July 2014

Classis BCNW at its session in March of 2014, was asked by one of its member churches for advice on how to facilitate having children participate in communion.

Classis ask those churches who already have children partaking of communion if they could share any written policy or advice they have with their fellow churches.

# FOR COUNCILS

Synod 2011’s decision to open the Lord’s Table to children places lots of responsibility on elders! How can we equip ourselves to help guide this big step?

* Read [Affirming Baptism and Forming Faith](http://crcna.org/sites/default/files/2011agenda_appendixA_0.pdf). This helpful document is aimed at deepening our understanding of baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and Profession of Faith.
* Check out the study guide to [Affirming Baptism and Forming Faith: A Study Guide for Small Groups](http://crcna.org/sites/default/files/Faith%20Formation_affirmingbaptism_study.pdf). Use questions from this study (especially part 4 which deals with communion) as a discussion starter for council conversation around the issue of children’s participation.
* Read [Children at the Lord's Table: Toward a Guiding Principle for Biblically Faithful Celebrations of the Lord's Supper](http://crcna.org/sites/default/files/2011agenda_appendixC.pdf).
* Use the study guide [A Practice of Christian Unity](http://crcna.org/sites/default/files/Faith%20Formation_bible%20study.pdf) to talk together about the significance of the sacrament of communion and how it relates to including children.
* Spend some council time discussing [Faith Formation: A Model for Healthy Congregational Culture](http://crcna.org/sites/default/files/ffc_model.doc) and using the accompanying checklist ([Faith Formation: A Checklist for Congregations](http://crcna.org/sites/default/files/ffc_checklist.doc)) to assess the culture of your congregation and its faith formation practices.

Below are 4 responses received and are printed here for informational purposes only.

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Summary of CRC Synodical History Regarding the Participation of Children in the Lord’s Supper[[1]](#footnote-1)

 **1984:** The issue of children participating in the Lord’s Supper has been discussed thoroughly in the Christian Reformed Church during the last 25 years. The discussion began in 1984, when Classis Rocky Mountain asked for a study committee to determine whether covenant children should be allowed to participate in the Lord’s Supper.[[2]](#footnote-2)

 **1988:** After reviewing a majority report (that felt that children should be allowed to participate in the Lord’s Supper based on their covenant status, and their ‘desire to remember and proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes’) and a minority report (that felt a profession of faith for children was necessary) Synod allowed for covenant children who gave evidence of faith, who were able to discern the body, and who publicly professed their faith to participate in the Lord’s Supper, with adult responsibilities of membership added at a later time.

 **1995:** Synod ratified a 4-step procedure as a means of clarifying the requirements of public profession of faith for admission to the Lord’s Supper on the part of younger covenant children.[[3]](#footnote-3)

 **2006:** Synod allowed for the admission of all baptized members to the Lord’s Supper on the basis of their full membership in the covenant community.

 **2007:** Synod rescinded the decision of Synod 2006. Synod further clarified this matter by defeating a motion to grant congregations the freedom to admit all baptized members to the Lord’s Table upon approval of the consistory. Synod appointed a Faith Formation Committee with the mandate “to deepen the integration of biblical teaching; confessional norms; church polity; and liturgical, educational, and pastoral practices in the CRC” with respect to participation in the Lord’s Supper and public profession of faith.

 **2008:** The Faith Formation Committee reported to Synod, clarifying the current status of children at the Table and encouraging churches to implement the decision of 1988. The committee also summarized major positions within the CRC on Children and the Lord’s Supper (see below), offered some preliminary reflections on interpreting 1 Corinthians 11, and encouraged congregation to look at the issue of children and the Lord’s Supper within the context of a full-orbed faith formation.

<http://www.crcna.org/ministries/initiatives/faith-formation>

1. **Major Positions within the CRC on Children and the Lord’s Supper**

***Please note that each of the following 4 positions come out of the work of the synodically appointed Faith Formation Committee and are based on recent discussions that have taken place within the CRC on the issue of Children and the Lord’s Supper. They are intended to represent a cross-section of the main views on the issue that currently exist in the denomination.***

– Position 1: Some who are opposed to children’s participation at the sup­per have argued not only against having children participate who have not made profession of faith, but also against having younger children make an age-appropriate profession of faith (despite the action of Synod 1995, which allowed for the age-appropriate profession of faith of young children).

– Position 2: Some are simply calling for younger children to make an age-appropriate profession of faith, with a decision about their par­ticipation entrusted to the council of the congregation (a position that Synod 1995 already endorsed).

– Position 3: Some are advocating that children should be able to partake of the bread and cup before making a formal public profession of faith, but after reaching an age in which they are able to understand that the bread and cup offer us participation in Christ’s body and blood, with a decision about their participation entrusted to parents or guardians.

– Position 4: Some are advocating that all baptized members should re­ceive the bread and cup, regardless of their level of understanding. This position would allow for infant communion.[[4]](#footnote-4)

1. **Discussion:**
	1. Each of the 4 positions above uses various rationale (Scriptural, confessional, historical/traditional, etc.) to prove its point of view. When it comes to the issue, what should be the basis for welcoming or denying children to the table?
	2. Of the 4 positions presented above, which most nearly represents your own position?
	3. How does that fit with our congregation’s current practice concerning children’s participation in the Lord’s Supper?
	4. What questions or issues stand out for you regarding children at the Lord’s Supper? What should our congregation consider as we continue to define our position on the topic of Children at the Lord’s Supper?
2. **For Further Reading:**
	1. The official position of the CRC, from our denomination’s website:

 <http://www.crcna.org/pages/positions_lordssupper.cfm>

* 1. Calvin Theological Seminary’s *The Forum* dedicated the entire Spring 2007 issue to this topic:

 <http://www.calvinseminary.edu/pubs/forum/07spring.pdf>

* 1. *The Banner’s* report on the decision of Synod 2007

 <http://www.thebanner.org/magazine/article.cfm?article_id=1080>

##### ****1. What is the current position of the CRC with regards to children at the Lord’s Supper?****[[5]](#footnote-5)

Currently the church experiences some confusion on this matter. In the past the practice has always been that baptized members are admitted to the Lord’s Supper upon a public profession of their faith. Normally, such a profession was not made before the latter years of high school. In 1988, synod gave encouragement to the churches that younger children should be admitted to the Lord’s Supper by way of profession of faith. Synod said, “Covenant children should be encouraged to make public profession of faith as soon as they exhibit faith and are able to discern the body and remember and proclaim the death of Jesus in celebrating the Lord’s Supper.” And then it added, “Since the Bible establishes no specific age requirement, the common practice of delaying profession of faith even though faith is present has no biblical warrant.” (Acts of Synod 1988, Art.74, page 559). In 1995, synod affirmed that even though younger children are in view, their admission to the Lord’s Supper still requires a profession of faith.

However in 2006, in response to an overture, synod allowed “for the admission of all baptized members to the Lord’s Supper on the basis of their full membership in the covenant community” (Acts of Synod 2006, Art.71, page 730). However, because this decision involves a major policy change, it requires a ratification by the following synod before it becomes official.

Since the Synod of 2007 did not ratify this decision of 2006 it is no longer in effect.

Therefore the current position of the CRC regarding children and the Lord’s Supper is that baptized children are to be admitted to the Lord’s Supper upon an age-appropriate expression of their faith. However the church is exhorted to encourage her children to seek admission to the Lord’s Table as soon as such faith is present.

##### ****2. Why are we talking about all of this now?****

A variety of reasons have been suggested and it seems they have all come together simultaneously:

* A deepening desire throughout the denomination to lead our children into the profound grace of our Lord Jesus Christ in every way that we can.
* An awareness that within the CRC two quite different viewpoints of interpretation of I Corinthians 11 continue to function.
* A weakening of the walls between various Christian traditions, which reveals that the Christian Reformed practice is among the most restrictive and leads us to ask why this is so.
* A continued wrestling with trying to achieve the balance between receiving communion as a wondrous gift and a means of grace and sensing that it is a precious privilege that warrants accountability.
* Confusion and ambivalence concerning healthy practice of the call to profession of faith.
* A growing sense that the relationship between baptism and communion and the relationship between the Passover and communion having not been properly articulated in traditional Christian Reformed practice.

These six factors do not point to clear conclusions concerning these matters, but they do point to the need for discussion and study of the issue.

##### ****3. Isn’t the teaching of I Corinthians 11 perfectly clear?****

For generations the Christian Reformed church has used its preparatory communion forms to teach that mature self-examination is a prerequisite for participation, and this teaching was based on I Cor. 11: “Beloved in Jesus Christ, since we hope next Lord’s day to celebrate the blessed sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, we are called to prepare our hearts by rightly examining ourselves. For the apostle Paul has written: ‘Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup’ (I Cor. 11: 27-28).” According to this interpretation and application, children who are not mature enough to conduct such self-examination may not participate.

The force of generations of repetition has left the impression that this is the only proper interpretation of this passage. But a careful reading of the context suggests that another interpretation is also worth pursuing. The context tells us that:

* The church in Corinth suffered from many divisions (11: 18).
* Communion practices expressed these divisions, and were so dysfunctional that some members became drunk on communion wine before others had even arrived to worship (11: 21).
* Paul is compelled to instruct them concerning how the body of Christ is one though it consists of many different members (ch. 12), that agape/love binds the community together (ch. 13), and that in its worship, various gifts are exercised appropriately so that worship is practiced “in a fitting and orderly way” (ch. 14).

When we note this context, the verse that follows the two verses used in the CRC preparatory form takes on profound meaning: “For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself” (vs. 29). The phrase “body of the Lord” points us in two directions: (1) the body of the Lord who died for us, calling us to personal examination concerning our walk with the Lord [as the form does], (2) the body of the Lord as the community of believers [as the metaphor is used in ch. 12], calling us to corporate examination concerning our spiritual health as a community.

Some commentators observe that this text should take us in this second, communal direction, and ask questions such as, “are we truly a Christian community that includes all members?” “In what ways are we saying to certain members, ‘We don’t need you,’ (12: 21)?” “Who are the contemporary equivalents of the Grecian widows who are being overlooked” (Acts 6: 1)?

This second, communal direction in which I Cor. 11 takes us challenges us also to ask the question, “If we prevent children from participating in communion, are we guilty of not recognizing the body of the Lord?” Though the answer to this question is not immediately clear, the passage does properly challenge us to explore the question.

One of the major tasks of the Faith Formation Committee will be that of assessing these positions and arguments.

##### ****4. What is the practice of other Reformed denominations on this matter?****

Many Reformed denominations are engaged in conversations about this subject at this time. The following give us a picture of the landscape of the churches and their positions on this matter.

1. In the early church all baptized persons were welcomed to the Lord’s Table. This practice was gradually abandoned in the 12th and 13th centuries. The Protestant Reformers did not give consideration to reversing this abandonment of the practice of welcoming children to the Lord’s Table.
2. Many denominations currently practice confirmation which welcomes children of elementary school age to communion after a period of instruction, while others provide confirmation after their first communion.
3. Significant variation in others denominations in remarkable, with each marked by vigorous pro and con voices.
* The Reformed Church of America currently allows young children to come to the Lord’s Table upon the evidence of faith and the permission of the parents and elders.
* The Presbyterian Church USA says “Baptized members are entitled to the pastoral care and instruction of the church and to participate in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper.”
* In the Presbyterian Church of American (PCA) the customary practice is to admit to the Lord’s Table only those who “are of years and ability to examine themselves” and make a formal profession of faith, however they are allowed to hear a profession of faith of a younger child, and this would not entail full membership but would allow the child to participate in the Lord’s Supper.
* The Presbyterian Church of Canada requires a profession of faith in Christ and obedience to him before admission to the Lord’s Table.
* The Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) requires a profession of faith before admission to the Table of the Lord.
* The Christian Reformed Churches of Australia has claimed that “there are no Scriptural grounds to continue the Reformational practice of requiring a profession of faith by baptized members of the covenant community before seeking to take part in the Lords’ Supper” and parents, with the prior approval of the Session, are given discretion of allowing their children to participate.

##### 5. Won’t admitting baptized children to the Lord’s Supper undermine the importance of Profession of Faith?

This fear has frequently been expressed. It seems to arise from the concern that if profession of faith receives its significance from the fact that it grants one the right to come to the Lord’s Table, then it potentially loses its significance if children may come to the table on the basis of their baptism, or at any time prior to profession of faith. Perhaps this might be so. However, there are several other considerations which tell us that profession of faith receives its weighty significance from other factors also.

The church has always taught that the Bible tells us that our profession of our faith has a far greater significance than to be a gateway to the table. Through our profession of faith we declare to God, our fellow believers, and the world that we “confess with our mouth that ‘Jesus is Lord’, and believe with our heart that God raised him from the dead” (Romans 10:9) for our salvation.

The church has also given consideration to the fact that even if young children come to the Table of the Lord, we should still “devise an appropriate means for securing a commitment to the creeds of the Christian Reformed Church and to the responsibilities of adult membership in the local congregation from confessing members who, having attained the age of 18, have not yet made such a commitment.” (Acts of Synod 1995, Art. 69, page 720).

The Faith Formation Committee is committed to carefully evaluate all these considerations in the course of its study and discussion.

##### 6. What curriculum is currently available regarding faith formation?

Faith Alive Christian Resources and other ministries provide very helpful material on this subject. Their materials include, but are not limited to:

* The Year of Faith Formation. Resources are available at [www.crcna.org/pages/fa\_walkon\_resources.cfm](http://www.crcna.org/pages/fa_walkon_resources.cfm).
* Dynamic Youth Ministries. ([www.calvinistcadets.gospelcom.net](http://www.calvinistcadets.gospelcom.net/); [www.gemsgc.gospelcom.net](http://www.gemsgc.gospelcom.net/); and [www.youthunlimited.org](http://www.youthunlimited.org/))
* Faith Alive Christian Resources, in particular the following publications ([www.faithaliveresources.org](http://www.faithaliveresources.org/)):
	+ Several recent articles in Reformed Worship and the Banner.
	+ The Baptism of Children: A Guide for Parents.
	+ Children’s Profession of Faith Kit.
	+ I Believe: Getting Ready to Profess My Faith.
	+ Quest of Faith: Understanding What You Confess.
	+ Together All God’s People: Integrating Children and Youth into the Life of Your Church.
	+ Disciples: A Multi-year Faith Formation Program for Adults.
* Christian Schools International, and especially the CSI "nurturing faith" blog. ([www.csionline.org/resources/community/nurturing\_faith\_blog](http://www.csionline.org/resources/community/nurturing_faith_blog) and/or [http://nurturingfaith.wordpress.com](http://http:/nurturingfaith.wordpress.com))
* Continuing Education Sessions, at various “Days of Encouragement”, “Googling Youth,” etc.
* The Calvin Institute of Christian Worship. ([www.calvin.edu/worship](http://www.calvin.edu/worship))
* The Center for Excellence in Preaching at Calvin Theological Seminary. ([http://cep.calvinseminary.edu](http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/))
* Calvin Theological Seminary publications, such as The Forum. ([www.calvinseminary.edu/pubs/forum](http://www.calvinseminary.edu/pubs/forum))

##### 7. What are the various options that the church is considering on this matter of children at the Lord’s Table?

While answering this question, we must remember that the church does have a current position on the matter (see the answer to Question 1 above). However, the church is continuing its conversations and studies in this manner. Theoretically, we may say that there are four possible options that are under consideration by various members of the CRC.

* That profession of faith is required for admission to the table of the Lord, and it is best if profession of faith is made during the late teen years.
* That younger children should be admitted to the Lord’s Table after making an age-appropriate public profession of their faith.
* That children should be allowed to come to the Lord’s Table before making a public profession of faith, but after reaching an age in which they are able to understand that the bread and cup offer us participation in Christ’s body and blood, with a decision about their participation entrusted to parents or guardians.
* That all baptized members of the church should participate at the Lord’s Table, regardless of their level of understanding. This allows for their admission to the Lord’s Table solely on the basis of their baptism.

##### 8. Does admitting children to the Lord’s Supper square with the Reformed Confessions?

This subject certainly will be part of the debate and discussion that we must have. The Heidelberg Catechism, Q/A 81 and 82 and Belgic Confession of Faith, art. 35 are the portions that most directly address this practice. Professor Lyle Bierma of Calvin Theological Seminary admits that at first glance, these portions of the confessions appear to prohibit the entrance of children to the Lord’s Table. But he goes on to say that if we study them more carefully and consider their intent, we must admit that the confessions were concerned about something other than admitting children to the Lord’s Table. They were concerned not so much about children but about fencing the table against the ungodly and unrepentant who were mature enough to believe but willfully refused to do so. In addition, At the same time, the confessions suggest that both of the sacraments are a sign and seal of the promises of God (that is, receiving the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit), to the whole covenant community. (Heidelberg Catechism, Q/A 74,61)

Therefore it is possible to read the confessions in either way. We must admit, however, that our traditional interpretation of I Corinthians 11 seems to be written into the confessions, and has steered us in our interpretation of the confessions. Therefore, we will carefully assess all these considerations in our understanding of the Confessions.

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**The Lord’s Supper at VCRC**

**Questions and Answers**

A few weeks ago, I preached two sermons on the Lord’s Supper. Below is a summary of those sermons in question and answer form. Brittney and I created this resource to help you understand the significance of this meal and to explain why, beginning on September 29, we will be inviting Sunday School aged children upstairs to participate with us.

**What is the Lord’s Supper?**

On the night before his death, Jesus ate the Passover dinner with his disciples. When he passed around the loaf of bread he said, “This is my body given for you”. When he passed around the cup of wine he said “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, poured out for you”. Jesus also said, “Do this in remembrance of me”. Ever since that time, when Christians have gathered together to worship God, they have eaten a similar meal together in order to celebrate the significance of who Jesus is and what he has done.

**Does anything happen as we eat and drink?**

Yes! Some people think of the Lord’s Supper as a teaching tool, visual aid, or reminder - but it’s so much more than that! Not *only* does the Lord’s Supper help Christians remember what Jesus did for them in the past, it *also* refreshes Christians for their life with God in the present. When we participate in the Lord’s Supper, the Holy Spirit feeds our faith in the Gospel, builds our hope for Jesus’ return, and strengthens our love for God and each other. In this way the Lord’s Supper is more than a reminder. It is a special, sacred time when God is active and at work.

**Who is allowed to participate in the Lord’s Supper?**

Everyone who has been baptized, who knows Jesus to be their Saviour, and who desires to live for Him are welcome to participate. In other words, the Lord’s Supper is for Jesus’ disciples - those who are apart of the family of God.

**Are children welcome to participate too?**

Yes. Children raised in homes of believing parents are part of God’s family. God desires to work in them through the Lord’s Supper no less than anyone else. Jesus said to his disciples,“Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these” (Matthew 19:14). Jesus also held up the simple faith of children as what all believers ought to strive for (Matthew 18:3). Children ate manna in the wilderness with the rest of the Israelites. Children celebrated the Passover feast with their families. Therefore, baptized children should also be allowed to participate in the Lord’s Supper with the rest of God’s people. Just as God uses this meal to nurture the faith of adults, so he will use this meal to nurture the faith of children.

That being said, it is up to parents to discern whether or not their child is able to eat and drink with the family. Since the Lord’s Supper is a special meal, we need to enjoy it with care. This food should not be thrown on the ground or played with.

**What will happen to Profession of Faith?**

In the past, children that were part of Christian Reformed churches were not allowed to participate in the Lord’s Supper until after they made a public declaration of their belief in Jesus and commitment to the church, an event called “Profession of Faith”. Profession of Faith marks someone’s response to God’s work in their lives and their official membership in the church community. Even though children are invited to the Lord’s Supper long before they will be able to understand what Profession of Faith is, they will nonetheless be encouraged to take this important step at some point in their lives. And when they do, our community will appropriately celebrate!

**Why are we talking about this now?**

This year at VCRC our focus is on Jesus. The sermons will explore scripture passages on Jesus and discipleship ministries will use materials that deepen our understanding of Jesus. Since the Lord’s Supper was instituted *by Jesus* in order that God would nourish us *with Jesus*, this has been a fitting time for the leadership of VCRC to discuss and evaluate how we celebrate the Lord’s Supper.

Since 2005, the children of our congregation have been allowed at the Lord’s Table, and many have occasionally participated. However, few active steps were taken to equip our congregation to welcome children to the Table consistently or effectively. This year, one of the ways the elders want to improve our celebration of the Lord’s Supper is to openly communicate that our children are welcomed at the Table and to remove any barriers to their participation. Therefore, on Sundays when we celebrate the Lord’s Supper, the Spark Sunday School program will end early and children will return to their parents so that they will be able participate with the rest of the family of God if their parents allow.

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From Victoria CRC:

 (Attached: Q and A on the Lord's Supper)

WE also called all the families with small children and gave them a copy of "You're Invited" ( a faith alive resource for families ).

I also preached a two part sermon series on the Lord's Supper:
[https://engagingthestory.wordpress.com/2013/08/26/jesus-feeds-us-himself/](https://engagingthestory.wordpress.com/2013/09/02/a-communion-community/)

and
<https://engagingthestory.wordpress.com/2013/09/02/a-communion-community/>

The 2nd one is more specifically geared towards explaining why Children should be invited to the table.

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# Welcoming Younger Members to the Lor d ’s T able

**Procedures and Guidelines for New West CRC**

REVISED - November 2012

## Preamble

At the February 2011 meeting of Consistory (Elders), a procedure for welcoming younger members to the Lord’s Table was approved. This procedure was revised in November 2012 on the basis of a review of recent changes in the Church Order on this subject. We wish to share this procedure with the congregation and encourage parent(s) of younger members to read and discuss it within their families and with their elders as necessary.

The elders have been discussing the matter of encouraging and welcoming younger members to participate in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. Pastor Mike preached a sermon on this topic in October 2010, and followed that up with a teaching service / discussion during a PM service. As this was taking place the elders became more aware of the history of this topic within our church’s fairly recent history. Our previous pastor, Pastor Sinia, offered several Bible studies on children at the Lord’s Supper (Spring 2005). Prior to Pastor Sinia, the Council, under Pastor Helder’s leadership, shared a “Pastoral Letter” with the congregation “Regarding the subject of Children’s participation in the Lord’s Supper.” (March 1998).

As elders we have come to appreciate the background this issue has had in our congregation and are thankful for the conversations that have taken place on this matter. The procedure set forth below is in large part what was shared in the March 1998 letter.

This document is not intended to provide further Biblical or theological reflection on the issue of younger members at the Lord’s Table. That kind of reflection has been carried out very capably by past Synodical study committees. As elders we have sensed that within our own congregation we are to a large extent in agreement that younger members should be encouraged to participate in the Table of our Lord.

At Synod 2011, our denomination received an important report from the “Faith Formation Committee”, a committee whose mandate included providing congregations direction on how to meaningfully welcome younger members to the Table. The report is available online at <http://www.crcna.org/site_uploads/uploads/resources/synodical/FaithFormation.pdf>. Their prior report is important for understanding the background to their recommendations (see <http://www.crcna.org/pages/ffc_documents.cfm>). There were a number of changes that were recommended to the Church Order, some of which are “housekeeping” or “technical” in nature, others which were more substantive. Some of the proposed revisions read as follows:

All baptized members who come with age- and ability-appropriate faith in Jesus Christ are welcome to the Lord’s Supper and called to obey the scriptural commands about participation in an age and ability-appropriate way under the supervision of the elders.

Confessing members receive all the privileges and responsibilities of such membership. Privileges include but are not limited to presentation of children for infant baptism, the right to vote at congregational meetings, and eligibility to hold office. Responsibilities include full participation in the work, life, and mutual discipline of the local congregation and the universal body of Christ.

Each congregation shall determine the appropriate age at which a confessing member shall receive such privileges and responsibilities.

As elders we are in agreement with the substance of these proposed revisions. A key phrase in this study committee’s work is that of “age-and-ability-appropriate faith in Jesus Christ”. We believe that all younger members, having expressed an age-and-ability-appropriate faith, should be welcomed to participate in the Lord’s Table.

The study committee also proposed revising the wording of Article 63a in the Church Order to read as follows:

a. Each church shall minister to its **children and** youth—and to the **children and** youth in the community who participate—by nurturing their personal faith and trust in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, by **nurturing their faithful participation in the Lord’s Supper,** by preparing them to profess their faith publicly, and by equipping them to assume their Christian responsibilities in the church and in the world. This nurturing ministry shall include receiving them in love, praying for them, instructing them in the faith, and encouraging and sustaining them in the fellowship of believers.

As elders we believe that the requirement for us as church community to nurture personal faith and trust in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, and to nurture our children and youth in faithful participation in the Lord’s Supper” to be essential. Faithful participation in the Lord’s Supper flows directly out of

faithful discipleship; that is, wholeheartedly receiving the promises of the Gospel, and obediently living out its covenant commands. Young or old we are invited to receive the new life that Christ graciously offers and commit to following Him in every aspect of our lives.

As elders we believe the primary responsibility for nurturing our children and youth lies with parents and families. Of course, church and school play an important part, but parents and families have the primary responsibility. During the past year Pastor Mike and Marnie have strengthened and equipped a number of our parents of young families in raising covenant children to follow Christ. Some of the things that were discussed together were things like: what is the covenant?, discipline, technology in the home, children and media, and family worship. Children who grow up in environments where parents model and talk about what it means to wholeheartedly follow Christ in today’s culture, will be nurtured in a living faith and trust in Christ.

As we seek to encourage and welcome younger members to the Lord’s Table, we would like especially to encourage parents and families in their role of nurturing living faith in their children. So much of how our children will grow and mature in terms of: prayer, worship, consumption, television, film, music, Biblical understanding, community, discipline, extra-curricular interests, leisure, etc., are things that parents and families ought to have a primary hand in shaping.

Now, one might ask, why raise these matters in the context of children at the Lord’s Table? As elders we believe that the question of whether a younger member is ready to express an age-and-ability- appropriate faith, is very much connected to the issue of whether Christ-like discipleship is being

modeled and nurtured in the home. As children receive God’s grace channelled through the sacrament, it is important that their home be a place where this grace is talked about and celebrated in ways that deepen faith and Christian commitment.

As elders meet with parent(s) and children (see procedure below), we wish the conversation to include these issues of faith nurture in the home. We recognize the challenge that exists in our day to raise children and youth to faithfully follow Christ. Parents today are finding that the issues they faced in their childhood and youth are different than the ones their children are facing. Howard Vanderwell, a member of the Faith Formation Committee, and a long-time pastor, in an interview with Dr. John Witvliet of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, shared this observation, “there is a high level of anxiety among parents, knowing it is their responsibility before God to watch over the faith formation of their children, but not really understanding how to do it or feeling trained to do it, because what they experienced in their adolescence just is not effective anymore today. It is a different culture. There are different influences on their children then what occurred as influences on them. They’re baffled. They feel anxiety, and the church and the elders of the church need to be helping these parents to understand their role.” (See “Interview 5” on <http://www.crcna.org/pages/ffc_interviews.cfm>). As elders meet with parents of children wishing to participate in the Lord’s Supper, we have a wonderful opportunity to strengthen, equip, and encourage parents in raising children in today’s context to love and serve the Lord.

## Procedure

1. That (appropriate to parental covenantal responsibility) **parents initiate** the process of children’s participation when children ask questions and desire to participate. At this point parents are asked to talk about the sacrament with their children, determining if they have an age-and ability-appropriate understanding of the Lord’s Table, and what it means to be a follower of Christ. If so, the parents request a family visit with an elder. The elder(s) will then visit with the parents and child to affirm the parent’s judgment and discuss responsibilities as Christian parents for ongoing faith nurture.
2. The **elder** reports to consistory. Upon consistory approval, the congregation is informed by a notice in the bulletin and/or verbally from the pulpit, that this child/children has demonstrated an age- and ability-appropriate faith in Jesus Christ and an understanding of the Lord’s Supper and are now welcome to participate in this sacrament.

Note: There will be no change in member designation to “Professing Member” at this time. This person will then be considered a “Communicant Member”

1. **Education:** Ongoing faith nurture in the church will take place through ministries of Sunday School, GEMS, Cadets, SD, etc. Each year the Sunday School will teach a lesson(s) on the meaning of the Lord’s Supper to 7 year old students as an additional resource to parents. Whenever Lord’s Supper is celebrated in the AM service, the Sunday School children and their teachers will be welcomed back into the service to participate or observe.
2. Baptized members, whether they have previously participated in the Lord’s Supper or not, shall be encouraged to make a **public profession of faith**. This encouragement may come by way of a visit from an elder or Youth Director to discuss their love for the Lord and their commitment to following Christ; their desire to be active members of His church; and their commitment to the Reformed creeds and confessions. Prior to public professing their faith, they will be encouraged to go through the “Profession of Faith / New Member’s Class”.

Upon their public profession of faith, they shall be designated as “Professing members” (NOTE: “professing member” is equivalent to “confessing member”).

NOTE: Professing members receive all the privileges and responsibilities of such membership at the age of 19 (age of majority in B.C.). Privileges include but are not limited to presentation of children for infant baptism, the right to vote at congregational meetings, and eligibility to hold office. Responsibilities include full participation in the work, life, and mutual discipline of the local congregation and the universal body of Christ. Also, at this age, active professing members will be included in the statistic used for calculating our congregation’s Ministry Share obligations.

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1. This document is adapted (with permission) from a discussion led by Pastor Dan Hoogland (Smithers CRC) at the September 2008 Classis BCNW Meeting. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Agenda for Synod 1995: (276). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Synod 1995 adopted a four-step procedure, largely drawn from earlier synodical reports, for admitting children to the Lord's Table. Children are first to express interest to a parent, church school teacher, or other faith mentor in the church. The parents are then to discuss the meaning of the sacrament with their children and if "convinced that this inquiry arises from a genuine stirring of the Spirit in the heart of the child," are to contact an elder or pastor of the church. The pastor or elder is then to meet with the child, conduct a short process of preparation for profession of faith based upon the meaning of the sacrament and a basic explanation of the Apostles' Creed, Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer, and make a recommendation to the council on the admission of the child. If the council admits the child to the Lord's Table, the child "will make a public profession of faith in a simple and appropriate manner during a regular worship service." [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Agenda for Synod 2008 (p.235). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. http://www.crcna.org/pages/ffc\_faq.cfm [↑](#footnote-ref-5)