

FAMILY PREPARATION FOR COMMUNION



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INTRODUCTION

This Devotional Workbook has been prepared to help you assist your children to understand and participate in taking Communion, whether for the first time or not. There are many traditions that various denominations have concerning the celebration of Communion. Noroton Presbyterian Church is part of the Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA). We follow the guidelines for Worship, Ministry, Education and Mission outlined through our denomination. The information that is shared, and the activities encouraged in this booklet are consistent with PCUSA theology and practice.

One of the responsibilities of the church is to assist parents in nurturing their children to respond to the invitation to the Lord's Supper. There are no foolproof guidelines about when your child is ready to respond to the invitation to the Lord's Supper. In the end, all we can offer are some general guidelines.

Parents can tell if their child is ready to receive the Lord's Supper when they express an interest in it and begin questioning their parents about it. Sometimes parents need to initiate a discussion. In our experience, a child before the age of five will generally not be ready to receive communion. At this age some children will begin asking about communion. If they have not asked by the age of seven or eight, it would be a good idea to initiate a discussion of the Lord's Supper. What we would hope for them to be able to understand at their developmental level is that Jesus Christ is really with us if we trust him to be our God; to help them begin to understand the symbolic meaning of the elements as well as understand that as baptized children we are part of God's family and so we take this meal together. These at home devotions will help, as will the Communion Workshop at church. Some parents feel their children should be able to fully "understand" what Communion is all about before partaking. This may be an unreachable goal, as few of us fully "understand" many things before we do them. It is in the "doing" that we actually glean a deeper understanding. Jesus encouraged the children to come to him and not to discourage them. If your child is asking the questions and wanting to participate, explain it at their level as best as you can, helping them to see it as a privilege and as a rite of passage. They will "grow into" understanding with each participation, just as we have even as adults. Remember, there are no age limits because the final decision as to the readiness to receive communion rests with the family.

This Family Guide is a set of five days of family devotions for you to use at home. There may be Communion Preparation Workshops for families with children ages 5-12 held at the church throughout the year to supplement what you do at home to prepare your child for joining in the receiving of this Sacrament. Please read through the whole booklet once first. Some days have activities that will require some simple materials to be on hand. There will be short readings and some songs included. Feel free to be creative and depart from the guide to bring the message to your child in your own way.

Pick a good time, like after dinner, when everyone is together and relaxed. Getting the love of Jesus Christ across is more important than getting through a particular activity. Feel free to do only one part of the devotion for very young children, for example, or to expand or replace an activity for an older child. Devotionals plus activity should take 15-30 minutes, depending on how extensive you get with the activity and how long the "Wondering" questions take your family to process.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

What is the Lord's Supper? – It is the sacrament based on Jesus' words and actions at the last meal that he shared with his disciples in the Upper Room. The meal that Jesus was sharing with his disciples was the Passover Feast/Feast of the Unleavened Bread. This "Feast" had a strong connection to Jewish History and had grown in significance over hundreds of years of practice and remembrance. (see reference below) The Feast of Unleavened Bread was meant to give the Israelites a time to "clean house" of yeast, a substance that, once introduced to flour, permeates the entire batch – like sin does in our lives. It was meant to last one full week. During the time of the Exodus, this feast also included the sacrificing of a lamb, placing blood on the doorposts of the home so that when the Angel of Death "passed over" all the homes in Egypt, families who had sacrificed a lamb and painted their doorframes with the blood of that lamb, would be spared from the death of their first born child. This then became the "Passover Meal." Also, preparing for a quick exodus meant that there wasn't time to wait for the bread to rise –so "un"leavened (without yeast) bread was used in this meal. While this is a gruesome part of Jewish History, especially for the Egyptians who were so cruel to the Israelites, it is clearly taught in the book of Exodus and the Passover Meal was a reminder to the Jewish people of God's hand of salvation for them when God set them free from Egyptian slavery. It showed the importance of the sacrificial system for the atonement of sins and was the forerunner for Jesus becoming "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Remember it was Christ's death on the Cross that gives provides for the forgiveness of sins and Christ's resurrection shows us God's power over death, and accepting Christ's sacrifice, confessing our sins and committing our lives to Christ, sets us free and brings us new life. He was the PERFECT Lamb, sinless in Himself because Jesus is GOD in the flesh. (John 3:16)

Depending on the age of your children you need to be sensitive in talking about this subject. As the children become older, this aspect of God's ultimate sacrifice for us should not be neglected.

- Read **Exodus 12** to gain an understanding of the Passover historically and the Feast of Unleavened Bread.
- Read **Matthew 26:17-30** to gain an understanding of what Jesus did with his disciples at their time together celebrating this Passover meal.
- Then read **1 Corinthians 11:23-26** to understand how the Apostle Paul told Christians to remember what Jesus had said and done with bread and wine the night he was betrayed and how we are to do this "in remembrance" of Jesus and also proclaim his coming through sharing this together with one another.
- Other Scriptures that you want to add:

COMMUNION PREPARATION SUMMARY

Each day has an activity, Scripture references, teaching that you can either read or modify to fit your needs, a prayer and sometimes a song. If the child is old enough to read, have him or her look it up in a child-friendly translation (e.g., the Good News Bible, the Living Bible, or the New International Bible). Or, the parent can read the passage. Let everyone participate in the activity which can be done during, before or after the readings.

DAY ONE: The Lord's Supper is... A Connection to the PAST

Focus on how the Lord's Supper that we celebrate today has its roots in Jewish History through the Passover Feast and the Feast of Unleavened Bread in Exodus 12. God told His people those events were meant to be remembered through all generations.

Activity: Package of yeast, warm water, flour and salt. (Leavened bread) Flour, salt and butter (Unleavened bread)

DAY TWO: The Lord's Supper is... A Connection to Jesus' LOVE

Focus on how the Lord's Supper is an extension of our baptism and how we know that God provided the way of salvation through the Jesus in the various elements of the Lord's Supper just like God provided freedom from slavery for the Jews remembered in the Passover Meal.

Activity: Find a baptism picture of your child and their baby book.

DAY THREE: The Lord's Supper is... A Connection to WONDER

Focus on how the Lord's Supper is a time to ask for God's forgiveness and to wonder about what happened when Jesus died for us.

Activity: Draw our sins on the cross; crumple it up to remind us that Jesus takes away sins.

DAY FOUR: The Lord's Supper is... A Connection to the PRESENT

Focus on how the Lord's Supper is a time to give thanks for what is happening now. Communion is a time to be thankful to God, particularly for God's son, Jesus and what Jesus is doing in our lives today.

Activity: Make a poster of how we say "thank you" to God and showing how the Lord is present with us every day.

DAY FIVE: The Lord's Supper is... A Connection to the FUTURE

Focus on how the Lord's Supper is just a glimpse of what is to come. We have a great feast to go to in Heaven with Jesus to which we look forward to in the future.

Activity: Make invitations for your parents and family to come to the Lamb's Supper. Pretend you are serving them in heaven.

DAY ONE: The Lord's Supper is... A Connection to the PAST

Focus on how the Lord's Supper that we celebrate today has its roots in Jewish History through the Passover Feast and the Feast of Unleavened Bread in Exodus 12. God told His people those events were meant to be remembered through all generations.

Get Ready: Gather the family together, collect the ingredients in the activity, open your Bible to Exodus chapter 12 and open in prayer: *Lord, help us to learn something new today as we look what you did for people long, long ago and how what you did in the past is still important for us today. Amen.*

Activity: Package of yeast, warm water, flour and salt. (Leavened bread) Flour, salt and butter (Unleavened bread). Have two bowls ready to prepare two types of bread. Follow directions on the yeast package to show how it bubbles up and how when you add flour to it, the flour also "rises." Then also make a "flat bread" without yeast – have the children help you make it (use any tortilla bread recipe). Talk about the difference between bread made with yeast and flat bread (tortilla style) made without yeast. Have everyone help, stir, watch, roll out the flat bread, cook it fast on a hot skillet and eat it while telling the story. Keep an eye on the "yeast" bread rise and compare the two breads for how quickly one can make and eat the unleavened bread versus the leavened bread which has to rise first etc.

Suggested Story Line: (From Exodus 12) *Long time ago, when the Jewish people were slaves in Egypt, Moses had been told by God that God would rescue them and help them leave Egypt. God would lead them to a special new land where they could build their own houses and live in freedom. But they needed to be ready to leave at a moment's notice. Normally when the moms made bread for their families, it took a long time to make because they would use 'yeast' in the bread dough. Yeast takes time to make the flour rise and the bread has to sit for a few hours getting fluffy before it can be baked and eaten. There was a special holiday that the Jewish people celebrated in their homes once a year, called the "Feast of the Unleavened Bread." At this holiday yeast was treated like a bad thing. It was as if "yeast" was similar to doing something wrong; like telling a lie. Once you have a little 'yeast' in the flour – none of that flour can ever be cooked quickly like flat bread. Sort of like when we do one thing wrong, it leads to doing other things wrong and then we are in big trouble. So, if the mom's wanted to make flat bread, they had to make sure there was absolutely no yeast anywhere in the house. It was as if God was asking the people to get their hearts clean and ready for doing something new, and to please don't let any "yeast" ruin them. When the Israelites were told by Moses that God was going to lead them out of Egypt they needed to be ready to go – fast – so they were told to make bread, without yeast so that they didn't have to wait for it to "rise" before being able to cook and eat it. That's why the Feast of Unleavened Bread is connected to Passover. The Passover Meal was the meal that God told the Israelites to prepare and eat before they would be set free from being slaves in Egypt. God also wanted them to be ready to leave quickly with bread that didn't need to rise first. God wants us to be like flour that is ready to be used fast – without any "yeast" or without sin that leaks in and ruins our whole lives.*

When we, as Christians, get ready to take Communion, we need to be like the Israelite people and be sure we don't have any "yeast" (or sin) in our life that would get in the way of our being able to be used by God at a moment's notice. We know

from the Bible that God brought the Israelite people out of Egypt and brought them to a special land where they could be free and they could worship God. Every year the people were supposed to remember how God had saved them, by celebrating the special Feast of the Passover and Unleavened Bread. Jesus celebrated this special holiday with the disciples before Jesus died on the cross for our sins. We can celebrate this special meal too at church with our Christian friends. It is called Communion – or “The Lord’s Supper” because it reminds us of not only what Jesus did for us, but for how we, as Christians are connected to the same historical past that Jesus was connected to through the Old Testament.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:28. *The Apostle Paul told his readers that they should examine themselves before they took Communion. We need to do that too.*

Wonder Questions:

1. How are you going to “get ready” to be used by God at a moment’s notice?
2. What kind of “yeast” do you think might get into your life that God wouldn’t like?
3. Wonder why God wants us to remember the past and how it helps us now.

Pray and thank God for teaching us to examine our hearts so that we can be ready to be used by God at any moment. Thank God for the Old Testament and for special festivals that helps us to remember what God does for people who love God and obey.

DAY TWO: The Lord's Supper is... A Connection to Jesus' LOVE

Get Ready: Gather the family together in a comfortable place. Open your Bible and read Romans 8:16, "...we are children of God." Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to come and be with you as you learn about the Lord's Supper.

Activity: Talk with your children about their baptism. Tell them when and where it took place. Describe who was there from their family, the minister, how many people were in the congregation, etc. Any special details you can remember would be nice. Find a picture of the event or a baptismal certificate, if you can locate it. Tell them that you and all the people promised to tell them about God's love for them. That's why you go to church, and why you are planning to take communion now. Go through any other baby pictures to help set the stage.

Read: *A long time ago, something important happened. It happened in church, in front of the whole church family. The minister came and he or she put water on your head. Do you know what this is called? (Wait for response). Yes, that's right, you were baptized! When you were born you were already a part of a family. Your mother and father or other family were there to welcome you. Your family trusted God themselves and were already a part of God's family. They wanted you to be a part of God's family too! So they asked for you to be baptized. Ever since then you have been a part of God's family too.*

How many times do we get baptized? (Wait for the child to respond.) That's right, only one time. This is God's gift of life. When we are born we receive life in the body from our parents, but when we become children of God we receive spiritual life. This is God's gift of love. Jesus told his Disciples children were a part of God's Kingdom. (Read Luke 18:16ff).

What does a little baby need to grow bigger? (Wait for the child's response.) Yes, that's right, milk and food, and a lot of love. In the same way, God has given us some food to eat and something to drink. This is a sign to us that God loves us and is with us. This food and drink helps us to grow spiritually just like the food and drink helps the baby's body to grow. Just as our parents' giving us food is a way they show their love for us, so God shows his love for us through this special meal called Communion, or the Lord's Supper.

Do you know what food and drink God gives us? (Pause.) Yes, He gives us bread and wine or grape juice. It's kind of like a special party to which all people who have been baptized are invited. You are invited to the Lord's Supper—a very special feast or party with Jesus himself there! Jesus ate this special meal with only his closest friends because He loved them so much. He also told them that after he was going to eat this Passover Meal (remember we talked about that from the Old Testament before?) that he was going to show them even more about how much he loved them and that they should learn to love each other and serve each other just as he served them. (Read Luke 22: 25-27) "Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves."

Wonder Questions:

1. Why do you think Jesus wanted us to serve each other?
2. How did Jesus show he loved his disciples and that he loves us?
3. When we were baptized, how does that show our church family that we are loved?
4. How important are children to Jesus?

Sing: "Jesus Loves Me"

Pray: "Dear Lord. Thank you for your gift of love in the Lord's Supper. In Jesus' Name, Amen."

DAY THREE: The Lord's Supper is... A Connection to WONDER

Focus on how the Lord's Supper is a time to ask for God's forgiveness and to wonder about what happened when Jesus died for us.

Get Ready: So far, what have we learned about the Lord's Supper? (Wait for answer and discussion on the Lord's Supper being connected to the Past/Old Testament and the Passover meal/unleavened bread feast. Being able to share the Lord's Supper is because God loves us and children are part of the Kingdom of God.) Let's pray: God, teach us more, and thank you for teaching us about your love. (Let each child say whatever they would like. If a child does not want to pray, that's OK.)

Read: *We are spending these days getting ready to understand how important it is for us to celebrate the "Lord's Supper" or "Communion" at our church. Remember the first day we read the verse from Corinthians where Paul told people to "examine" themselves before they came to eat at this special table? (Read again 1 Corinthians 11:23-26). One of the things we need to do before we celebrate Communion is to WONDER about how we feel about our own lives and how close we feel to Jesus. It is also a time to WONDER about what Jesus did for us when He died for our sins.*

The Lord's Supper actually helps us meet Jesus because it helps us to wonder about Jesus' days on this earth. Why don't we start by taking time for each of us to tell what we think is the most important thing we remember about Jesus. (Here pause as family members wonder about Jesus)

Jesus gave us something to do that would help us wonder what it would be like to actually be with him. The Lord's Supper is that something. When we actually chew and swallow bread, actually take a cup and drink grape juice, it is as if we go back in time and sit around that table with the disciples, and eat and drink with Jesus. We can almost wonder what it would've been like to have actually been there on that very night. Let's read from the Gospel of Luke this time about the Last Supper and try to wonder how the disciples would have felt. (Read Luke 22:7-23) Notice the disciples are sad because each one wonders if he is the one who will betray Jesus. Part of what we think about during the Lord's Supper is whether we have done anything to hurt or disappoint Jesus. This is what the Bible calls sin. It's like that "yeast" has gotten into our lives and we're not as ready as we should be. When we do hurt Jesus—and we all do because we are human—we can tell Jesus about it and ask him to forgive us. Then we just let go of it. Jesus does not mean this bread and juice we eat during Communion is his real blood and real body. He means this bread and wine remind us of the gift of life he gives us when he forgives us all of the bad things we have ever done or will do. All we need to do is to trust that he has done this for us.

Time to Wonder Activity: After the story time, draw a large cross on a blank piece of paper. Draw people, images, or events around the cross that remind you of a time you hurt Jesus or for the times you didn't do something that you should have for which he needs to forgive you. When complete, crumble up the paper and throw it away as a reminder that Jesus makes us clean again.

Pray: Jesus, forgive me for when I hurt you. Thank you that you took all my sin and died to save me and forgive me. Help me to remember what you did and to always wonder about how I can do things that please you. In Jesus name, Amen.

DAY FOUR: The Lord's Supper is... A Connection to the PRESENT

Focus on how the Lord's Supper is a time to give thanks for what is happening now. Communion is a time to be thankful to God, particularly for God's son, Jesus and what Jesus is doing in our lives today.

Activity: Make a poster of how we say "thank you" to God and how we see Jesus in our daily lives each day.

Get Ready: What things have we learned about the Lord's Supper so far? (Pause for discussion) Let's pray: Lord, help us to be ready to learn more about your Supper. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Today's lesson is more conversational than story time. In order for us to understand that accepting Christ as our Savior means that we have the Holy Spirit of God with us right now, we need to spend time thinking about how we notice Jesus in our every day ordinary daily lives. When we take time to "Give thanks" we then become more aware of Christ's work in our lives today. So spend much of this devotional time finding ways to see Jesus in your every day life.

Read: *Another connection between us and the meaning of the Lord's Supper is that it is a way to give thanks to God and to realize that God is with us right now. Another name for the Lord's Supper is the Eucharist, which means, "to give thanks." Celebrating the Lord's Supper is way of realizing that Jesus is with us right now, here, in this moment. He is not just someone from a far away past. When we think about what God is doing in our lives right now, we realize that Jesus is Present with us! And so we have lots to thank Him for every day.*

What are you thankful for? (Pause here for discussion about what your family is thankful for.) Yes, we can thank God for making the world, and for creating us to be his children. But the most amazing thing to be thankful for is how God sent Jesus into the world to die for our sins so that we can live forever, starting right now!

(Read John 3:16ff; Matthew 28:20)

Wonder Questions:

1. How do you know that Jesus is with you right now, today?
2. When you look for signs that God is helping you today, how does that help you become thankful?
3. How does taking "Communion" help us remember that Jesus is with us today?

Activity: Make a poster proclaiming thanks to God. Have each member of the family write or draw something they are thankful to God for on a big sheet of paper. If possible, display it on the kitchen wall or in the child's room.

Close in Prayer: Use "popcorn" prayers – meaning that everyone says one thing that "pops" into their mind to say thank you to God about.

DAY FIVE: The Lord's Supper is... A Connection to the FUTURE

Focus on how the Lord's Supper is just a glimpse of what is to come. In Heaven there will be a great Banquet that we will be able to go to with Jesus!

Activity: Make invitations for your parents to invite them to the Great Feast. Pretend you are setting a table in heaven. Invite your parents and anyone else you may want to invite. Serve them juice or milk and cookies or whatever you have that is tasty and good! Leave an empty seat for Jesus and remember to thank him in prayer for saving you and inviting you to this feast.

Get Ready: *Yesterday we learned that communion or eucharist means...? (Pause) Yes, thanksgiving. The day before we learned that the Lord's Supper means that we are...? (Pause) We are forgiven for our sins, or the things we have done wrong. The day before we said...? (Pause) God loves us. And the first day we learned about how the Lord's supper is connected to what feast in the Old Testament? Today we will learn that God has given us the Lord's Supper to be our hope and to show us what is to come.*

Read: Titus 2:13— *"We wait for the blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." Yes, this is a part of the Good News! Jesus is coming back! The Lord's Supper reminds us that there is more to come. Although we have a taste of the Kingdom of God now in knowing that God is with us, especially in the Lord's Supper, one day we will be always in God's presence. When Jesus shared that special Passover Meal with his Disciples he told them that he wasn't going to eat this meal again until the future – (Read Luke 22:17; Matthew 26:29). Jesus said he was going to eat it again WITH US in Heaven. Won't that be amazing?? Remember how when the Israelite slaves needed to be ready to leave Egypt that God gave them special instructions to prepare a meal to remind them of how God was going to save them? When Jesus was with his Disciples he took that same meal and gave it a new meaning to help remind the disciples of how Jesus was going to sacrifice his own life to save us. Every time we celebrate a small part of that special meal, that is just the cup and just the bread, we are not just looking back at the past (Passover) or at the Present (The Holy Spirit with us now), but we are also looking ahead to the future when Jesus is going to eat this meal with us in Heaven, when the Kingdom of God takes over the whole world!*

(Read Revelation 19:6-9)

In heaven we will be eating and drinking at a great feast or party called the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. We are all invited to this table. The Lamb at this supper is another way of talking about Jesus. Jesus is coming back to make a new heaven and earth where there will be no more sickness or death. What a wonderful supper that will be!

Wonder:

1. What do you think you will ask Jesus about when you have this meal with him in heaven?
2. What do you think Jesus will ask you about when he shares this meal with you?

Pray: Help us this Sunday as we celebrate your supper. Help us to look forward to celebrating with you when you come again. In Jesus' name. Amen