

ECCH Communion FAQ with Pastor Joy

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. (Acts 2:42, NIV)

Can my child participate in communion?

At Hinsdale Covenant Church, we leave this question for the parents to answer. Our pastors recommend that children participating in communion have either been baptized and/or professed faith in Jesus Christ.

Because of our emphasis on freedom in Christ, we recognize that there are different streams of Christian tradition and biblical interpretation converging in our sanctuary each Sunday. Some households may want to emphasize the gracious hospitality of God at the Lord's Table; other parents may want to emphasize an individual's decision to receive Jesus as Lord and Savior in the act of partaking of the bread and cup.

Our communion liturgy states: *"All who humbly put their trust in Christ and desire his help that they may lead a holy life; all who are truly sorry for their sins and would be delivered from them; all who would walk in love with their neighbors and intend to live a new life, following the commandments of God and walking from now on in his holy ways, are invited to draw near with faith and to receive this holy sacrament."*

All of us need God's help to fulfill these requirements. Children can know that Jesus calls them to follow, to leave behind their sin, and to trust in him.

I remember when my daughter prayed to commit herself to follow Jesus. She was four years old, and it was Maundy Thursday. Our church had a communion service each Maundy Thursday, and I thought that, since she had committed herself to Jesus, she was welcome to receive the bread and the cup. This was a decision I had to make quickly, but I'd make the same choice again. It is wise to reflect on your own experience and understanding of communion, and be in conversation with other Christians about their own practices.

What if my child hasn't been baptized?

Some parents, especially those coming from Evangelical traditions that emphasize believer baptism, will understand that participating in communion is a sacrament for people who have made a public confession of faith in Christ—either by praying with a parent or Sunday school teacher to receive Jesus in conversion, or who have been confirmed into the church.

Other parents, who may emphasize infant baptism, may view communion as an ongoing participation in the family of God, as it began in baptism.

If you and your spouse disagree about how to approach this, possibly because you were raised in different Christian traditions, please know that you're not alone. Feel free to reach out to me or Pastor Lars to discern how the Holy Spirit may be leading your family.

How do I explain communion to my kid? I don't even fully understand!

Communion has 3 primary emphasis.

- 1) We take communion to participate in the Last Supper. We remember the night before Jesus was crucified, when he used the Passover bread and wine to teach on his saving act of death on the cross. Like the bread, Jesus' body was given to us. Like the cup, Jesus' blood was poured out to clean our sin so that we can be holy before God (1 Cor. 11:23-26).
- 2) We take communion to fellowship in a meal with God and other Christians. Like a big celebration, communion brings us together as a family in the presence of God.
- 3) We take communion in anticipation of the joyful hope of the new heavens and the new earth, when we will fellowship in The Wedding Supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9).

I was raised Catholic. Does that matter?

Roman Catholic doctrine emphasizes *transubstantiation*, which is the teaching that the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Jesus. This is based on Jesus' actual words, "This is my body," and "This is my blood" in Matthew 26:26-30. This doctrine, at its best, offers believers a sense of being filled with Jesus and being literally part of his body. It can be encouraging, convicting, and inspiring. However, it can also lead to challenges, like what to do when the bread is dropped or the cup is accidentally spilled. Biblical scholars have wondered if Jesus meant these words to be read literally or symbolically.

The Covenant church comes out of the Lutheran tradition, in which the real presence of Christ at communion is emphasized. While we do not teach the doctrine of transubstantiation, neither do we teach that the bread and wine are merely symbols. They are not symbols; they are a sacrament, in which the spiritual and physical together invite us into deeper participation in the life of Christ.

These details, of course, do not need to be discussed with children, but emphasizing the mystery of the sacrament and Jesus' presence with us while we participate is wise.

Pastor Joy & Pastor Lars appreciate any opportunity to discuss the sacraments and what it means to follow Jesus with you and your child. Please don't hesitate to reach out to us, even if you feel like your question is small. We're here to support your family in your journey in Christ!