

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	4
Foreword, The Rev. Paige Blair	5
Then and Now	
A Brief History of Children at the Eucharist	6
Current Theology Surrounding Children at the Eucharist.....	8
Current Practice	8
Introduction.....	14
Session One: Sharing a Family Meal.....	15
The Session	16
Session Two: Storytelling.....	21
The Session	22
Session Three: These Holy Things.....	27
The Session	28
Session Four: Praying Together	33
The Session	36
Session Five: Manners and Customs.....	42
The Session	43
Bibliography.....	47



Session One: Sharing a Family Meal

PLAN THE SESSION

Session at a Glance:

Welcome: make nametags
Gather and light candle
Share quieting prayer
Pass out booklets and explore them
Conversation re. family meals/special meals
Communion as Thanksgiving meal
Pass out prayer books and candles
Closing prayer

Materials:

big candle, matches
children's booklets, prayer books, and candles
pens, pencils, markers
newsprint or big paper or board on which to
write/draw
photocopies of the Parent Pages

Planning ahead:

Order the necessary number of children's
booklets and prayer books
Photocopy Session One Parent Pages
(back to back if possible, for single handout)
Decide where the class will meet
Get nametags
Gather writing/drawing materials

The day of the session:

Set up the space where the class will meet
Put the big candle in a highly visible place
Arrange chairs in a circle (unless you decide to meet in the sanctuary)



Before beginning:

Try to arrive early enough to have some time alone before others arrive. Offer the following prayer, adapted from our prayer book:

Almighty God our heavenly Father, you declare your glory and show forth your handiwork in the heavens and in the earth: Help us to accomplish the work you give us to do in truth and beauty and for the common good; for the sake of him who came among us as one who serves, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Know that God rejoices in your willing heart as you undertake this Communion instruction program. Be tender to yourself and to your own needs as you serve the needs of others. Let God's peace rest on your heart.

THE SESSION

As children arrive with their parents and/or other adult companions, greet them personally and invite them to make nametags.

Once everyone has arrived, gather in a circle, standing together, perhaps even holding hands. Ask everyone to be silent while you light the candle, and then offer a quiet prayer, either of your own, or perhaps the following:

Lord Jesus, stay with us [for evening is at hand and the day is past] [this day, this season, and always]; be our companion in the way, kindle our hearts, and awaken hope, that we may know you as you are revealed in Scripture and the breaking of bread. Grant this for the sake of your love. Amen.

Invite everyone to be seated, and pass out a booklet to each child. Show them the inside front cover where they are to write the names given them at baptism; you might ask if it's the same name they put on their nametag. We often have different names, depending on circumstances. Children might have nicknames or shortened names among family or friends, and some of the adults might be "Mr." or "Ms" at work, "Mom" or "Dad" at home, and on a first name basis with friends and neighbors. Have the children ask their adult companion for their baptismal name, and encourage them to write it in. Ask them for the next class to either find a photograph or draw a picture of themselves as they are now, and to sign their name underneath.

Read aloud the note at the top of that page: "Everyone who has been Baptized into the Christian family is invited to share Holy Communion with one another and with Jesus. Baptism makes you part of this extended family and makes you welcome at the Eucharist, the special, sacred family meal."

Then ask the children to describe a typical weeknight family meal at home. Write down what they say on blackboard or newsprint so they can see their own ideas up there, and can compare them with others'. Find out how many families sit down to dinner most

nights together (in one of my high school classes last year, not even one student sat down even once a week to eat with family. This represents a troubling loss of table fellowship, for it is around the table that bonding happens, that forgiveness happens, that thanksgiving is offered). Once you get a sense of how these children experience regular family meals, ask about special celebratory meals. What's different? Make a separate place on the board or newsprint and list what they remember. Andy Tyler, who took part in a Communion instruction class when he was eleven, recalls the list his class came up with: candles, flowers, special foods, special dishes and silverware, a special tablecloth, sometimes music and singing—and “everyone was there.” It ended up sounding a lot like a Sunday morning Eucharist. See if your class can get to that recognition, too. (It's ok to get parents involved, too—just don't let them take over.)

Show the children page 2 in their booklets that asks specifically about their Thanksgiving table. Encourage the children to tell you about the foods they eat, and the number of people that share Thanksgiving in their family. Cover the newsprint with people (stick figures are fine—just get a sense of a crowd). If there is time in class, encourage the children to draw their own Thanksgiving memories; if not, ask them to do the drawing at home. **Note:** if you have older students or reluctant artists, tell them it's perfectly okay simply to write down what they remember; if words work better than pictures for them, that's fine.

Read to them from their booklets: “The word “Eucharist” comes from a Greek word in the Bible. It means giving thanks. Jesus made Eucharist when he took bread and gave thanks to God. In church, we take bread and give thanks to God, too. Our Eucharist is a special kind of Thanksgiving meal we share with the whole Christian family. The altar is a special kind of table for the Eucharist.” Here you can talk about how we don't have turkey and mashed potatoes in church on Sunday mornings, but bread and wine because that's what Jesus blessed and shared with his friends so that it became holy food and drink for Christians everywhere.

Now you can direct the children to page 5 in their booklets, where they are invited to draw the altar. Even if you don't have time to draw this now, do ask the children what they remember about how the altar looks on Sunday.

Read more: “When you were baptized, you became part of a much bigger family [bigger, you might note, than what you just drew]. This is God's gift to you. God made you part of the family of Christians. We find this family not only at this church, but throughout the whole world. This family is not only those alive now but all Christians who have ever lived [even the apostles are part of your family!]. Even the saints are part of your family! Even those Christians who have not yet been born are part of this new family. When you take Communion, you are sharing a special Thanksgiving meal with the Christian family everywhere. When you take Communion, you are sharing a special Thanksgiving meal with Christians everywhere.” They are then asked to draw people taking Communion—and to “imagine that millions and millions of people from everywhere and from all time are there with you.”

Even if you don't have time for the more extensive drawings, do have students undertake the last one in this section of their workbooks: "Turn your hand upside down and draw or trace it here." Beside the space to draw their hand it says (and read it to them): "Every time you take the bread of Communion into your hands, you are doing what millions of people have been doing for over 2000 years, ever since Jesus first broke bread with his friends and family. Imagine Jesus as the one who offers you this bread week by week. Imagine Jesus as the one who puts the Bread of Heaven into your outstretched hands."

Before ending this session, present each child with a prayer book and a candle. If your parish is unable to purchase prayer books for each child to own, loan them each a copy for the duration of the class so they can spend time at home looking at the service for Holy Eucharist. The candle is for families to light whenever they sit down to draw in the booklet or to read in the prayer book in connection with the Communion instruction class, a way to sanctify that time together. (They could also light it for the Saturday evening meal or Sunday dinner, as a way to honor the Lord's Day.)

Now close the session by standing together in the circle. If you have a good voice you might lead them in singing a closing blessing; but if, like me, you're afraid no one would come back if you tried to sing, say a closing prayer. Consider using the Lord's Prayer, or the following adaptation of the prayer of St. Chrysostom:

Almighty and loving God, you have given us grace to be together for this time, and you have promised through your well-beloved Son that whenever two or three are gathered in his Name, you will be in the midst of us. As you have been with us here, go with us now, deepening our love for you, granting us in this world knowledge of your truth, and in the age to come life everlasting. Amen.

Exchange the Peace of the Lord.

Extinguish the candle.

Bid them good-bye.

Take a moment to process this first gathering. Know that you serve as an instrument of God's peace and God's love among these families; rest in that knowledge. Allow yourself to feel God's love and grace.

Looking back at this session, what pleased you?

What worried you?

What do you need to do in order to feel ready for the next session?

NOTES TO PARENTS ON SESSION 1

Sharing a Family Meal

“Children should be as welcome at our altar as at your Thanksgiving table. They don’t have to understand in order to take part” (the Rev. Leslie Smith).

Many of us grew up waiting to receive Communion until early elementary school or even until after Confirmation in early high school, but what the Episcopal Church has been doing over the past 30 years is re-claiming ancient practice. From the earliest days of Christianity, children received Communion along with everyone else, beginning at Baptism. Jesus established the rightful place of children by embracing them throughout his ministry. Matthew recounts the presence of children at the feeding of the multitude; children were among the recipients of that blessed and broken bread. Up to the tenth century, writes Joseph Russell, “the only question that seemed to bother the Church about infants and children receiving the Sacrament lay in the question of how it would be administered. Spoons, straws, fingers, and even leaves were the suggested tools for reception.”

What happened to interrupt the practice was that by the eleventh century, the doctrine of the “real presence” of Christ in the consecrated bread and wine identified them as too sacred for children to understand—or digest. Liturgics Professor Leonel Mitchell writes that “an overly realistic late medieval view of Christ’s presence in the elements” barred the youngest Christians from Communion “lest children should profane the sacrament by ‘spitting up’ as infants are wont to do”.

Then in England early in the thirteenth century, the Archbishop of Canterbury, John Peckham, declared that no one could receive the Sacrament until after being confirmed by a bishop. (This was designed as a political, not a theological, move in order to give bishops more control over parish life; what this decree obviously also did was to extend the time before children could receive communion.)

By the nineteenth century, however, the Anglican church had begun to soften its stance, saying that Communion was neither forbidden nor commanded for children; it was left to the discretion of each parish. More recently in the Episcopal Church the 1971 General Convention stated that Communion was intended for all the baptized (even the youngest) —not just for confirmed Episcopalians. The current *Children’s Charter for the Episcopal Church* states that “The Church is called to include children, in fulfillment of the Baptismal Covenant, as members and full participants in the Eucharistic community and in the church’s common life of prayer, witness, and service.”

What the Church has done is to come full circle, adhering once again to the ancient practice of welcoming at the Lord’s Table all who have been baptized.

NOTES TO PARENTS ON SESSION 1 (Cont.)

Optional activity at home: creating and sharing a meal

Plan a special meal; this would be especially appropriate for a Saturday evening in preparation for Sunday's worship. Be sure to have fresh bread—either enlist the children in helping make bread from scratch, or buy frozen dough so you can still watch it rise and smell it baking. (A realtor once said that the best way to sell a house is to bake bread before showing it because fresh bread smells like “home.”) Have the children help set the table with flowers and the candle from class.

Begin the meal by lighting the candle and saying: Light and peace, in Jesus Christ Our Lord.

Children: Thanks be to God.

Adult: When Jesus shared meals with his friends,

Children (with arms outstretched, palms up): God was with them.

Adult: And as we break this bread together,

Children (with arms crossed, hands on opposite shoulders as though hugging themselves):
God is with us.

Adult: When Jesus blessed the bread and wine at the Last Supper,

Children (Arms outstretched): God was with them.

Adult: Whenever we receive Communion,

Children (arms crossed): God is with us.

Adult: Lord Jesus, stay with us for evening is at hand and the day is past; be our companion in the way, kindle our hearts, and awaken hope, that we may know you as you are revealed in Scripture and the breaking of bread. Grant this for the sake of your love. Amen.

Share the meal. After the meal is over, you might close it with the following:

Adult: May God bless us and keep us, this night and for ever.

Children: Amen.

Everyone: Thanks be to God.

