

When should a child begin to take communion? For many years the standard practice among Presbyterians was to provide a “communicants” class for “non-communicating” children. With mechanical regularity children enrolled at the age of eleven, studied the doctrines of the church, and at the conclusion of the class made a public profession of faith.

There were a number of problems inherent to this system. Some children who were genuinely converted at a young age were being denied the sacrament two, three, or even four years prior to age 11. Too many other children, in our view, took the Communicants’ Class because they were 11 years old and it was the thing to do, rather than because they had come to know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Thus they were completing the class and making a public profession of faith without ever having been regenerated by the Spirit of God. Then, a few years later, at the age of 16, they were becoming voting members having been taught the catechism, which was good, but without instruction in the government and discipline of the church.

Therefore, to correct these weaknesses, the Session adopted a new procedure (in September of 1991) whereby the children of Independent Presbyterian Church will be admitted to the Lord’s Table upon 1) a credible profession of faith in Jesus Christ, 2) memorization of and understanding of the Creed, the Ten Commandments and the Lord’s Prayer, and 3) understanding of the meaning of the Lord’s Supper. This new system does not alter the three levels of membership as defined in the Constitution of Independent Presbyterian Church, which are 1) Non-Communing Membership for those who have been baptized but have not yet been admitted to the Lord’s Table, 2) Communing Membership upon a public profession of faith, and 3) Voting Membership upon reaching the age of sixteen. What has been altered is the criteria for admission to the second two levels of membership: admittance to the Lord’s Table and voting membership.

The three levels of church membership and means of admission to each is outlined below.

I. NON-COMMUNING MEMBERSHIP

Infants and children shall continue (as always) to be received into non-communicating membership when:

1. they are born into the family of member parents;
2. their parents have been instructed by the ministers in the meaning of the parental baptismal vows; and
3. they have actually been baptized.

II. COMMUNING MEMBERSHIP

Your child shall be received into communing membership when he/she fulfills the requirements for membership as stated in the Church’s constitution, that is, when he or she has “been baptized and has pledged obedience to Him, this profession being accompanied by habits of life which are not inconsistent therewith.” The Session shall determine the credibility of a profession in the following manner:

1. Parents shall inform the Session that in their opinion their child has come to saving faith in Jesus Christ, and therefore is ready to come to the Lord’s Table.
2. The Session shall then form an ad-hoc committee consisting of a minister, the child’s care group elder, the child’s Sunday School teacher, and one or both of the child’s parents.

3. That committee shall then examine the child as to:
 - i) his/her profession of faith;
 - ii) memorization and comprehension of the Apostle's Creed, The Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments (in any version, even Watt's "Thou shall have no other gods but me...");
 - iii) his/her understanding of the significance of the Lord's Supper.
4. The committee shall then either:
 - i) concur with the judgement of the parents and recommend that the child appear before the Session to be received into Communicant membership, or
 - ii) recommend that the child wait until he/she is older and has a more clearly credible profession of faith.
5. When a child does finally appear before the Session, its examination will consist of the child's testimony and a brief review of the work of the committee.

III. ADULT (VOTING) MEMBERSHIP

Communing children will be admitted to voting membership when they have followed the procedure below:

1. A Spring prior to their 16th birthday, they will be enrolled in an "adult," or voting membership class.
2. The Voting Membership Class shall be a thirteen-week study of the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Constitution and policy documents of Independent Presbyterian Church. Children who have already given a public profession of faith, and will turn 16 prior to the next offering of the class, shall be eligible.

This system puts a much greater burden on parents to instruct their children in the gospel and to monitor their comprehension and growth. It also refocuses attention on the child's actual experience: his spiritual re-birth, his personal repentance and faith, his personal walk with Christ. The Session likewise has a tougher job. It cannot rely on external criteria, such as the completion of a communicant's class, to determine whether covenant children are ready to take communion. It will have to discern the marks of the Spirit of Christ in the lives of the children, a more difficult but more important criteria.

Finally, don't rush the process. Parents should not view competitively the age when the children of the church publicly profess faith in Christ. Let it happen *supernaturally*, whether at age 7, 12 or 18!