

Children and Communion
Children's Ministries SPD, Julie Weslake
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The Issue

Should children be a part of the Communion service, involved in footwashing and partaking of the bread and wine.

Background

1. The Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual states that Adventists hold open communion.
2. The Church Manual states that children must be baptised before taking part in communion
3. Many people believe that this contradiction needs to be addressed.
4. Many churches have addressed this "unofficially" by allowing their children to participate.
5. Other churches are quoting the Church Manual and not allowing children to participate.

Discussion

1. Children are part of our church now and need to feel a part of it.

The communion service exists to remind us of Christ's great love and sacrifice and to give us hope as we look forward to His second coming. In our participation we show that we accept Jesus as our personal Saviour. Children need salvation – they need us as a church to teach them spiritual truths and value them as a part of our church. They need to be able to show their acceptance of Jesus as their personal Saviour in this very experiential ceremony. Communion was designed by Christ as a community experience. Children are part of our community and their faith develops as they know that they belong.

2. Taking part unworthily – 1 Corinthians 11.28, 27,29

1 Corinthians 5-11 lists the sins that need to be forgiven. We leave the decision to the individual adult and Ellen White in *Desire of Ages* p656 states that "beyond that none are to pass judgement".

Children are usually innocent of these sins – often the victims. As with the adults, they need to deal with their sins individually and then be accepted. They need us to value them as Jesus did. *"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these"*. Mark 10:14

3. Children understand salvation and make commitments to Jesus.

"Children are the most susceptible to the teachings of the gospel; their hearts are open to divine influence." *Desire of Ages p.515*

"Do not speak of religion as something that children cannot understand, or act as if they were not expected to accept Christ in their childhood." *ibid page 517*

"Children of eight, ten or twelve years are old enough to be addressed on the subject of personal religion. Do not teach your children with reference to some future period when they shall be old enough to repent and believe the truth. If properly instructed, very young children may have correct views of

their state as sinners, and of the way of salvation through Christ." *Test., Vol 1, p.400*

"If people do not embrace Jesus Christ as their Saviour before they reach their teenage years, the chance of their doing so is very slim." *George Barna.*

Children are "hardwired" to connect to other people and to moral and spiritual meaning. *Commission on Children at Risk* – www.americanvalues.org

There are high levels of spirituality in children under thirteen and a sharp decline of this in adolescence. *Kalevi Tamminen and Leslie Francis.*

4. **Children's Participation in Old and New Testament.**

Old Testament worship was a family and community based process.

The Israelites are identified as a relational community where the children were to grow up participating in the culture they were becoming. All participated from the youngest to the oldest.

In the religion of Israel, children were not just included, they were drawn in, assimilated, absorbed into the whole community with a deep sense of belonging. They came to know who they were and who they were to become.

The early church was a multi-generational entity - worshiping, breaking bread, praying together, ministering to one another in the context of the home (Acts 2:46-47; 4:32-35; 16:31-34).

Children were clearly present in other spiritual settings. In Acts 16:15, Lydia was baptized "with all her household" and in Acts 16*33, the jailer was baptized "with his whole family." Also in Acts is the story of the youth, Eutychus, who, while listening to Paul preach until midnight fell out of a window (Acts 20:7-12).

Conclusion

We live an age when 5 out of 10 of our children leave the church. Research by Gary Hopkins tells us that we can keep them if we can connect with them and surround them with caring adults who show true love and concern for them. I believe that the communion service instead of being exclusive to adults should be a time when adults make non-judgmental, non-discriminatory connections helped to link children to their Saviour.

Children do understand salvation and I am concerned that if we do not recognise a child's commitment to Jesus, by allowing participation in communion, then we are wasting valuable years and opportunities for spiritual growth. What are we telling a child when we say that the remembrance of Jesus sacrifice is only for adults? We should be thankful that they show an interest and should be giving them encouragement and support.

Recommendations

1. Allow children and their families to individually decide if they want to participate, depending on their commitment and understanding.
2. Provide instruction to children to help them understand the meaning and symbolism. (GraceLink Primary lesson 10 – Year B, 1st Quarter)
3. Train parents to take responsibility for preparing their children for communion.
4. Offer communion as a family event. Explain to children what the bread and wine symbolise.
5. At times have communion as an "Upper Room/ Agape Feast" experience where families and children can understand it in its original context.