

Communicants Parent Information Redeemer Presbyterian Church

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Martin Bucer, the great Reformer of Strasbourg first proposed what he called an “Evangelical Rite of Confirmation.” He envisioned a process where the child would undergo catechetical instruction followed by a personal public profession of faith before the congregation. This profession was deemed a ratification of the baptismal covenant made for the child by the parents and would gain the child admission to the Lord’s table.

John Calvin further described this process whereby...

.... A child of ten or so would present himself to the church to declare his confession of faith, would be examined in each article, and answer to each; if he were ignorant of anything or insufficiently understood it, he would be taught. Thus, while the church looks on as a witness, he would profess the one true and sincere faith, in which the believing folk with one mind worship the one God. Then, I warmly approve of the laying on of hands, which is simply done as a form of blessing, and wish that it were restored to pure use.

Some Presbyterians will speak of a “communicants class”, whereby the children affirm on their own the promises made for them by their parents and as a result become communing members of the covenant body. In their descriptions of the communicant or confirmation process, both Calvin and Bucer set forth a three-fold approach. Communicants class should involve:

- 1) **CATECHIZING** - the child is instructed in the *basics of the gospel* and the *living out of the Christian life* (e.g. the Lord’s Prayer, the Ten Commandments, the Apostles’ Creed). Confirmation marks an internalization of the faith of the church, a personal understanding of and pledging towards that faith by the child.
- 2) **TRUE FAITH** - while confirmation includes study of the basics of the Christian faith, it is to be done only if *the parents and the Session believe that the child credibly holds to Jesus as Savior and Lord* and that there are signs of the Spirit’s work in his or her life. It is this profession of a credible faith that opens the door to full Eucharistic fellowship in the church.
- 3) **PUBLIC PROFESSION AND COMMISSIONING** - the children are taken through a catechizing process, then they profess their faith before a representative of the session, but they also *profess that faith before the congregation in a service of public worship*. During this service, the children take vows of membership, are given a brief charge from the pastor, receive a prayer of blessing, and are acknowledged and welcomed as communing members of the church.

Source Cited

Calvin, John. *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol.2, ed. John T. McNeill, Library of Christian Classics, 21 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), pp.1460 ff.

When Is The Right Time?

It has been said that timing is everything. This is definitely true when it comes to raising children. How many of us have bought toys for our children only to have them discard them immediately? The same can be true for communicants. Understanding the appropriate age for your child to participate in communicants class is a difficult but important decision.

On one hand, participating too early can be extremely frustrating for the child and only produces a meaningless experience. On the other hand, waiting too long can cause the child to be disinterested as the material becomes irrelevant to where they are in life. Understanding where your child is in the process of their spiritual formation is crucial to having a relevant, meaningful experience. The process of communicants class, done at the right time, will strengthen and deepen your child's relationship with Christ and understanding of the church.

How do you determine if your child is ready for communicants class? Below are a few questions to guide you through your decision.

1. Have you sought to raise your child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord? You may have recognized this phrase from the vows that you as parents took at the time you presented your child before the church for infant baptism. The process of spiritual formation starts very early on in your child's life. We must look back to some of our vows to gain further understanding.

#3 Do you claim God's covenant promises on (his/her) behalf, and do you look in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ for (his/her) salvation, as you do for your own?

#4 Do you unreservedly dedicate your child to God, and promise in humble reliance upon His grace, that you will endeavor to set before (him/her) a godly example, that you will pray with and for (him), that you will teach (him/her) the truths of the Christian faith, and that you will strive, by all the means of God's appointment, to bring (him/her) up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?

At infant baptism, you claimed God's covenant promises on your child's behalf, but now your child must claim these promises on his/her own. He/she is stepping out from the covenant that you made before God to pursue his own faith in God. He must claim these promises for himself and also look to the Lord Jesus Christ as he works out his own salvation (Philippians 2:11-12). The communicants process is an act of confirming and strengthening your child's faith. It builds upon the foundation that the child has received at home. One cannot confirm a faith that does not exist or a faith that a child does not understand.

2. Is the child initiating the desire for membership? In Romans 3:10-11 and John 6:44, we see that no one can seek God on his own unless God draws him. When one inquires about spiritual concerns it is God who is initiating towards him/her. As John Stott explains, confirmation is the process by which a child ratifies the covenant that his parents promised years before and God's confirming His work in the child's life. This faith and desire for church membership must come from the child's heart and not from parental persuasion. Calvin believed a child of ten should know his beliefs. Whether this is the ideal age or not, it does show that a child needs a certain maturity to know his beliefs, defend his faith, be a responsible and active church member and initiate the desire to be confirmed.

3. Is your child displaying fruit in his life that stems from his faith in Christ? How do you discern if your child has a credible profession of faith? Is it enough to claim that you are a Christian to enter into membership? If this was the only criteria for membership then virtually anyone could enter the church by claiming to trust in Christ. The key is to understand what is meant by the word "credible." With adults, the process of examining one's profession of faith to determine if it is credible can be a much clearer picture due to their maturity and ability to communicate their views. The adult understands and has the opportunity to tithe, commit and serve in the purposes and mission of the church. These and other tangible qualities can easily be examined. With the child it is much different. So then, how do you determine if he truly understands his faith? You must look for how God is working in your child's life. Scripture clearly states that those who God draws near to Himself will exhibit fruit from the Spirit in their lives (John 15:16, Romans 7:4, Galatians 5:22). Is your child seeking God on his own? Does your child desire to read her Bible? How do you see God working in your child's life? How do you see your child taking ownership for his own faith? As this happens, rejoice as you see God penetrating the heart of your child.

If you believe your child is ready to confirm his/her beliefs, Redeemer welcomes him/her to be a part of our next confirmation class. Please refer to the guidelines for children becoming communing members that are listed below.

1. The child should have a desire to begin the process. It should not be a parent driven decision.
2. The recommended age for confirmation at Redeemer is for a child in grade 5 or higher.
3. Understanding that God can work in our children's lives at different times, parents of children under the recommended age wishing that their child participate in confirmation may do so by requesting a pre-assessment elder interview to determine if they should pursue confirmation.

4. The child is required to attend each of the six classes in the series.
5. Once the lessons are completed, an elder interview will be scheduled.
6. Finally, the child will be asked to attend our confirmation service to stand before the congregation and take the membership vows.

Communicants Process

Communicants Classes	9:15AM to 10:15AM Select Dates in January - March
Elder Interviews	Dates are TBD
Candidates presented during service	Date is TBD

Questions for Membership Service

1. Do you acknowledge yourselves to be sinners in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure, and without hope save in His sovereign mercy?
2. Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation as He is offered in the Gospel?
3. Do you now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes the followers of Christ?
4. Do you promise to support the church in its worship and work to the best of your ability?
5. Do you submit yourselves to the government and discipline of the church, and promise to study its purity and peace?