



Worship Formation & Liturgical Resources: Frequently Asked Questions

At what age do congregation members receive communion?

The worship staff receives a number of similar inquiries on worship-related topics from across the church.

These responses should not be considered the final word on the topic, but useful guides that are to be considered in respect to local context with pastoral sensitivity.

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First communion can and does happen at many different ages throughout congregations of the ELCA. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's set of priorities for the practices of word and sacrament, *The Use of the Means of Grace*, notes that,

"There is no command from our Lord regarding the age at which people should be...first communed" (38B).

As a result, the age at which baptized members of our congregations receive their first communion reflects a variety of practices and understandings.

Some congregations follow a pattern familiar to older generations of Lutherans: first communion is received at the time of confirmation. A generation ago, many of our congregations began preparing catechetical material for children to receive their first communion when they reached fifth grade. Today there is a growing awareness that focus on one particular age group may not be the primary factor to determine when first communion is received. In fact, historical studies of the early church and the witness of other denominations in our day have led both congregations and members to ask about the possibility of communing infants, a practice precluded by an earlier communion practices statement (See *The Use of the Means of Grace*, 37B and 37D).

Although no particular age for first communion is prescribed by *The Use of the Means of Grace*, one guideline is offered. Because admission to the Sacrament is by invitation of the Lord to the baptized,

"baptized children begin to commune on a regular basis at a time determined through mutual conversation that includes the pastor, the child, and the parents or sponsors involved, within the accepted practices of the congregation" (37 and 37C).

Each congregation is encouraged to ask the question of readiness for first communion, establish their own policies regarding age and practice, and accompany that practice with catechesis appropriate to the age of the communicant (37E and 38B).

When congregations receive children as members from another congregation where those children have been accepted as communing members, it is advised that the children be welcomed to communion, perhaps as an exception to the congregation's own policy

(38 D). This may result in diversity of ages regularly receiving the sacrament even within a congregation itself.

The present differences of practice among parishes within the ELCA will continue to hold the question of age for first communion before congregations and members. Addressing that question will involve reviewing particular practices against biblical and confessional norms and will continue to encourage ongoing theological reflection and pastoral wisdom.

RESOURCES

[Resources Available for Download on the ELCA Website:](#)

- ☞ *The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997. (Available in English and Spanish)
- ☞ *Principles for Worship.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002. (Available in English and Spanish)

[Resources Available from Augsburg Fortress:](#)

- 📖 Brugh, Lorraine S. and Gordon W. Lathrop. *Using Evangelical Lutheran Worship: The Sunday Assembly.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2008.
- 📖 Erlander, Daniel. *A Place for You: My Holy Communion Book.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1999.
- 🎧 *Fed and Forgiven.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2009. *Fed and Forgiven* is a complete set of resources for leading children, youth, and adults into the sacrament of Holy Communion. Resources include a comprehensive leader guide, DVD, and age-appropriate learner resources.

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