

Children and Communion

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**St. Paul's
United Church of Christ
Robesonia, Pennsylvania**

To assist parents and guardians in fulfilling their baptismal vows the following guide for communion in regard to children has been developed. It is hoped that this guide will help parents and guardians grow with their children in the Christian faith, be faithful Christian disciples for their children, and assist them in making decisions about the sacraments.

- Communion is recognized within the Reformed Tradition as being a meal of remembrance of the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus the Christ; a meal of community bringing even closer together the congregation with one another and with the Trinity; and a tangible expression of the intangible grace of God. Therefore in order for this to be a meal of remembrance, individuals must first learn what it is they are to remember; and in order for this to be a meal of community, those communing must be a part of the Christian Body.
- All people including children need to first be baptized into the faith of Christianity prior to communing.
- Until they affirm their own vows, it is through a child's parent(s)/guardian(s) that a child is a part of the Christian Church. It is therefore through the parent(s)/guardian(s) active participation in the Body of Christ with their children that their child is able to participate in Communion.
- Unconfirmed, baptized youth who are visiting from another congregation, are invited to follow the guidelines of their home church, and are welcome at the Lord's Table.
- Youth who have affirmed their baptismal vows through the rite of confirmation are considered full adult members, and are able to participate in the sacrament of communion as such. With their parent's approval, youth enrolled in confirmation classes are also invited to commune.
- Confirmation is the affirmation of the baptismal vows. Youth who decide not to be confirmed, are in effect rejecting the vows of baptism, and as such should not participate in communion.
- If parent(s)/guardian(s) (and/or the youth) do not believe that their child is ready for communion, the child is always welcome to come forward with their parent(s)/guardian(s), when we commune at the chancel rail, to receive a blessing from the pastor. Unlike communion, a person does not need to be baptized to receive a blessing. If this is desired, the youth should keep their hands down or crossed over their chest (rather than outstretched for the elements).

- The following must take place for unconfirmed youth to commune:
 - (1) Be a baptized Christian.
 - (2) The youth should have expressed a desire to participate in communion.
 - (3) Parent(s)/guardian(s) of the youth should affirm their child's decision to commune.
 - (4) Participate in Communion Classes *and* Refresher Classes.
 - (5) The youth should express and have knowledge of the Reformed tradition's understanding of this sacrament. This should be taught in the home, through communion classes, and through regular participation in worship and Sunday school.
 - (6) The youth should be mature enough to follow their parents' teachings of whether or not they should/may choose the wine or the grape juice.
 - (7) When communing, children should commune with their parent(s)/guardian(s). The exception being those who cannot sit with their parents due to their leadership role or their parents' leadership role within the service (i.e. acolyte, crucifer, choir, communion elder, pastor, organist, etc.).
 - (8) Youth desiring to commune are expected to be in regular attendance in both worship and Sunday school. They do not necessarily need to be in attendance at St. Paul's UCC, if they are regularly attending another Christian church.

- **Communion Classes and Refreshers Classes**

- (1) Youth and their parents/guardians are to participate in communion classes prior to the youth communing.

If *both* parent(s)/guardian(s) are members of the church, it is expected that *both* participate with their child in communion classes and refresher classes until their child reaches the point of confirmation, especially if both made the baptismal promises "*to be Christ's disciples...to grow with this child in the Christian faith, to help this child to be a faithful member of the church of Jesus Christ...*" If there are extenuating circumstances that prevent one of the parents from participating in the class, please be in contact with the pastor for possible alternative options.

- (2) Communion Classes are planned to be offered annually, with the dates published in the newsletter. Classes *may* be offered by age groups (i.e. 1st-3rd, 4th-7th, 8th-12th).
- (3) A youth needs to take a Refresher Class with their parent(s)/guardian(s) at least every even numbered school grade until being confirmed. If there is a scheduling conflict with the times offered, please be in contact with the pastor for the possibility of scheduling an alternate day/time.

Again, taking these classes is important, because you cannot remember what you do not know. In addition, with age and experience, youth have increased capacity for more abstract understanding and questions, and benefit from repetition of teaching for long-term retention of knowledge.

- (4) You and your child can take the Communion Class and still decide that your child is not yet ready for communing. In other words, just because you take the class, you do not need to commune. You can come to learn more and gather more information, to help you in making a more informed decision.

*In the event that parent(s)/guardian(s) are unable and/or unwilling to fulfill the vows of Christian Discipleship for their children, it *may* be possible for an elder of St. Paul's UCC to volunteer to be a mentor for the youth. Please contact the pastor for more information regarding a mentoring elder.

- UCC Polity:
Within the United Church of Christ, the ordained minister of the congregation has full authority over the administration of the rites and sacraments within the congregation. As such, practices and guidelines regarding the sacrament communion must meet with the approval of the congregation's ordained minister.