Dear Redeemer Ardmore Friends,

May 3, 2011

A number of families have asked us to wrestle with the issue of when and how children should take communion on Sunday morning as a part of gathered worship. The session has wrestled with this subject and have come up with some guidelines developed and unanimously adopted by elders at all three Redeemer Sites (Ardmore, Yadkin Valley and Salem Presbyterian.)

We hope that this stance clears up any confusion that might exist with our beliefs on when and how children should participate in communion. We are sensitive that ultimately this is a decision that parents make for and with their children, so if as parents you are concerned about the sessions issue on this matter, we would welcome the opportunity to discuss our understanding of this practice with you at any point in time.

Please do not hesitate to contact any of us with questions you might have.

If you have a child who would like to be interviewed by an elder to begin taking communion, please contact any elder so that he can schedule something that works for your household.

Blessings-

Rob Alexander 723 - 3532  Peter Beilman 659 - 9426  Steve Beck 782 - 8455
Ger Browne (on sabbatical) Hunter Dockery 724 - 2217  Scott Gurley 577 - 9070
Josh Kwasny 782 - 8457  Kevin Morton 722 - 1230  Tripp Sanders 473 - 5785
Vern Schmidt (on sabbatical)  David Swayne (on sabbatical)
Children and Communion:
When should a baptized child first take communion?

Baptism and communion are the two sacraments of the protestant church. In the PCA we practice infant baptism. We believe that baptism emphatically, publicly and visibly marks the infant as a member of God's family of grace. This is a great blessing for the child. In it, God holds out the gift of salvation for the child. It is theirs. We eagerly anticipate the day that they will embrace it as their own. On that day, the child begins to participate in the second sacrament - communion.

Baptism initiates. Communion maintains.

For this reason, baptism should always precede communion for everyone. Communion is the outward sign of the inward work of Christ. Feasting on Christ strengthens and sustains our faith on a regular basis. We believe that the Last Supper was a Passover meal - the Ultimate Passover with Christ playing the part of the sacrificial lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7). Passover (see Exodus 12) is our model for communion. In Exodus 12:24-27 we see that children were participating in the Passover meal, asking questions about what is taking place. Our understanding is that children were welcome to eat the passover meal as soon as they understood and owned their faith.

The normal practice at Redeemer is that children should participate in communion as soon as they personally embrace the salvation offered in baptism. This is when they begin to take on age appropriate responsibility to "maintain and grow" their faith.

The Normal Progression to Communion

1) Faith - When a parent believes that their child is ready to own and express their faith they make it known to leaders in the church. A child who is ready for communion should be able to "discern the body and blood of Christ" (I Corinthians 11:28-29). We interpret that to mean the following:
   ● A person taking communion (communicant) must love God and seek His Kingdom.
   ● A communicant must acknowledge their sinful condition and regularly repent of sins.
   ● A communicant must accept redeeming work of Jesus Christ on the cross.
   ● A communicant must bear the Spirit's fruit (love, joy, peace...) and regularly find life in the gospel.

2) Interview - The family invites an elder from the congregation to confirm the faith of the child through an interview. This is normally an elder the child knows or perhaps an elder accompanied by a trusted sunday school teacher or friend. The parents may or may not be present depending on their preference.

3) Reception into membership - The elders have the responsibility to discern the faith of those coming for membership. We collectively determine whether the candidate is ready to take communion.

4) Public Vows - The child takes membership vows as the final step towards communion.

5) First Communion - A child’s first communion ought to be publicly recognized. The congregation acknowledges them as communing members who are taking responsibility for their faith as they come to communion for the first time. We encourage families to make much of this. It is a special time and one that should be celebrated.
Some Questions and Answers:

1) When should first communion happen?

Each child's spiritual development is different. We encourage children to partake as soon as they're ready. We understand that a six year old will express their faith in a way that is appropriate for that age. A twelve year old will have a more developed understanding of their faith. Expectations of expression are adjusted to age.

2) Are there resources available to me that will help me make this decision?

At regular times their are "communicants classes" for seventh and eighth grade youth. Children meet with teachers who review the doctrines of faith with them and help them understand all that is involved in them owning faith for themselves. This is a good opportunity to both inform the child and to help them join a community of others who are also owning their faith. For younger children there are catechism materials available for parents to use to train their children. The catechism is another great way to educate and build a child's understanding of the doctrines of faith regardless of their age.

3) What do I tell a child who wants to take communion but hasn't been interviewed?

This is difficult. We encourage you to use their desire for communion to teach the child about the responsibility of becoming a communing member and encourage them to be interviewed by an elder. It is the session's job to discern whether this is simply a desire to be included or a genuine confirmation of real faith. The process helps everyone do that.

4) But is my child missing out on something by waiting to take communion?

It is certainly possible for believers to neglect the grace that is offered at the Lord's Table. A child that clearly believes and wants the supper should not be denied the opportunity to be interviewed by an elder. However a baptized child that is still too young to come to the table is not being excluded from the promises of God's covenant of grace. These promises come through baptism, the preaching and teaching of God's Word, and the faith of believing parents (I Corinthians 7:14.)

5) Does my child need to stand in front of the church to take membership vows?

That is our preference, although we haven't always been clear on this point. We desire that public confession would be the norm. Taking public vows prior to first communion is most in conformity with Scripture and our book of church order (BCO). Please talk to an elder if you have a concern about this - in special cases this can happen in different ways.

6) The 1 Corinthians 11 passage seems out of context for my child. Does it apply?

Yes, this passage addresses those who are foolishly taking communion in a careless manner. The general principle of reverence before the sacrifices of God is what is in view (See the story of the sons of Eli in 1 Samuel). For parents this means helping our children understand the seriousness of the sacraments and discerning their ability to comprehend what is happening during communion, and act accordingly.