciples. Knowing that it was his “last supper,” Jesus expanded the meaning of the Passover rituals so that his disciples would “remember me” when they shared bread and wine. Jesus also described the bread as “my body, which is given for you” and said about the wine that, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. (Luke 22:14-20).

The early Christians continued this tradition; they ate meals together and then shared in the bread and wine as part of the worship practices. Paul writes in **1 Corinthians 11:23-26** the words that we often hear during communion. *“For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.”*

How do I know my children are ready?

Some parents believe that the table should be open to all, even babies. Children may understand communion viscerally even before they can articulate its meaning. Other parents want their children to truly understand the meaning before they participate. You decide what is appropriate for your family, and then keep the conversation open as children grow.

Is there a “first communion” kind of ritual?

No, because children begin at different ages, a celebration of first communion isn't part of our tradition. Simply invite your children to take a piece of bread and a cup of grape juice when they trays are passed in worship. Communion is served the first Sunday of each month. If you choose to participate as a family, you might prepare using some of the ideas below.

Continuing the Conversation at Home

Communion is a mystery no one fully understands. So the conversation can be on-going. Some ideas for your family:

- Bake bread together and talk while it rises (or while you eat).
- Tell stories. Share your own memories of communion or of life-changing meals.
- Read the story of the Last Supper from a Bible (Luke 22 or another gospel). Read the stories of Jesus' sharing food with his disciples or the story of “loaves and fishes” (the version in John 6 is particularly good because a boy gives the disciples the food). Talk about how Jesus' lifetime of sharing food and dining with outcasts connects with his final meal.
- Volunteer to serve at the soup kitchen, PADS, or another at another community meal. Then connect the stories of Jesus' meals with your experiences.
- How do you prepare yourselves for communion? Talk about the things that make communion “real” rather than simply ritual. This could include things that we do in worship – such as confess and be pardoned – and things to do on your own, such as pray, meditate, and read the Bible.
- Where do you meet Christ? Do you feel like you meet God each Sunday in church? Do you sense God most on the beach, while you're praying, or when you hug your children? Encourage children to think about the places where God becomes real to them; relate these stories to meeting Christ at the table.

Our pastors serve us the Lord's Supper. One lifts a loaf of bread high into the air, breaks it in two, and shows us the broken halves. The other pours a long ribbon of grape juice from a special pitcher into a special cup and says, “Our Savior invites all who trust in him to share the feast.”

We pass plates of bread to everybody in the church. When the pastor says, “This is the body of Christ,” we eat the bread. Everyone is quiet for a minute. Then we pass trays with tiny cups of grape juice to everybody in the church. The trays are very heavy. When our pastor says, “This is the blood of Christ,” we drink.

Jesus is with us in a special way at the Lord's Supper.

From **Come Worship With Me**, by Ruth Boling

*This book, as well as Ruth Boling's book **A Children's Guide to Worship** are recommended for further reading. They can be found in the Millicent Kreischer Children's Library.*