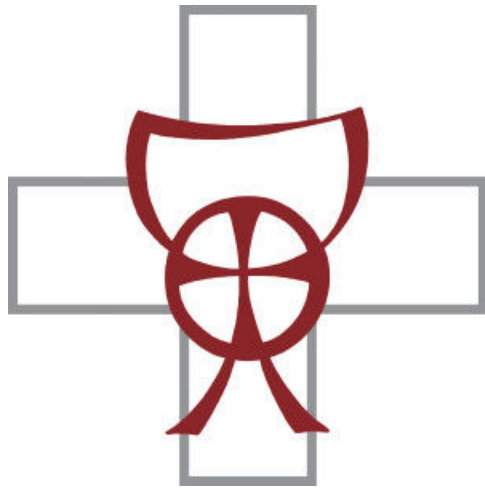


## FIRST COMMUNION PRIOR TO CONFIRMATION



EPIPHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH  
DORR, MICHIGAN

**I**N HIS LARGE CATECHISM, Martin Luther wrote these wise words: “If you could see how many daggers, spears, and arrows are aimed at you every moment, you would be glad to come to the Sacrament as often as you can. The only reason we go about so heedlessly is that we neither imagine nor believe that we are in the flesh, in the wicked world, or under the kingdom of the devil” (LC V 82). Herein is the twofold reason we gladly receive the Lord’s Supper as frequently as possible: first, the forgiveness of sins, and, second, divine protection against the devil and his evil angels. We need the peace that passes all understanding that comes only from sin forgiven and the indwelling of our Triune God. The Lord’s Supper does both of these miraculous things. As adults, we cherish these gifts that come to us through the Supper. Those who hunger and thirst for Righteousness (that is, Jesus, 1 John 2:1 and 1 Corinthians 1:30) are satisfied (Matthew 5:6).

### **Does Scripture require us to reach a certain age to partake of Holy Communion?**

No. Scripture does not tell us that we need to be a certain age to receive Holy Communion. The practice many of us know today is the result of tradition.

### **What are Scripture’s requirements for receiving Holy Communion?**

Scripture requires two things:

- 1) Knowledge of our sin and our need for a Savior
- 2) The person who receives is able to express that what they receive is the very Body and Blood of Jesus, with the bread and wine.

“Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the Body eats and drinks judgment on himself.” 1 Corinthians 11:28-29

### **Will we commune infants or toddlers?**

No. Though there are some in our Synod who advocate for this practice, we will not commune infants or toddlers. They are not yet able to verbalize their sinfulness, need for a Savior, and the mystery of the Lord’s Supper, as St. Paul says is necessary.

Communing those persons would not be beneficial to them because they cannot yet express their discernment that Christ is present bodily in this Feast.

### **Does this lead to Open Communion?**

No. We will not open the Altar to everyone regardless of their denominational affiliation. St. Paul says that, in addition to a right confession of Christ's presence in the Supper, unity in the faith is also necessary when we come together for the Lord's Supper. "I appeal to you, brothers, by the Name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment." 1 Corinthians 1:10.

### **What benefit comes from receiving at a younger age?**

Quite simply, the youth who commune will receive the same benefits as an adult who communes: Forgiveness of sins, life, salvation, the death and resurrection of Jesus, the strengthening of their faith, the powerful and cleansing Body and Blood of Jesus coursing through their veins, communion with one another and with the whole Church of God in heaven and on earth.

### **Will this eliminate Confirmation?**

*This does not replace or eliminate the Rite of Confirmation.* We will continue to Confirm youth at the end of 6<sup>th</sup> grade after a period of formal instruction (normally two years). Though the Rite of Confirmation is nowhere commanded or outlined in Scripture, it is a good tradition created by the Church for the education of our young people and the giving of the opportunity to publicly, verbally confess their faith before the congregation. Because Baptism and instruction in the faith are inseparable (see Matthew 28:19-20), there must be a formal time of instruction for all people. **If a child is presented for First Communion before the Rite of Confirmation, is admitted to the Altar, and does not enroll in Confirmation classes at the appropriate time (beginning of 5<sup>th</sup> grade), that person will not be allowed to commune until they enroll in Confirmation class.** We must obey Christ's command to teach the basics of Christian Doctrine to all who claim membership in the Christian Church.

### **What about peer pressure or parental pressure? Will you commune a child just because they say they want to, or their parents want them to, but the child is not able to rightly confess what they receive in the Supper?**

As your Pastor, I promise that I will not admit to the Altar any child who is not able to confess their faith clearly, who does not understand their sinfulness and need for a Savior, and who cannot confess that what is received is no ordinary food but is truly the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, even if our mortal eyes cannot see that reality. I will not approve a child for the Rite of First Communion just because a parent wants them to do this, nor will I approve them if the child does not want to receive but is only doing this because of parental pressure. We must not turn a Gospel gift into a demand of the Law. I will not allow a child to receive this Gift to their spiritual harm if I believe that they do not understand what is being offered. I also make this same promise for adults who commune. I do not want to give this Sacrament to anyone's harm.

### **How do I know if my child is ready to consider First Communion?**

Some signs include, but are not limited to:

- ✘ They pay attention diligently during the Divine Service.
- ✘ They show an awareness of what is going on at the rail during the Distribution (paying attention, watching, showing an interest in participating/receiving).
- ✘ When asked, they are able to explain that the Lord's Supper is something holy, that it is more than bread and wine.
- ✘ They are able to confess that they are sinners in need of forgiveness.

### **I believe my child is ready to consider receiving Holy Communion. What do I do?**

- ✘ Talk to Pastor Beffrey. Tell him that you think your child is ready to commune.
- ✘ Pastor Beffrey will give you the tools necessary to continue teaching the Christian Faith at home in a fuller way.

### Why do I begin the teaching, not Pastor Beffrey?

Martin Luther wrote his Small Catechism to be a tool for families to teach the faith to one another. He begins each section with this heading: "As the **head of the family** should teach it in a simple way to his household" (emphasis added). The Church's assumption has always been that Christian education is the responsibility of the parents. The Pastor's (and Sunday School's) job is to *supplement* what is happening in the home, not *replace* it. Scripture explains this responsibility for parents, especially fathers, clearly:

- ✘ **Deuteronomy 11:19**, "You shall teach [My Words] to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise."
- ✘ **Proverbs 22:6**, "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it."
- ✘ **Ephesians 6:4**, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."
- ✘ **2 Timothy 3:14-15**, "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."

Though this sounds intimidating and may be at first, the more you do it, the easier it will be. You don't have to be a doctor of theology or feel like your child must be the next Martin Luther. You are simply reading with and to them the Words of Holy Scripture and teaching them what they mean and how they inform areas of our life. This will open doors for communication with your child that will serve you well through the rest of their life. Once they see they can come to you with questions about faith, they will gladly come with questions in other areas of life.

### What do I need to teach my child?

The material is the Small Catechism itself. Pastor can give you a copy that is only the Catechism (not the expanded version with the Synodical questions and answers appended). Conversation will be far more informative for them than attempting simple rote

memorization of the Catechism. Conversation will allow for questions and answers and will help them understand that church doesn't stop once you leave the building.

The information your child should know to be ready to move ahead includes, but is not limited to:

- ✘ Making sure they are exposed to and understand in an age-appropriate way the Six Chief Parts of the Catechism.
- ✘ Making sure they are able to understand that what we receive at the Altar is the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.
- ✘ Making sure they understand that this is given to them to forgive sins and strengthen faith.
- ✘ Making sure they are able to make a general confession of sin, believing that they need forgiveness and that they are forgiven by Jesus Christ.
- ✘ They need to commit to memory:
  - The Ten Commandments (the Commandments themselves, not necessarily the explanation, though that is good for them to begin to memorize)
  - The Creed (Apostles' or Nicene - Nicene may be more common from its use in services)
  - The Lord's Prayer
  - The Words of Institution

### What happens when they know these things?

- ✘ When they are able to do the things above as a result of catechesis in the home, the parents will come to Pastor Beffrey to tell him that they believe their child is ready to receive Holy Communion.
- ✘ The child will begin a six-week session with Pastor Beffrey and any other children ready to receive Holy Communion. Each class will focus on one chief part of the Catechism, especially as it relates to Holy Communion. Parents are strongly encouraged to attend class with their child.
- ✘ At the end of the course, on the next Sunday they will be admitted to communicant membership of Epiphany Lutheran Church by the Rite of First Communion Prior to Confirmation.

**When will the Rite take place?**

Because the penitential seasons of the Church Year (Advent and Lent) have their origins in preparing Christians for Baptism, Confirmation, and reception of the Lord's Supper, the Rite will take place on Gaudete, the Third Sunday in Advent, and Laetare, the Fourth Sunday of Lent. The dates for the next several years are as follows:

<b>Season</b>	<b>Sessions Begin</b>	<b>Rite of First Communion</b>
Advent	11/5/2017	12/17/2017
Lent	1/28/2018	3/11/2018
Advent	11/4/2018	12/16/2018
Lent	2/17/2019	3/31/2019
Advent	11/3/2019	12/15/2019
Lent	2/9/2020	3/22/2020