

FROM THE CHAPLAIN

Dear Parents:

I am delighted that you are taking the time to consider how to introduce your child to the Lord's Supper.

First experiences leave impressions that will last a lifetime for our children, and we want them to sense God's love and nurturing presence as the essence of the Lord's Supper.

In the early church, communion was offered to those who wanted to discover the meaning of Christianity. It was an introduction to the faith for inquirers, a sustenance in the faith for believers, and a strengthening of the community for the congregation.

Your child is welcome to receive the Lord's Supper when you believe the time is right. To assist you, the Chapel has prepared this booklet to use as a resource for your family.

If your faith tradition requires a "first Communion class" contact your Chaplain or an Army religious educator to arrange this training.



GARRISON:
CHAPLAIN POC:
EMAIL:
PHONE:

Excerpts from "A Guide for Parents: God's Family at the Table" by Thomas Long.
Adapted by Grace C. Yeuell, Religious Education Program Director, IMCOM-Europe.

CHILDREN & COMMUNION PARENT'S GUIDE



A RESOURCE FOR PROTESTANT FAMILIES

U.S. ARMY CHAPLAINCY—FOR GOD AND COUNTRY

WHAT CHILDREN CAN UNDERSTAND

Infants develop a sense of trust in their parents or guardians as their caregivers hold them, rock them, provide clean and warm clothing for them, and feed them. All of this builds a foundation for the child to trust God and to receive the Lord's Supper as an expression of God's trustworthiness.

One to Threes are developing language skills, so parents or guardians can begin to talk with them about the communion service. These children can begin to understand that communion is a very special meal, God's meal. They can learn that communion helps us remember a time when Jesus shared a meal with his friends and that it is a time for thanking God for our blessings.

Three to Fives will be curious about the physical aspects of communion - the table, the cups, the bread, etc. They can grasp the concept of the church as a family sharing a meal together.

Six to Eights are beginning to think historically. They can begin to grasp the relationship between the Last Supper and the communion service. These children are also developing the ability to think symbolically. They can begin to understand that the bread represents Jesus' love for us. They can see that in the Lord's Supper the minister and people are performing the same actions Jesus and the disciples performed at the Last Supper. They have a deeper understanding of the church as family. As a result, at this age they can also begin to feel excluded if they are not receiving communion.

Older Children are beginning to be able to grasp more of the meanings found in the Lord's Supper. They are more skilled at abstract and symbolic thinking. They have good reading skills and can make clear sense of the prayers and words associated with the sacrament.

MEANINGS OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

- The Lord's Supper is a meal for God's people – God's grace nourishes and refreshes us and is food for our souls.
- The Lord's Supper is the church's "thanksgiving dinner" – the church gives thanks for Jesus Christ and for the continuing blessings of the Holy Spirit.
- The Lord's Supper is a sign of the church's unity and fellowship – we commune with each other and with God.
- The Lord's Supper is a call to sacrificial service – to give ourselves up to God, like Jesus did, in an act of praise and service.
- In the Lord's Supper, the spirit of Jesus is present and serves as host.
- The Lord's Supper is a celebration that looks forward to the coming of God's kingdom.

STEPS TO PREPARE

When you decide that your child is ready to take part in communion, you will probably want to spend time teaching him or her about the Lord's Supper. Here are some suggestions:

1. Describe to your child in advance what happens in a communion service.
2. Point out various meanings of the Lord's Supper (see above).
3. Talk to your children about Jesus sharing meals and feeding his followers, and read them passages from a Bible storybook.
4. Tell your children about some of your own experiences with communion—your first time to receive it, special services, etc.
5. Talk to your children about communion at mealtime. You can emphasize the family meal: the Lord's Supper is like a family table where the church gathers to share in the same bread and the same cup because the people in the church belong to each other and to God.

