



Is My Child Ready to Receive Communion?

If you are the parent or caregiver for a young child, you may be wondering when he or she is ready to begin receiving communion. Some of us may have been raised to believe that participation in holy communion requires a bit more than the generous splash of baptism. We may have received our first communion right after we were confirmed and so understood it as something of a reward for making it through those years of classes. Or, tradition may have given the impression that holy communion was a privilege enjoyed by those mature enough to understand and appreciate it.

Consider these two statements from *The Use of the Means of Grace**:

- Admission to the sacrament is *by invitation of the Lord*, presented through the church to those who are baptized.
- *There is no command* from our Lord regarding the age at which people should be baptized or first communed. . . . 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.

Your child's readiness is best determined by you—a parent or caregiver—in consultation with your pastor and, perhaps, a children's ministry staff person. Each child is different, and each will pick up on the significance of the meal at a different point. One important cue for readiness is your child showing signs of feeling excluded. Use questions like these to help you understand your child's sense of belonging in the faith community, so you can make a decision about readiness.

*A statement on the practice of word and sacrament that was adopted for guidance and practice by the Fifth Biennial Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, August 19, 1997.

- Has your child been baptized?
- Is your child comfortable in various locations around the church, including at the altar?
- Will your child extend his or her hands when asked to do so?
- Does your child recognize the pastor and seem able to interact enough with him or her to receive the elements?
- 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?

Only the first question requires a yes before your child can be considered ready. Use the others to generate discussion and to plan, with your pastor, for your child's preparation to begin receiving the sacrament and the gifts it brings. Blessings to you on this journey!

