

# Cornerstone Statement on Communicant Membership

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We recognize that the issue of when to allow baptized children to the Lord's Supper is one that good Christians, even Reformed Christians, sometimes disagree on. Our church belongs to the denomination of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), and as part of its church guidelines, children are to be brought to the Table when they give a "credible profession of faith" before the session (church elders). This sets the principle, but it also allows for diversity. When is a profession of faith considered "*credible*," and how mature and articulate does that faith need to be? How should parents guide their children in this?

Our position at Cornerstone Church is that we consider quite simple professions of faith by young covenant children to be credible, and we exhort Christian parents to bring their children before the session for admission to communion at an early age. Our own *Book of Church Order* in the PCA does not justify entrance to communicant membership on the basis of *age*; it wisely states that "the time when young persons come to understand the Gospel cannot be precisely fixed" (57-2). Therefore Cornerstone does not base access to the Lord's Supper on *age*, but rather on an age-appropriate *faith*.

This is also consistent with our confessional standards. Since the children of believing parents are members of the visible church, "the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God" (WCF 25.2), "within the covenant" and not "strangers from the covenant of promise" (LC 166), and sacraments are to be given to those "within the covenant" (LC 162) "to put a visible difference between those who belong to the church and those who belong to the world" (WCF 27.1), including young children at the table is not inconsistent with the general principles of Reformed theology. Children participated in old covenant feasts, such as Passover (Ex 12; Ex 23:17; Deut 12:11-12; Deut 16), and Paul likens the Lord's Supper to Passover (1 Cor 5:8) and other meals in the OT in which the whole covenant community participated (1 Cor 10:1-4, 18). Those OT meals themselves included warnings of wrongful participation (Isa 1:12-17; Amos 5:21-27; Jer 7:21-23). Our standards further state, "The sacraments of the Old Testament, in regard of the spiritual things thereby signified and exhibited, were, for substance, the same with those of the New" (WCF 27.5).

Scripture also supplies us with many examples of the faith of young children (Ps 8:2; 22:9-10; 71:6; Lk 1:41-44; 2 Tim 3:14-15; Tit 1:6) and our Lord himself speaks of how the mysteries of the kingdom are revealed to infants (Matt 11:25), even of infants who "believe" in Him (Matt 18:6; Lk 18:16) and praise Him (Matt 21:16). Thus we do not think we should doubt the simple profession of faith by a young covenant child.

In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul exhorts each partaker of the Supper to "examine oneself" and "discern the body." The context of 1 Corinthians 11 is adults who were using the Lord's Supper in rather flagrant ways (getting drunk! 11:21) and causing divisions within the church (11:18). Paul's main contention is *not* that the participants were not of advanced intellectual capacity. Rather, his main contention was that what was meant to express unity was being used to knowingly "despise" and "humiliate" certain church members (11:22).

We believe these exhortations should be taken according to different levels of mental capacity. Children should be able to confess their sins and so demonstrate that they are examining themselves. Children should also be able to connect the bread to Christ's body given for them and the cup to Christ's blood shed for them, and so recognize that this meal is for those trusting in Jesus. The exhortation is not to advanced intellectual ability or to an already-arrived spiritual maturity, but to a humble faith that is seeking to be faithful in practice. Our confessional standards tell us that "this sacrament is appointed for the relief even of weak and doubting Christians" (LC 172).

Scripture calls parents to raise their children up in the fear and admonition of the Lord. Therefore parents should not wait until their children are old enough to make a verbal profession of faith to begin training their children in faith. Likewise, parents should also not presume upon God's grace, but should continually instruct their children after they begin to receive communion. They should not assume that the spiritual formation of their children stops at their entrance to the Lord's Supper.

It is also important to recognize the cooperative element between parents of baptized children and the leadership of the church. On the one hand, parents are the immediate overseers of their children's spiritual development. On the other hand, at a child's baptism the entire church vows to assist parents in the Christian nurture of their child, and we must take these vows seriously. Elders are given spiritual authority over the whole flock and that includes both parents and children. Thus the session of Cornerstone encourages parents to bring their children to the session for interview and admission to the Supper, and the session will also seek to give spiritual oversight to parents in bringing their children to be nurtured at the Table and beyond.