

June 2005

Dear Fellow Members of the Session,

Some of you may be aware that several years ago, Perry Henderson thoroughly revamped the Christian Education class for our eighth graders. As I understand it, Perry's vision was to cover the fundamentals of biblical Christianity and Reformed Theology, essentially the same type of material so often covered in traditional communicants' classes. He even instituted the use of the Shorter Catechism, "translated" (but not dumbed down) into contemporary English.

The Goal

- To provide a venue for students who have completed the class to make a *public* profession of their desire to be accountable to Christ and the church.
- The opportunity should also be made available to high school students who have been regularly attending and can articulate their faith in Christ and desire to be a part of the church.

Parents' questions

During the short time that I've been involved in teaching this course with Dave Hunniford, James Kelderman, and Kim Montgomery, I've become aware that many of our church's families have significant confusion about a number of issues. They don't have a clear idea about their own children's status in the church:

1. At what age can their children vote in congregational matters? ¹
2. What should parents and their children do about communion? Do kids decide on their own to take communion? Do they decide with their parents? Do the children need to speak to any elders or not? (see attached)
3. And a number of parents have asked, shouldn't there be some public way to recognize significant spiritual steps along the way, something at least as public as what we have adults do when they join the church?

A Tentative Proposal (for purpose of discussion)

When we publicly recognize new adult members, we also recognize any new "*communing* members" by having them come up at the same time and answering the same questions about their faith and their relationships to the church. This event would be called a "public recognition of faith."

¹ Years ago, the session decided that *parents* should decide the appropriate time for students to take the Lord's Supper and, therefore, vote on congregational matters.

As for communicating this process, here are a couple suggestions:

1. Include an explanation of this in the Connections classes so that new members are clear about this, especially if they currently have kids living with them and attending CLPC.
2. Every Sunday on which new members are received, we provide a brief explanation of the process printed in the bulletin. We should also include information about whom to contact and what to do if a person wants to join the church as a “communing member.”²
3. During the reception of new members and/or during communion, the pastors can offer whatever commentary might be encouraging and helpful for everyone’s understanding.

Things to keep in mind

As we discuss these things and figure out how to best communicate to the congregation, the process could get complicated by several factors:

1. We desire to remain biblically and theologically consistent.
2. We need to be spiritually discerning.
3. We want to be personally sensitive, especially since we’re dealing with people’s children, their relationships with Christ, and their relationships with the church.
4. And, of course, we need to be consistent, discerning, and sensitive in both our private dealings with people and in the “public” arena.

I hope this is helpful, at least to get some discussion started.

All for the best, Michael Harvey

² A “communing member” is a member of the church who has participated in the Lord’s Supper and *IS* given full voting privileges. A communing member may be any age. A “non-communing” member is a member of the church who does not take communion or vote on congregational matters. (BCO 6-4, 25-1)

Background information provided by Larry Edison
Covenant Life Policies concerning Children and the Lord's Supper:

The policy of our church regarding Children and Communion is as follows:

- First: It is to be understood that children should not be taking communion. This is the stance of the PCA. The BOCO says "only communing members." Communing members are those who have been interviewed by the elders as to their profession of faith in Christ
- Second: Parents should begin educating their children about the general nature of the church and its sacraments (baptism and the Lord's Supper). This should also be happening in Christian education classes on Sunday mornings.
- Third: For children who begin asking questions such as "Why can't I take the Lord's Supper" or, "Mom, Dad, I want to be a Christian, how can I be one?" we would encourage you as parents to help them articulate a profession of faith (and to pray with them that they would trust Jesus as Lord). When they are asking such questions, usually the time is ripe to lead them into taking that responsibility of articulating their own faith in Christ.
- Fourth: At whatever age this seems to be happening, the next step is bringing them to the elders (usually two are assigned) and having them share their age-appropriate profession of faith. The elders, in the Presbyterian Church, are those men who accept people into membership (or, in this case, into the Lord's Supper).
- We also assume, when they come to share their faith with the elders, that they have a basic (but good) understanding of the Lord's supper. We want them to share in the Lord's Supper as they have a good idea of what it means and why they are taking it. So, basic instruction before coming to the officers is critical. If a parent needs help, we are glad to provide that help and counsel BEFORE the children come into talk with the officers.
- Upon their "credible profession of faith" they are then allowed to take the Lord's Supper together with the rest of the church.

One minor problem is that many children are not asking about the Lord's Supper, because, having attended Children's Worship, they are generally not around to see the Lord's Supper being served.

1. Baptism and communion

Generally it is assumed that one should be baptized before one takes communion. This is another way of saying that, ordinarily, one should be a member of a church before taking the Lord's Supper (or, for that matter, becoming baptized)ⁱ.

Reason:

- a. One should be committed to the Christⁱⁱ and to the body of Christ before taking the sacrament which is a picture of what Christ has done for the Body, His church

b. Ordinarily, all who are members of the church are baptized members (and baptism is the initiatory sacrament for becoming part of God's covenant community)

Only those who profess faith in Christ should take the Lord's Supper. Under normal circumstances, all who profess faith are baptized (whether previously as infants or as adults at the time of their profession)

2. Baptism and one whose parents are not members

Generally, it is proper that those children or students whose parents are not members should not be baptized unless:

a. They have asked the elders for permission to be baptized (i.e. make a credible profession of faith)

b. Been accepted as communing members by the elders (which should be with their parents permission unless they are living as adults)

As long as parental permission is given, and as long as the children make a profession of faith, and as long as these children are involved in CE (or other forms of consistent discipleship and learning), they can then be baptized.

3. Communion and one whose parents are not members

Generally, it is proper that those children or students whose parents are not members should not take the Lord's Supper unless:

a. They have asked the elders.

b. Been accepted as communing members by the elders (which should be with their parents permission unless they are living as adults)

As long as parental permission is given, and as long as the children make a profession of faith, and as long as these children are involved in CE (or other forms of consistent discipleship and learning), they can then share in the Lord's Supper.

4. Baptism and involvement with CE (discipleship)ⁱⁱⁱ

Ordinarily, only those students involved in CE (implies regular gathering with the people of God and participation in discipleship) are candidates for baptism.

Reason: If the parents of the students are not coming, the children need to be in some type of learning or discipleship arrangement, and be, in that sense, part of the church (in order to receive the sacrament which marks them out as disciples of Christ and members of the church)

5. Baptism and voting

According to the Book of Church Order, all baptized/communing members are entitled to vote. The BOCO does not impose a voting age any more than it imposes a superficial suggestion for an age at which:

a. A profession of faith *should* take place

b. A conversion *might* take place

Reason:

The assumption is that the family ought to be responsible enough that the church ought not to impose any criteria upon the family. The family should realize that children should be:

a. Mature

b. Able to understand the issues

Before they encourage their children to vote. The denomination is grass roots and does not impose this on the churches. At this point, since we are family centered, we don't want to be authoritarian and impose the same on our family members.

6. Baptism and Profession of Faith are not identical in meaning.

Therefore, as Biblical Presbyterians we do not re-baptize someone upon their profession of faith.^{iv}

Reasons:

a. The meaning of baptism is a picture of what God does (in the process of our redemption), not primarily what we do (our profession).

b. Baptism as God's claim and sign of ownership (and belonging to the covenant community) takes its significance from God's Word. It is not "made void" if a covenant child turns their back on Christ. It is, in actuality, a sign, then, of covenant judgment. When a baptized child "comes back" to Christ, that child does not need to be re-baptized, but can make a profession of faith and begin taking the Lord's Supper.

That "return" to the Lord is the fulfillment of the promise and expectation of the sacrament of baptism. It is in keeping with God's Covenant promises claimed and believed by Christian parents at the time of their child's baptism.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Of the Sacraments.

I. Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by God, to represent Christ and his benefits, and to confirm our interest in him: as also to put a visible difference between those that belong unto the Church, and the rest of the world; and solemnly to engage them to the service of God in Christ, according to his Word.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Of the Lord's Supper

ⁱⁱ **VIII.** Although ignorant and wicked men receive the outward elements in this sacrament, yet they receive not the thing signified thereby; but by their unworthy coming thereunto are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, to their own damnation. Wherefore all ignorant and ungodly persons, as they are unfit to enjoy communion with him, so are they unworthy of the Lord's table, and can not, without great sin against Christ, while they remain such, partake of these holy mysteries, or be admitted thereunto.

ⁱⁱⁱ**CHAPTER XXVIII.**

Of Baptism

I. Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church, but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, or his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life: which sacrament is, by Christ's own appointment, to be continued in his Churchy until the end of the world..

VII. The sacrament of Baptism is but once to be administered to any person.

^{iv} VII. The sacrament of Baptism is but once to be administered to any person