

Children and The Lord's Supper

This pastoral letter sets forth theologically the biblical principles which should be applied to the questions we face as Christians and churches in evaluating and responding to the issue of children and the Lord's supper.

A pastoral letter is intended to shine the light of God's word broadly on a general area of concern to the Church. Requiring the approval of only one General Assembly, it is not as definitive as a Position Paper, which requires the approval of two General Assemblies (including a minimum of one year circulation among the presbyteries). The primary purpose of a pastoral letter is to guide churches within the EPC rather than to identify our positions to the world. (Act of Assembly 97-13)

The Committee on Theology issued this pastoral letter to the 13th General Assembly in response to its request for guidance on the subject of young children and their participation in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

Administration of and participation in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper must be done in accordance with Scripture as expressed in the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapters 27 and 29, the Westminster Shorter Catechism, questions 96 and 97, and the Westminster Larger Catechism, questions 168 through 177.

The history of the Reformed tradition on this matter is fairly clear that young children have not been admitted to the Lord's Supper. However, the early church until the 12th century did permit the practice. In recent years, greater interest has developed among the Reformed denominations in allowing such to participate.

It is the conclusion of this committee that Scripture, as explained by our confessional standards permits only those who are of faith in Christ to participate in the Lord's supper. Further, none who are of saving faith in Christ are to be prevented from it (*WLC, 173*). Those who do participate must be able to discern the nature of the sacrament (*WLC 170, 174*), must prepare themselves for worthy participation (*WLC 171, 173*) and be able to engage in self-examination at the time of and following participation (*I Cor. 11:26-30, WLC 175*).

The Session of the church is charged with the responsibility to discern the credibility of the profession of those who wish to participate in the Lord's supper, regardless of age. This is explained in the Westminster Larger Catechism, #173.

Q. May any who profess the faith, and desire to come to the Lord's Supper, be kept from it?

A. Such as are found to be ignorant or scandalous, notwithstanding their profession of the faith and desire to come to the Lord's Supper, may and ought to be kept from that sacrament, by the power which Christ hath left in his church, until they receive instruction, and manifest their reformation.

The advice of this committee is that, though a local Session is not required to admit young children to participate in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, it may permit them if the following criteria are met:

1. The child has been administered the sacrament of Christian baptism.
2. The child presents a credible profession of faith as determined initially by his or her parents, and determined ultimately by the Session of the church.
3. The child is able to evidence to the Session a basic understanding of the nature of the sacrament as it is set forth in the Scriptures and in the Constitution of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.

The Session must continue to exercise diligence in its covenant responsibilities toward those children who are admitted to the Lord's Supper. The Session may or may not choose to admit the child into active membership at that time.

**Adopted 13th General Assembly
June, 1993**