



“Let the Children Come to Me”

A curriculum for Holy Communion for Household Instruction

...[T]he disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”² He called a child, whom he put among them,³ and said, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.⁴ Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.⁵ Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

⁶ “If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea.⁷ Woe to the world because of stumbling blocks! Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to the one by whom the stumbling block comes!” **(Matthew 18:1-7).**

¹³ One day some parents brought their children to Jesus so he could lay his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples scolded the

parents for bothering him.

¹⁴ But Jesus said, “Let the children come to me. Don’t stop them! For the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those who are like these children.”¹⁵ And he placed his hands on their heads and blessed them before he left. **(Matthew 19:13-15).**

1. Introduction—The Christian experience of when to instruct for Holy Communion runs completely across the possibilities of child development. Many in our Lutheran tradition (ELCA and its predecessor bodies) were instructed in the 5th grade. Some Lutherans have waited until confirmation, so they were not instructed until 7th, 8th, or even 9th grade. If you grew up Roman Catholic, it is likely you were instructed in 2nd grade. Eastern Orthodox Christians commune their children

when they are baptized as infants.

(Relatedly, when it comes to Baptism, we make no sort of instructional demands upon nor expect any “understanding” from the child being baptized in order to receive the promises of God through water and the Word. One might ask the question then, “How is Holy Communion any different?”)

In the opening Bible verses to this booklet, of course, there is no age limitation given, nor expectation for understanding who or what Jesus is when he speaks about children and faith. In fact, he says to the adults in his midst, “...**Unless YOU change and become like children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven**” (Matt. 18:3). This is not necessarily a matter of eternal judgment as it is a warning not to miss the in-breaking of God’s love to our world in the here and now. Jesus’ words could be understood well in this way: “*Unless you can trust and believe like a child, you’re going to be apt to miss what God’s up to.*”

Truly, Jesus’ even more stern words are directed to the adults in his midst who miss the opportunity for welcoming children (18:5 and 19:14) or who, worse yet create obstacles for children coming into the presence of God’s love through Jesus (18:6-7).

These are the words that our congregation considers in the forefront of our mission of “TEACHING the Word. Reaching the World” and our purposes of “forming and sustaining life-long, personal faith...engaging in cross-generational ministry...and radical hospitality.”

2. A Brief History within the ELCA—Somewhere in the late 60s a wide range of Lutheran congregations from the predecessor bodies of the ELCA began separating First Communion from Confirmation and began preparing children to receive their first communion when they reached fifth grade.

In its 1989 publication *A Statement on Communion Practices* the newly-formed ELCA affirmed the fifth grade and/or ten years of age as an appropriate and desirable guideline for when a young person, after appropriate preparation, may first commune.

However, it became apparent that focusing on a particular age as the *primary* criterion for determining when first communion is received did not adequately consider *other* important factors, e.g., a child’s maturity, a child’s experience in the church, a child’s family as a supportive context for faith, discipleship and understanding, etc.

After years of study and conversation, in 1997 the ELCA issued a new First Communion guideline as part of a larger document on the centrality of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion in the life of faith. This larger document is called ***The Use of the Means of Grace***, and it lifts up a biblically based Lutheran understanding of the Sacraments. Its intent is to help us avoid a “legalistic” and “mechanical” ap-

proach to how parents, pastors, and congregations raise up our children in the Christian faith—meaning that it is inappropriate to take something Jesus intends as GRACE and turn it into some sort of achievement on our part. Regarding Holy Communion the statement recognizes:

- ***“Baptized children may begin to commune on a regular basis at a time determined through mutual conversation that includes the pastor, the child, and the parents or sponsors involved, within the accepted practices of the congregation”*** (p. 41).*
- ***“Ordinarily this beginning will occur only when children can eat and drink, and can start to respond to the gift of Christ in the Supper”*** (p. 41).
- ***“In all cases, participation in Holy Communion is accompanied by (instruction) appropriate to the age of the communicant”*** (p. 42).
- ***“There is no command from our Lord regarding the age at which people should be baptized or first communed. Our practice is defined by Christ’s command (“Do this”), Christ’s twin promises of his presence for us and for our need, and the importance of good order in the Church. 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”*** (p. 43).

(You can view the full 63-page *The Use of the Means of Grace* on our website at www.sslcmn.org/more-history-about-1st-communion.html.)

* **Note:** The phrase *“accepted practices of the congregation”* is an undefined reality that includes Biblical and pastoral teaching; practices of individual households; endorsement by congregational leadership; and more.

3. A Brief History within our Congregation—Our congregation’s trajectory on this issue has been tracking younger after being on the older end of the spectrum for many years. This movement can be tracked through a number of phases.

For one, as our congregation’s worship practice began to include the Wednesday evening service, a service that is almost exclusively attended by our youth and their families, we also began to recognize a significant piece of that congregation that was not able commune even though their classmates were. Fifth graders, then, began to receive instruction for Holy Communion.

Additionally, as our congregation has grown in its outreach into our community, contacting and welcoming households who come to us from a variety of Christian backgrounds, congregations, and practices, we also began to commune younger children who had been instructed elsewhere, including Pastor Mike’s children.

After Pastor Mike’s arrival in the fall of 2013, our congregation began to invite

households with children younger than fifth grade to receive instruction, beginning with 4th graders. However, this invitation also began to stretch to households with children younger than 4th grade with the following guidelines had been offered to those households:

- Is your child baptized?
- Is your child able to sit through worship?
- Can he/she participate in a 45 minute to 1 hour time of instruction and activity?
- Does your child have some basic sense of basic Bible stories, including especially Noah's Ark, Moses and the big stories of Exodus, and at least 3 stories about Jesus, including his Last Supper, his death, and resurrection?
- Has your child been asking questions about Holy Communion?
- Is your child aware enough of others in the congregation and the needs of others to show a degree of respect for the communion experience? Does your child have the ability to conduct himself/herself well during Holy Communion?
- Are you prepared to continue to fulfill the promises you made at your child's baptism to bring him or her regularly to the Lord's Table and to provide for his/her instruction in the Christian faith?

Pastor Mike had conversation with any household younger than 4th grade about these guidelines and reserved and exercised the right not to instruct younger children who couldn't meet those guidelines.

Most recently, we began to recognize the practice of a handful of households either who had come to us from other congregations who had a completely open welcome to the Table, or who had taken it upon themselves to begin teaching their children even younger than kindergarten about the Lord's Supper. Pastor Mike affirmed that parental teaching and encouraged those households with informal, conversational instruction about bringing their children to the Table.

In April 2016, through conversation with the Church Council, Pastor Mike was advised to create a more formalized curriculum to aid these households with "pre-reader" children in nurturing and growing their faith and practice.

4. A Welcome, an Encouragement, and Two Images for Passing on Faith—When children are presented for Holy Baptism, there are two sets of promises we hear.

The first set of promises is the most important, for in the water and the Word of baptism, God frees us from sin and death by joining us to the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. God promises to us that nothing can separate us from God. God promises to forgive and renew us. God promises that as Jesus was raised from the dead, someday so will we be raised.

The second set of promises is our response to the promises that God makes to us. In this set, as parents and family members, we promise...

*...to faithfully bring [our children] to the services of God's house, and teach them the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments.
...to place in their hands the Holy Scriptures and provide for their instruction in the Christian faith (service of Holy Baptism).*

Likewise, we as a congregation, in response, promise to pray for, to support, to encourage, and to equip those households.

All of these promises are the foundation of our mission and purpose as a congregation. We encourage you, even in whatever tentative way that may be, to use this material to continue working with your child(ren) and household in teaching and practicing the faith.

Two final images for passing on faith and practice, regardless of the ages of our children: in our states with a strong culture of hunting, the state government has identified some stake in instructing and licensing youth hunters—safety being one of the most important components. But the best instructed, most ethically-equipped, and safest youth hunters come from families where a hunting ethic and gun safety is instilled BY THEIR ELDERS long before the state licenses and sanctions them as hunters. These youth have been in the process of “becoming,” guided by the people most important in that process.

Second, in highly rural, predominantly agricultural states (like North Dakota, for example) youth could get their drivers' license at the age of FOURTEEN! Why? Because the tradition and family practices of that largely agricultural state relied on youth even MUCH YOUNGER than 14 being able to drive trucks and other farm equipment. Those youth had been in the process of “becoming” drivers (and farmers), guided by the people most important in that process.

Our mission of “*Teaching the Word, Reaching the World*” is most robustly embodied when we take seriously equipping the adults most important in the process of our children's “becoming” Christian. We want to help families create disciples of Jesus.

5. Some Teaching Strategies for Households:

Before your child(ren) begin to receive Holy Communion:

1. Talk to Pastor and let him know that your household will be intentionally working on this with your child(ren). Which ones and how old?
2. Any questions or concerns you may have about how to do this or what to do?

Some things to be aware of as you begin to instruct your older children:

- Help them to realize, even as they are participating in the meal, that we will still

make a “big deal” out of their first official communion with the congregation when that time comes in the Spring. We will still have a blessing. We will still give them a gift for their faith chest. This practice and growth for them—kind of like getting a learner’s permit for driving; or hunting with their elders.

- Have conversation with your children about WHY YOU take communion—what’s important for you about it? What do you remember about learning about Holy Communion. Your kids WANT to know what you believe and WHY. Even as challenging as it might be to put that into words, that’s a HUGE growing moment for them AND for you.
- The **“Things to do to teach about Holy Communion”** below are the heart of what will be taught at First Communion class. If you have questions about any of that, contact Pastor Mike.
- Don’t underestimate the “active” component of learning—going through the motions of what to do and how to do it; seeing parents and accompanying parents in serving communion; etc.
- This curriculum includes a 2-week pattern for teaching the material that is at the heart of Holy Communion.
- **This curriculum is intended to be guided and led by the adults who know your children best—THAT’S YOU. PLEASE DO NOT HAND THIS BOOK TO THEM AND HAVE THEM WORK THROUGH THIS ALONE. This is a partnership and part of the promise you made at your child’s baptism about teaching and modeling. And, it is part of the promise our congregation made to equip you to do this.**

Things to do to teach about Holy Communion:

Week 1—Read about the Passover.

We’re beginning to learn about the Lord’s Supper... or Holy Communion... or, you might have even heard it called *the Eucharist*. (That word simply means “*thanksgiving*.”) Our celebration or practice of this event reminds us of a very special meal that Jesus and his disciples kept called *the Passover*. Tonight we’re going to learn about that special event.

Find the book of Exodus in your Bibles. Do

Things to remember:

- **Eucharist**—one of the names for Holy Communion. It means “thanksgiving” because we give thanks for God’s love given to us in Jesus.
- **Passover**—the special meal that Jesus and his disciples were in Jerusalem to celebrate. The Passover reminds the Jewish people of what God did for them in freeing them from slavery in Egypt.

The Book of Exodus in a Nut Shell—The word “exodus” means “going out” or “exit.” In the book of Exodus, God tells the Egyptian Pharaoh (the king of Egypt), “*Let my people go!*” so they could worship God in the land God would give them. But Pharaoh did not let them go, so God rescues the people of Israel from slavery and leads them out of Egypt. Exodus shows us that God doesn’t let ANYTHING get in the way of his relationship with his people.

you know what Exodus is all about? Exodus is the story of Moses and God leading his people Israel out of slavery in Egypt. You can find out more about this in your story-book Bibles beginning on p. 66 or on p. 60 in the Old Testament of your Spark! Bibles.

Here is a daily lesson to walk through the important part of the Book of Exodus and the Passover:

Service—Together, figure out a way to help out with communion soon!

Ritual: Holy Communion is full of prayers before and after the meal. Try this common and traditional prayer when your family eats together:

Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest. Let these gifts to us be blessed. Amen.

Day 1—Exodus & the Passover: **Devotion & Prayer:** Read together **Exodus 1:1-22** from a Bible with which you and your student are comfortable.

Caring Conversation:

1. What's your favorite part of the story?
2. How did Israel get to Egypt? (Skim Genesis 42)
3. Why did Pharaoh fear the Israelite people?
4. What did Pharaoh do to the Israelite people?
5. Where is God working in this passage?

Pray together: Dear God—thank you for always working to watch over and take care of us, even when we can't see you. Amen.

Day 2—Exodus & the Passover: **Devotion & Prayer:** Read together **Exodus 2:1-15 and verses 23-25** from a Bible with which you and your student are comfortable.

Caring Conversation:

1. What's your favorite part of the story?
2. The basket in which Moses' mother puts him is like a little boat. Can you think of another story where God's people are kept safe in a boat? (AT LEAST 1!)
3. Where is God working in this passage?
4. What does Exodus 2:23-25 say that might give the Israelites hope?

Pray together: Dear God—thank you for always working to watch over and take

care of us, even when we can't see you. Amen.

Day 3—Exodus & the Passover: Devotion & Prayer: Read together **Exodus 3** from a Bible with which you and your student are comfortable.

Caring Conversation:

1. What's your favorite part of the story?
2. How does God speak to Moses?
3. What does God tell Moses?
4. What does God promise?

Pray together: Dear God—thank you for always working to watch over and take care of us, even when we can't see you. Amen.

Day 4—Exodus & the Passover: Devotion & Prayer: Read together **Exodus 4:1-23** from a Bible with which you and your student are comfortable.

Caring Conversation:

1. What's your favorite part of the story?
2. Does Moses want to do what God asks Moses to do? What are some excuses Moses comes up with?

Pray together: Dear God—thank you for always working to watch over and take care of us, even when we can't see you. Amen.

Day 5—Exodus & the Passover: Devotion & Prayer: Read together **Exodus 5** from a Bible with which you and your student are comfortable.

Caring Conversation:

1. What's your favorite part of the story?
2. Who goes with Moses to speak to Pharaoh?
3. Why do they want Pharaoh to release the Israelites? (5:1 & 3)
4. How does Pharaoh respond?

Pray together: Dear God—thank you for always working to watch over and take care of us, even when we can't see you. Amen.

Day 6—Exodus & the Passover: **Devotion & Prayer:** Skim **Exodus 6-11** (about the Plagues) from a Bible with which you and your student are comfortable. Read together **Exodus 12:1-8** and **12:11-51** and answer the following questions:

Caring Conversation:

1. What's your favorite part of the story?
2. Name 3 of the first 9 plagues:
3. What is the last and most horrible plague of all?
4. What does God command the Israelites to do?
5. What was special about the bread they were commanded to eat?
6. In 12:14-20 and 12:24-27, God tells Moses that the Israelites should repeat this meal every year. Why do you think God wants the Israelites to do this?

Pray together: Dear God—thank you for always working to watch over and take care of us, even when we can't see you. Amen.

Names & Words to Remember from the Passover:

Exodus:

Moses:

Pharaoh:

Slavery:

Plagues (including, what some of the plagues were and HOW MANY):

Passover:

Parts of the Passover meal:

Lamb's Blood:

“We remember...”.

Week 2—Jesus and the Passover. You have learned about some of the ancient origins of the meal and celebration that Jesus and his disciples were keeping during that week that led up to his arrest and crucifixion. Now, we're going to learn a little bit more about Jesus' actual meal and what it means.

- **Read together one of the passages where we find the Lord's Supper recorded:**

Matthew 26:17-30

Mark 14:12-26

Luke 22:1-23

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

- What did Jesus use at the supper?
- What did Jesus say?
- When you are done reading, pray this prayer together: **Lord Jesus, we thank you for this gift of bread and wine through which you promise to come and to be with us always. Amen.**

Some things to know about the story.

- Jesus and his disciples were in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover.
- When Jesus says what he does about the bread and the wine, he's doing two things: **(1) he's making a connection between what God did in Exodus and what God will be doing through him; and (2) he's making a connection between the lamb and its blood in Exodus and his own blood that will be spilled in his suffering and death.**
- In the same way that Jesus and his disciples were remembering what God did in and through the first Passover, *we remember what God did through Jesus.*

- We call Holy Communion **a Sacrament**.
- The word “Sacrament” means “*sign*,” as in a “sign that points us toward God’s love.” **Even when we can’t be sure about where God is anywhere else in life, the Sacraments promise to point us toward God’s love.**
- In the Lutheran way of understanding things, we speak of **two sacraments**: Baptism and Holy Communion.
- There are **three things** that make a Sacrament: **(1) It has to be in the Bible. (2) It has to be commanded by Jesus—i.e., “Do this...”. And (3) It has to have some sort of “element,” some sort of “stuff.”**
- We don’t know necessarily HOW it happens other than “God says it,” but the other uniquely Lutheran way of thinking about Holy Communion is that the bread and wine, either together or separately, **really, truly ARE Jesus’ presence with us.**
- We focus on the words, “*This IS my body broken... This IS my blood shed...*”.
- And most importantly of all, we notice *for whom* Jesus says he does this: **“FOR YOU.”**



Here is a daily lesson plan to walk through the important part of the Book of Exodus and the Passover:

Service—Together, figure out a way to help out with communion soon!

Ritual: In addition to the table prayer ritual that you and your family has at meal time, this week might be a great opportunity to be reminded of the other Sacrament that you would have been connected to at some point, that of Holy Baptism. Each day after you have done your Bible readings—either with a small bowl of water or without—make the sign of the cross on each other’s foreheads with these words:

Remember you are a baptized child of God, in the name of the Father, + and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Note to parents: *In each of the following readings, the focus is intended to draw your attention to the fact that God’s actions are always preceded by God (or God’s appointed spokesperson) speaking. “And God said, ‘Let there be light...’... God*

*said to Moses...Moses said to the people... etc. etc. etc. In connecting these readings to what happens at Holy Communion (or Baptism, for that matter), the point to be made is that, "How does bread and wine become the presence of Jesus?" **God speaks, and things happen.** So it's not the pastor who makes communion "communion." It's simply the pastor as "spokesperson" proclaiming what the Word says, which strikes ears of faith, and invites the believer forward to receive, some way, some how, that presence of Jesus declared by God's Word.*

Day 1—The Creation: Devotion & Prayer: Read together **Genesis 1:1-13** (at least) from a Bible with which you and your student are comfortable.

Caring Conversation:

1. What's your favorite part of the story?
2. What does God "do" the actually create?

Pray together: Dear God—We thank you, that when you speak, things happen. Amen.

Day 2—The Red Sea: Devotion & Prayer: Read together **Exodus 14:1-22** from a Bible with which you and your student are comfortable.

Caring Conversation:

1. What's your favorite part of the story?
2. What does God do to make the Red Sea part? (Hint: before the wind blows)
3. Through whom is God working to make this happen?

Pray together: Dear God—We thank you, that when you speak, things happen. Amen.

Day 3—Daniel & the Lions: Devotion & Prayer: Read together **Daniel 6:1-23** from a Bible with which you and your student are comfortable.

Caring Conversation:

1. What's your favorite part of the story?
2. What does God do to save Daniel? (Hint: 6:22)

Pray together: Dear God—We thank you, that when you speak, things happen. Amen.

Day 4—Jonah & the Whale: Devotion & Prayer: Read together **Jonah 1:11-2:10** from a Bible with which you and your student are comfortable.

Caring Conversation:

1. What’s your favorite part of the story?
2. What does God do to save Jonah? (Hint: 1:17 and 2:10)

Pray together: Dear God—We thank you, that when you speak, things happen.
Amen.

Day 5—Feeding the 5K: Devotion & Prayer: Read together **John 6:1-13** from a Bible with which you and your student are comfortable.

Caring Conversation:

1. What’s your favorite part of the story?
2. What does Jesus actually do to feed all those people? (Hint: 6:11)

Pray together: Dear God—We thank you, that when you speak, things happen.
Amen.

Day 6—In the Beginning...Again: Devotion & Prayer: Read together **John 1:1-14** from a Bible with which you and your student are comfortable.

Caring Conversation:

1. This reading is all about Jesus. What are some of the “names” John calls Jesus?
2. How does John say God created “in the beginning”?

Pray together: Dear God—We thank you, that when you speak, things happen.
Amen.

Other things to know:

- “First Communion Instruction” as a formal teaching time with Pastor Mike, with the congregation’s blessing as a milestone will come at a later point, usually in the spring time to coincide with Holy Week.
- What we are doing now is simply creating habit, ritual, and patterns with your child and beginning to lay the foundation for the knowledge components. We will go back and fill in “doctrine” and “instruction” when that it more developmentally appropriate.
- Questions, comments, or concerns? Don’t hesitate to talk with Pastor Mike, who

LOVES thinking about, planning for, talking about faith formation and equipping other adults to do it!

6. A Prayer for your Mission & Ministry as a Parent:

O God the Father of all humankind,

You have given to me these my children, and committed them to my charge to bring them up for You, and to prepare them for eternal life.

Help me, then, with your eternal, never-ending store of heavenly grace, that I may be able to fulfil this most sacred mission and stewardship.

Teach me both what to give and what to withhold; when to be patient and when to scold.

Make me to be gentle, yet firm;

considerate and watchful; and deliver me equally from the weakness of over-indulgence, and the excess of being too severe.

And grant that, both by word and example, I may be careful to lead them in the ways of wisdom and true faithful practice, so that at last I may accompany them to the unspeakable joys of our true home in heaven, in the company of all angels and saints. Amen.

