



# Everyone's Invited!

An Exploration of Children and Communion -  
Thoughts, Ideas and Resources  
for Pastors, Elders, Parents, Teachers,  
Children's Ministry Leaders,  
Families and Whole Congregations

BUC Children's Ministries Department

# Everyone's Invited!

A resource for pastors, elders, parents, teachers,  
and children's ministry leaders

List of contents:	
Inspirational Thought	2
Learning Objectives	3
Reflecting on your own experiences	3
Small group discussion	4
The History of Children's Involvement in Passover/Communion	5
Exploring the Issues	5
NAD Children's Ministries' Guidelines on Children and Communion	13
Activities to Explore Aspects of Communion Together Karen Holford	15
Ways to Involve Children in Holy Communion in your Church Karen Holford	19
The Upper Room Experience A preparation week for parents and children by Pastor Jacques Venter	21
A Visit to the Upper Room Article and ideas from Advent Source website	27
PowerPoint Slides	33
Worksheets to copy and hand out	38

(Note – because some of the material has been collated from other sources and left intact there may be some repetition of information and ideas.)

## **Inspirational Thought**

**Who is the greatest in the kingdom of God?**

**Mark 9:33-37 (NIV)**

<sup>33</sup> They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" <sup>34</sup> But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.

<sup>35</sup> Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all."

<sup>36</sup> He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, <sup>37</sup> "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."

**Are we in danger of thinking we are more important than the children in the church just because we are older than they are?**

**How can we make sure the children in our church feel warmly welcome?**

- **When they enter the building?**
  
- **During the worship service?**
  
- **During Sabbath at church?**
  
- **During Communion?**

**What do we need to confess to God about our personal and corporate attitudes towards the children in our church?**

## **Learning Objectives:**

- To rethink our understanding of Holy Communion through exploring the scriptures and to reconsider our response to children and Holy Communion within our church communities
- To feel God's heart for the children in your church and what He wants them to learn through the Communion Service.
- \* To explore fresh ways to help children understand the spiritual significance of Holy Communion and the plan of salvation.

## **Reflecting on your own experiences:**

- \* What are your first memories of Holy Communion?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- \* How old were you when you first understood that Jesus died for your sins?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- \* What did sense did you make of the symbols of communion when you were first aware of them?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- When did someone explain the meaning of the Bread and Wine to you?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- \* What did you think of being left out of Holy Communion when you were a child? Or how would you feel if you were part of a congregation celebrating Holy Communion and you were not allowed to participate?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Why do we need to think differently about Children and Communion?



## History of children's involvement in Passover/Communion

- The Jewish community included all those who had been circumcised (basically from birth onwards) in all their festivals.
- The early church included children - Holy Communion was for the whole community. 1 Corinthians 11:33
- Eastern Orthodox Christians - always included children in their Holy Communion
- Catholics excluded children until they were 7 and had been confirmed.
- In the 19<sup>th</sup> century Anglicans also decided that confirmation was the marker for receiving Communion, as in the Catholic Church.
  
- **Recently Anglican, Methodist and United Reformed Churches have all thoroughly reconsidered their stance on excluding children from Communion and decided that it is much more important to include them.**

### **The recent move for different churches to include children in Holy Communion is because:**

- We need to show children that they are accepted and important in their local congregations
- \* Children are equal recipients of salvation together with adults
- \* Children are also in need of spiritual nourishment as represented by the bread and juice
- \* Children need to have a sense of belonging to their church community
- \* Adults also need to become like little children

## Exploring the issues...

### **Communion – Rooted in Passover**

There are many experiences throughout the Old Testament where the Jewish people came together as a community to celebrate different feasts, victories, repentance, building a new temple, etc. Many of these times we know that the children were specifically included. (Deuteronomy 12:16-18; 16:9-15). God gave specific instructions regarding the involvement of children in the original Passover feast, which were to be passed down from generation to generation. (Exodus 12:1-28) Failure to follow all the instructions for the original Passover feast would have meant that some of the children would have died, as the Egyptians' children did.

We often forget when we celebrate Holy Communion as Christians that we are celebrating a Christian Passover. There is no doubt that if there had been children in the room at the Last Supper that they would have been included in the meal. In Jewish homes the youngest child opens the Passover

experience by asking their father 'Why do we do this?' No Jewish family would ever have excluded children from Passover. To exclude a child from Passover would be inconceivable because it was an important way of passing on important understandings of God from generation to generation. Psalm 145:4; Deuteronomy 6:4-12.

It is the child's role to invite the parent to explain the Passover feast in ways the child can understand. So today, the adults in the child's family have a responsibility to explain what is happening in the service in child-friendly ways, so that the faith can be passed on.

There is much we can learn from this as we celebrate Holy Communion today, our Christian form of Passover. Jewish children would also help to prepare for the feast, make the food and set the table.

One of the main purposes of the Feast of Passover is to tell the next generation about the goodness of God and how He saved them, and brought them up out of Egypt. Passover also provides a multi-sensory experience that helps children to understand God's plan of salvation and the sacrifice of the Lamb, Jesus, so they could be saved.

**(Child-friendly resources for learning about Passover and exploring its meaning can be obtained from the Judaism section of the website Articles of Faith – [www.articlesoffaith.co.uk](http://www.articlesoffaith.co.uk))**

30 minute seder (passover)  
[www.30minuteseder.com](http://www.30minuteseder.com)

How to do a Christian Seder/Passover service:  
[www.crivoice.org/seder.html](http://www.crivoice.org/seder.html)

[www.amightywind.com/passover/simple\\_passover\\_seder.html](http://www.amightywind.com/passover/simple_passover_seder.html)

## **Communion – communing together**

### **What does Communion mean?**

We often think it means the service where we eat communion bread and drink a small glass of grape juice, but Communion is about:

- belonging together
- being humble together
- sharing things together
- helping and serving each other
- forgiving each other
- believing in God together
- and especially believing that Jesus came to save us by dying for our sins.

Before we help children understand what Communion is all about, we need to understand what **communing** together as families and churches really means.

The Last Supper was not just about sharing the loaf of unleavened bread and a cup of grape juice. As Adventists we understand this and so we have also included the Service of Humility, or Footwashing, because Jesus set us an example of caring for each other, being humble, and putting other people's needs above our own. But part of the bigger picture of what was happening in the Upper Room was being together as a group and worshipping God. All the disciples were there, including Judas, and each person shared in the experience from their own unique perspective. They 'communed', with each other and with God.

So Holy Communion is about being together as a **community** in a spiritual way, rather than just socially. It is Comm – union. It is about being together, in unity, before God (John 17).

## **The Paradox...**

As Adventists we have a long tradition of excluding children from Holy Communion until they have been baptized. But, paradoxically, we also hold open communion – inviting anyone to join us who believes that Jesus is the Son of God who has died for their sins. This is an open invitation for believing children too.

What is happening when we happily accept an unknown adult at the Communion table, but refuse a believing child, just because we think they are too young to understand? Believing is different to understanding.

## **Young children believe that Jesus died for them**

Adventist children are taught in Sabbath School that God loves them and sent Jesus to die for them from a very young age. Many of them believe this in their own simple way from the age of two or three. God has made the plan of salvation simple enough for any mind to accept, so that no one need be excluded, even though the wonderful details of the full process of redemption are way beyond even our adult minds.

All of us are on different journeys of understanding this process and each time we participate in Holy Communion, and as we grow in Christ, we can receive fresh insights into the wonder of what God has done for us. But that does not make our first simple understanding any less valuable or important.

## **Are the children unworthy? 1 Corinthians 11:27**

The verse that is usually used to support the exclusion of children from Communion is the verse that warns us not to eat or drink at the Lord's Table *unworthily*. The context of this verse is about relationships and unity in the local church. When there is disunity between people, it is much harder for

them to *commune* together. This verse does not make any reference to the spirituality of the child.

When the disciples thought that the children were not worthy of Jesus' attention, he rebuked them and welcomed the children. It is a radical thought, but we may be eating and drinking unworthily by *not* allowing the children to be involved, because, by doing so, we create a division in the church community between adults and children. This is probably not a distinction that Jesus or the Jews would have made.

### **The role of the parent's faith**

Another verse that we need to consider as we reflect on these issues is that God saves the young child through the faith of their parents before they are able to comprehend it for themselves (1 Corinthians 7:12-14). So we do not need to worry that children may be drinking and eating it unworthily. They are as worthy as we are to partake in the wonder of salvation. Perhaps we need to reflect more on our own worthiness as adults?

### **Discuss together:**

**What are some of the things that make someone unworthy of participating in Communion?**

### **Don't let anyone go hungry...**

Paul also cautioned the Corinthian church about some people not getting food to eat at The Lord's Supper, and others drinking and eating too much. 1 Corinthians 11:21.

In 1 Corinthians 11:33 Paul encourages the church to involve everyone in Communion. He does not exclude children. His important messages about the Lord's Supper could be summarised as – 'don't be greedy during the Lord's Supper and don't leave anyone out, either.'

**How could Paul's message be applied to the children in our churches who experience spiritual and physical exclusion from our spiritual community during Holy Communion when they are not allowed to share the meal with us?**

**What creative ideas do you have about involving children in the Communion service so that they don't feel excluded?**

## Jesus' teachings about the faith of a child

- Adults need to look to children for an example of how to have faith in God - Matthew 18:3.
- Adults need to be born again and have an innocent and child-like faith in Him. John 3:3
- Children have a special place in God's kingdom. Childlike-ness is of the highest values in the kingdom of heaven - Matthew 18:4.
- Children's angels are always in the presence of the Father - Matthew 18:10.
- Children are worthy of blessing. Mark 10:13-16; Matthew 19:13-15; Luke 18:15-17
- When we welcome children we are welcoming Jesus himself. Matthew 18:5
- We must not do anything that interferes with a child's relationship with God. Matthew 18:6.

Jesus made these statements about small children who would be too young to have made any formal commitment to God and been baptised. They are also too young to they have the fuller understanding of spiritual things that an adult might have.

## Ellen White Statements about Children's Spirituality

"Those who love God should feel deeply interested in the children and youth. To them God can reveal His truth and salvation. Jesus calls the little ones that believe on Him, the lambs of His flock. He has a special love for and interest in the children...The most precious offering that the children can give to Jesus is the freshness of their childhood." *Reflecting Christ, p. 373.*

"God wants every child of tender age to be His child, to be adopted into His family." *Counsels to Teachers and Parents, p. 169.*

"When Jesus told the disciples not to forbid the children to come to Him, He was speaking to His followers in all ages,--to officers of the church, to ministers, helpers, and all Christians. Jesus is drawing the children, and He bids us, Suffer them to come; as if He would say, They will come if you do not hinder them." *Desire of Ages, p. 517.*

"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." *Testimonies, Vol. 1, p. 400.*

"Direct their minds to Jesus as soon as they can comprehend your lessons in simple words, easy to be understood. Teach them self-control. Teach them to begin the work of overcoming when young, and they will receive the precious help that Jesus can and will give, connected with prayerful efforts of parents.

Cheer them with encouraging words for the battles they fight in resisting temptation and coming off conquerors through grace given them of Jesus Christ." *That I May Know Him, p. 42.*

"As soon as the little ones are intelligent to understand, parents should tell them the story of Jesus that they may drink in the precious truth concerning the Babe of Bethlehem. Impress upon the children's minds sentiments of simple piety that are adapted to their years and ability. Bring your children in prayer to Jesus, for He has made it possible for them to learn religion as they learn to frame the words of the language." *Adventist Home, 320*

### **Think about it:**

- By choosing to exclude children from Holy Communion are we judging their spiritual experience through our own human perspectives rather than the perspective Jesus had?
- How prejudiced are we about children's spirituality? Do we believe that our more mature and informed spirituality is more valuable than their simple and innocent spirituality?
- Are our ideas about involving children in Holy Communion more informed by our cultural attitudes to children in our church and historical practices rather than Biblical teaching about children's spirituality and involvement in Jewish feasts?
- How have we inadvertently absorbed ideas from other churches about when children can be included in Holy Communion (such as the Roman Catholic Church), rather than looking to the Bible and God's clear instructions to the Jewish people regarding Passover?
- What spiritual messages are we giving the children by excluding them from The Lord's Table?

### **Children's comments about being excluded from Holy Communion:**

- I don't understand why the adults are doing something and they won't let us join in. I believe Jesus has died for me too. I understand that His death was a serious and important thing that He did to save me from my sins.
- It's as if the grown-ups are having a party with Jesus all by themselves and they don't want us to join in.
- Doesn't God love us too?
- Communion is boring and long and sad and there's nothing for children there.

## **Families and Communion**

An increasing number of families choose to stay away from church when it's Communion Sabbath, or they visit a church that isn't having Communion. This is a problem because both parents and children are missing out on the blessing of Holy Communion.

Some of the reasons parents give for not bringing their family to Holy Communion are:

- the services are usually too long for children when Holy Communion is included.
- Holy Communion is often done in a boring service that is too solemn and not at all child-friendly.
- the children's story is often missed out when it is Communion because there isn't time for it.
- the children are excluded from the ceremonies.
- the children are upset and distressed when they see others eat and drink something they aren't allowed to share.
- the parents can't care for their children and both be involved in foot-washing in separate rooms where children aren't usually welcome.
- the parents are also afraid that they will take Communion 'unworthily' and so aren't comfortable with the service themselves.

### **Discussion questions:**

**What can we do to ensure that children's spiritual needs are also met during Holy Communion?**

Their needs are:

- to experience God's ongoing forgiveness
- to be part of a spiritual and nurturing community
- to understand Jesus' role in the plan of salvation
- to have their spiritual experience validated

**If Jesus was planning a Communion service in your church what might He do to involve the children in some way and help them understand the significance of the symbols?**

### **Importance of Holy Communion in Faith Transmission**

We have a responsibility to find creative ways to involve families in Communion so they will want to come and bring their children to these important services. It is essential that we find a way to share this central concept of God's salvation, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, with our children.

## **Preparing ourselves for change:**

- Thoughtful prayer
- Reflective study
- Valuing the children in our congregations
- Discussion with others
- Being open to the Holy Spirit's guidance in our lives and ministry

## **Preparing our congregations for change:**

- Praying together as a community
- If possible – completing the 'Ten Promises for our Children' series of Bible Studies
- Valuing the children in our congregations
- Discussing the issues about children and Holy Communion openly, being aware of everyone's concerns and needs
- Being open to the Holy Spirit's guidance in our congregations

## **Conclusion**

Communion is a special celebration that needs to be conducted with reverence and in accordance with our beliefs. But we also need to revisit the Feast of the Passover to understand more about the spiritual and historical roots of Holy Communion. From this biblical perspective we can take a different view of this important service, so that we can pass the wonders of God's grace onto our children and future generations.

## **NAD Children's Ministries' Guidelines on Children and Communion**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual contradicts itself on the subject of Communion. On the one hand the manual states that Adventists hold open communion, meaning that one need not be a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in order to take communion with us. On the other hand, the manual states that children must be baptized before taking communion demonstrating that, in fact, we do not hold open communion. Some North American pastors point out that either we hold open communion or we do not. We cannot discriminate against any group and continue to make the claim for openness.

NAD Children's Ministries suggests that since the manual contradicts itself, parents and pastors should pay more attention to children on communion day. They should consider what is happening and the messages children take from communion.

In many churches, unbaptized children and youth stand around outside the church during communion. They enjoy being outside and talking with their friends. When they are older it is hard to coax them back inside to take part. Churches should consider the message they are giving when they exclude children from communion.

### **What About Taking Part Unworthily?**

If we do not worry about all the adults who may be taking part unworthily, why are we assuming that children are unworthy, that they don't understand, that they cannot set their hearts to rights during the sermon just as many adults do?

And who is responsible if they do take part unworthily? Their parents. So we need to leave that responsibility with the parents and educate parents to prepare children for communion.

One leading theologian in the church, a particularly good friend of children, points out that within the context of the statement about taking part unworthily, the Bible writer was talking about a lack of unity as being the cause of unworthiness. Lack of unity is a problem of adults.

### **Suggestions for Children Taking Part in Communion**

1. At least once a year, have a programme for families so children can experience and understand communion in its original context (see 'The Visit to the Upper Room' resource included in this pack).
2. Hold a family seminar on communion. Discuss the issues and encourage parents to take responsibility for preparing their children for communion.
3. When very small children ask to take part, parents might break off a little of their bread to share with the child.

4. When older children ask to take part, parents might talk to them about the responsibilities of membership in the community of believers. Talk about stewardship/tithing, listening to the sermon in church, regular attendance, helping at church, etc. If the children feel ready to take responsibility for these things, grant them the right to take part in communion. Make communion a family event.

5. Do not rush children into baptism just so they can take part in communion.

## Activities to Explore Aspects of Communion Together

### Build a Church

#### You will need:

- A big bucket of toy bricks in various sizes

#### Instructions:

- Take a large bucket of toy bricks such as Lego, Duplo or wooden blocks.
- Give the adults the longer bricks and the children the shorter bricks.
- Ask the group to build a church building, including doors and windows.
- It is best if there is an overall architect to help people know where to place their bricks.
- First, try to build a church using only the adults' big bricks. It will not look very good, or be very secure, because the smaller bricks are needed to give the building stability and neatness.
- Then ask the group to build a church using everyone's bricks.
- Invite the adults and children to think about what they have learned from this experience.

### The Chain

#### You will need:

- Paper chain papers from art, party and toy shops – Early Learning Centre often sells them. Otherwise use colourful paper cut into 2-3cm wide strips about 20 cm long
- Stapler

#### Instructions:

- Ask everyone to stand or sit in a circle and give each person a strip of paper.
- Then ask everyone to make a chain together, by looping their strip through the next person's loop and sticking or stapling the ends together to make a circle.
- The first time you do this the children can only connect their chain link to another child's link, but not to an adult's.
- Also, any adult sitting next to a child must not bypass the child to connect to another adult.
- What happens to the overall chain? It has lots of short parts that aren't joined together!
- Then hand out some more strips of paper and let the children join their loops to the adults' loops to make one long chain.
- Invite the group to reflect on this activity:
  - What happened when the children weren't included?
  - How do we connect with each other as people, not just as strips of paper?
  - What helps us to feel like we belong together as a church community?

## **We are the Church!**

### **You will need:**

- Small pieces of paper the same size – pages of a small, unlined notebook might be ideal (the larger your group, the smaller pieces of paper you will need so that you can fit everyone's piece of paper into the outline of your church)
- Pencils or felt-tipped pens
- Scissors (optional)
- Glue stick
- Large sheet of paper with the outline of a church drawn on it – use a ruler to make this as neat as possible

### **Instructions:**

- Give each person in your church a small piece of paper and a pencil or felt-tipped pen.
- Ask them to draw a small picture of themselves, and to write their name underneath.
- Then ask them to cut out their portrait.
- Draw a very large church on a very large piece of paper. You may have to stick several sheets of flip chart paper together, depending on the size of your congregation.
- Ask each person to stick their picture within the outline of the church to illustrate how the church is made up of a community of people, young and old, male and female, from different places.

## **Being a Church Together**

### **You will need:**

- Sheets of A4 paper cut into three equal sized pieces to make brick shapes
- Felt-tipped pens
- Glue sticks
- Large sheet of paper

### **Instructions:**

- Give each person a brick-shaped piece of paper.
- Then ask them to write on their brick a few words that describe what it means to be a part of your church. Or they can draw a picture if they prefer.
- Stick all the bricks onto a large sheet of paper to make the shape of a church.
- Encourage everyone to read what other people have written.

## **Footwashing**

### **You will need:**

- A non-slip, water-proof floor covering
- A large washing up bowl of wet sand
- Large washing up bowls of warm water
- Communion towels
- Bibles

**Instructions:**

- Cover the floor with a non-slip and water-proof covering.
- Place a large washing up bowl of wet sand on the floor, together with some bowls of warm water for foot-washing.
- Let the children step in the bowl of wet sand and make their feet all dirty. Then wash their feet well, and dry them with fresh towels.
- Talk about why we wash each other's feet, reading the story of Jesus washing His disciples' feet.
- Ask the children what foot-washing means to them.
- Discuss how foot-washing is an illustration of the way Jesus takes away our sins, and also how it encourages us to be humble with each other and take care of each other.
- Let them also wash each other's feet and discuss the difference between how they feel when they're washing someone else's feet and how they feel when their own feet are being washed.

**Following Jesus****You will need:**

- Strong paper in different colours
- Pencils or pens
- Scissors
- Glue-sticks
- Large sheet of background paper

**Instructions:**

- We wash each other's feet because we want to follow Jesus' example.
- Ask the children to draw around each of their feet on strong paper and to cut out their footprints.
- Then ask them to write or draw on each footprint some ways in which they can follow Jesus, and some of the different things Jesus did for his friends that we can do for each other.
- Stick the footprints on a large background as if they are walking along a path. Make a heading that says 'We're following Jesus!'

**Understanding the bread****You will need:**

- Whole wheat grains
- Pestle and mortar
- Electric grinder/nut or coffee grinder

**Instructions:**

- Help the children make unleavened bread from whole-wheat grains.
- Let them try to grind the grains in a pestle and mortar to see how hard it is to crush and grind the grains into flour.
- Then use an electric grinder to grind wheat into flour, or use stoneground whole-wheat flour. Sieve the flour to make it finer, and then make the unleavened bread with the children following your usual recipe. (See recipe below)

- Talk about why Jesus used the symbol of broken bread to remind us that His body would be broken.
- You could also make the unleavened bread into gingerbread man shapes, which can be broken, as a symbol of how Jesus' body was broken for us.

## **Unleavened Bread Recipe**

2 cups whole wheat flour  
 ½ tsp salt  
 7 tbsp oil (1/2 cup oil less 1 tbsp)  
 ½ cup water

Whip oil and water in blender until mixture turns white. Immediately add mixture to flour and salt and knead for several minutes until dough is elastic and ready for rolling. Roll out a thin (3/16") even layer directly onto cookie sheet. Score into 3/4" squares and prick each square with fork or toothpick. Bake at 350F or 180C for 12-15 minutes. Do not over-bake as when it becomes too brown it tastes bitter.

## **Understanding the Juice**

### **You will need:**

- Red grapes
- Bowl
- Aprons and protective clothing
- Juice extractor
- Glasses

### **Instructions:**

- Make sure the children have protective aprons and clean hands.
- Give the children a few grapes to squeeze with their hands to make juice.
- Let them see the juice come out and feel the crushed grapes.
- Then make juice in the extractor and let the children see the pulp and the juice.
- Give them some juice to drink as you talk about how Jesus bled and died for them.
- Ask them about the times when they cut themselves and how it felt and who helped them to make it better.
- Thank God for sending Jesus to die for us.

## **Ways to Involve Children in Holy Communion in your Church**

(Adapted from 'Creative Celebrations' Ministry Magazine, by Karen Holford 2009)

Each church may have a slightly different culture about Holy Communion and the involvement of children, and each church may be on a different part of the journey towards making Holy Communion a more inclusive service. Here are some ideas that you can adapt to the needs of your church.

1. Serve the bread and juice from the front of the church instead of serving people where they sit. Ask them to come forward in lines to receive the emblems. Children, babies and other people who do not want to take the bread and juice can come forward and receive a short prayer or blessing from someone who gently places a hand on their head.
2. Your Junior or Teen Sabbath School Class or Pathfinder group can research the meaning of the bread and juice used in Communion services. Why did Jesus use these two items to teach us about his love and sacrifice? Invite them to share their ideas and create a special presentation of their discoveries during your Communion Service. Maybe they could act out the Last Supper and prepare monologues about Jesus' life from the perspective of some of the disciples.
3. The children can help to make the communion bread and wine for the service. They can mix and bake the unleavened bread and process red grape juice in a juice extractor. They can do this in Pathfinders, at home with their parents, or in the home of a deaconess. Their adult helpers can create an atmosphere of awe and worship as they create the emblems.
4. Set aside a room for family foot-washing so that the children can wash their parents' feet, and the parents can wash their children's feet. Foot-washing isn't just for grown-ups, and there is no reason why children cannot be part of this service. One pastor washed all the children's feet during the Service of Humility to show them how much Jesus loved them.
5. Cut some hearts out of stiff white card and give one to each child. Then give them some black crayons or charcoal and ask them to make their heart grey and smudgy. During the Communion Service ask the children to show the congregation their dirty hearts, which illustrate the sins in their lives. Then offer to swap the dirty hearts for pieces of heart-shaped unleavened bread, made especially for the children, or fresh white card-hearts. This shows how Jesus takes away our sins and makes us clean through his forgiveness.
6. Find a short, child-friendly DVD about the Last Supper, or Jesus' death and resurrection, and show it to the children during the foot-washing. Select clips from 'The Miracle Maker', or 'Friends and Heroes' (series 1, episode 11) which helps the children to understand the meaning of the Passover.
7. Buy some water-dissolving pens from sewing shops (as soon as water touches the ink the colour disappears). Let the children make marks on

their feet with the pens to illustrate some of their sins. When their feet are washed the marks will completely disappear. Let their parents or carers massage fragrant body butter into their feet after they are dried, reminding them of the story where Mary pours perfume over the feet of Jesus.

8. Give each child a small piece of play dough or Crayola Model Magic (available from [www.bakerross.co.uk](http://www.bakerross.co.uk) - this is a clean, white, easy to use play-dough-type material that doesn't drop 'crumbs' and mess up your church!) As you go through the service ask the children to shape their piece of dough into a foot, a piece of unleavened bread, a glass of grape juice, a cross and a heart.
9. Give each child a four page booklet (fold a piece of paper in half) to help them explore the different parts of the Communion service:

Page 1 – Title  
Page 2 – Foot-washing  
Page 3 – Bread  
Page 4 – Grape juice

Provide pre-cut shapes of feet, bread and glasses of juice that can be stuck onto the pages. Or find Bible puzzles that can help them to understand the service. (See Worksheet section)

10. Buy every child in your church the book 'Daniel Asks about Baptism and Communion'<sup>1</sup> from the ABC. This was written by Heather Hanna, an Adventist mother living in the UK. This can be read out loud whilst the adults are involved in foot-washing. Or you could make a PowerPoint presentation by scanning the images from the book into your computer.
11. Give the children large, brown paper cut-outs of 'bread' shapes and large purple 'wine-glass' shapes. Invite the children to write their ideas about Jesus and his gift of forgiveness on the shapes. Make a display of the shapes and use it as part of the Communion service, or place it in the foyer on Communion Sabbath.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Daniel asks about Baptism and Communion'. Heather Hanna, Pacific Press 2005, ISBN 6320837.

## **The Upper Room Experience**

Often children of all ages feel left out on "Communion Sabbath." Not only is the symbolism above their heads, but the ritual seems strange—even rigid. And adults are often at a loss to know what to do with the children; will they be welcome at the foot washing? Are they allowed to take part?

Seventh-day Adventists practice open communion—adults don't have to be a member to take part. So why should the children be required to wait until baptism? However I believe we should at least try and help them understand what is happening and also help them sincerely desire to follow Jesus.

As a church I believe we can help our children experience, understand, and value communion through "A Visit to the Upper Room." This can easily be staged at church. All it takes is a few of us willing to help and the church to agree. It would be nice if the church would agree to run this as the last communion of each year.

### **How it will work**

Children of different ages, those who have participated in communion before, children preparing for baptism, and those parents feel are ready to learn are invited to take part. Mum and Dad would have to be part of this on this specific Sabbath instead of attending the footwashing. This could also be an opportunity to strengthen the commitment of the adults, although the programme is geared to the children.

I would need the help of some helpers and that is why I am writing to you. To achieve the objects of this lesson we need to work together. An important part of Communion is the sense of community we feel when we do something significant together.

The church will have to be prepared on the Friday evening. We could move things around in front to create the scene for the table, the buckets that dispense water, and the towels, and bowls for the foot washing. Another thing that could create the right ambience is to set up the room with reminders of objects from Jesus' time. Provide a place at the door where the children can remove their shoes. Leave a pair of leather sandals there to set the A.D. 34 scene. Other things we could do if you feel it will help are:

- Have some adult helpers dress in costume of Bible times.
- Display a basket each of bread and grapes.
- Play soft background music as people enter.

The aim of this communion service is that the children will:

- Know the meaning of the various symbols and the reason for taking part in the foot washing and the communion service.
- Feel the joy of following Jesus' instruction "this do in remembrance of Me."
- Respond by determining to prepare themselves for the communion service each time it takes place.

## **Things to Plan Ahead**

Here are some things to do ahead of time:

- An area near the door where people may leave their shoes.
- A table with bowls, towels, and water for foot washing.
- A table set with the bread and wine.
- Chairs in informal groupings or cushions on the floor.

## **Things we Might Need:**

- Decoration: candles, matches, small table with white cloth, flowers, picture of Jesus, cross, baskets of bread and grapes, jug, cups.
- Food: grape juice, unleavened bread
- Foot washing: basins, towels, buckets of water, ladles or jugs.
- Mood: music, costumes, materials for building a fire outside.

## **Programmeme**

### *Welcome*

Those who welcome the people on this Sabbath will explain the custom of removing shoes, inviting the children to do so, and helping them find a place to sit. Enough greeters will be needed so that nobody stands at the door wondering what to do.

### *Song Service.*

Suggested songs:

- "Come into His Presence,"
- "Clap Your Hands,"
- "God So Loved the World,"
- "Special Delivery,"
- "Oh, How He Loves You and Me,"
- "All Nations of the Earth,"
- "God Is with Us," 104.

I am sure there are other songs, but we could relay our request to whoever is doing the praise time on this Sabbath.

### *The Passover Explained.*

Pastor invites people to imagine themselves in the year 34 A.D. The Passover reminded people of the night that Israel left Egypt—blood was sprinkled on the door posts so that the angel of death would pass over. People ate a lamb with bitter herbs and unleavened bread. They were not to break any of the bones nor leave any food until morning.

### *Scripture Reading.*

Mark 14:12-16. This reading could be done by one of the older children. Pastor explains that the disciples were expecting a traditional Passover supper when they entered that upper room. But Jesus had planned something even more meaningful.

## **The Foot Washing**

*A. The custom explained.* Talk about the custom of walking the dusty roads of Palestine in open sandals so that feet quickly become dirty. Before reclining on the couch to eat, people washed both their hands and their feet. A servant often performed this task. The washing of feet still holds great significance in Asia and Africa where people wear open sandals and walk dusty paths. Touching another person's feet is a sign of humility. To wash somebody's feet says that you do not consider yourself better than they.

*B. Scripture Reading.* John 13:3-10 One of the older children could read this.

*C. Foot Washing.* The Pastor explains the procedure that everyone will follow for the foot washing. Have a few parents stay behind to help wash the children's feet. Let the children take their own towels and bowls back to the appropriate place so that they help to tidy things away. Finish with prayer.

*D. Song. Sing "Seek Ye First"* When everyone has returned we sing together.

## **The Bread**

*A.* Pastor explains that one of the elders is going to pray and ask Jesus to bless us as we eat the bread.

*B. Breaking the Bread.* The pastor and the elder break the bread and bless it before the helpers serve each participant.

*C. The Symbol.* While the deacons hand out the bread, the Pastor explains that the bread symbolizes the lamb that was slain for the Passover and for the temple service. After Jesus' death it would become a symbol of His body which was broken for our salvation. The bread was to be unleavened. That means that no yeast was used to make the dough rise, forming little air bubbles. In the Old Testament, yeast represented sin, so this special unleavened bread was to be without "sin." In Jesus' day people broke off a piece of bread. In churches today the bread is usually broken by the minister. After people take a piece they hold it until the pastor indicates that it is time to eat it. The children are served last, otherwise they might eat it before the appropriate time.

*C. Eating the Bread.* Read 1Cor. 11:23-24. Pastor begins to eat his bread as a sign for the participants to eat theirs.

## **The Wine**

*A.* Pastor explains that one of the elders is going to pray and ask Jesus to bless us as we eat drink the grape juice.

*B. Serving the Juice.* The pastor explains the procedure for receiving the juice and it is handed out.

*C. The Symbols.* While the children wait for the juice to be handed out to everyone the Pastor explains the grape juice as a symbol of the blood that was sprinkled on the door posts at the first Passover and later in the temple

services. When Jesus died, grape juice became the symbol of His blood that paid the penalty for sin.

*C. Scripture.* Read 1 Cor. 11:25-26. The pastor begins to drink the juice and the participants follow.

Disposing of the Leftover Emblems. The Pastor explains that in church we don't usually see what happens to the leftover wine and bread. In accordance with the Passover custom, the remaining wine is poured out on the ground, and the bread is burned before they become stale, because Christ's body did not decay in the tomb.

Close with prayer

## **What Parents Can Do to Help their Children Prepare For This Sabbath**

### **Sunday: Altar**

Items: *stones, glue, card paper*

First help your child/ren collect some stones. Read or tell your child/ren the story of the Israelites crossing the Jordan River as found in Joshua 3:1 - 4:9. Help them build an altar on a piece of card. Explain that every time the Israelites saw the pile of rocks from the River Jordan, they would remember what God had done. Ask what other things God gives people in the Bible to help them remember what he has done (for instance, the Passover meal). Also use the opportunity to explain about communion and why we celebrate it. Ask the children if they can think of any things we see every day that can remind us of something God has done for us.

### **Monday: Foot Washing**

Items: *bowl, warm water, towel*

Before picking your child/ren up from school put the kettle on to boil. Place the bowl and towel at the front door. When you arrive back have your child/ren take their shoes off. Take the water in the kettle, pour it into the bowl, add some cold water if necessary, and wash their feet. Use this opportunity to explain to them that in the Bible times, when people walked the dusty roads of Palestine in open sandals, their feet quickly became dirty. Before reclining on the couch to eat, people washed both their hands and their feet. A servant often performed this task. The washing of feet still holds great significance in Asia and Africa where people wear open sandals and walk dusty paths. Touching another person's feet is a sign of humility. To wash somebody's feet says that you do not consider yourself better than they. Before Jesus and the disciples had communion He washed their feet.

Alternatively you can prepare the same items for when mum or dad is going to arrive after work. Then help your children wash mum or dad's feet and then wash theirs.

Alternatively pick another time in the day to wash your child/ren's feet. Perhaps you could let them walk barefoot in some earth or sand so that their feet are really dirty, or even brush a little brown paint on their feet first.

### **Tuesday: Upper Room**

Items: paper, *colouring pencils*

Read to your child/ren the story of the upper room as found in Matthew 26:17-30. Help your child/ren draw a picture of the upper room with Jesus in the middle and the twelve disciples around the table. Help them decide where each disciple sat. Take the opportunity to help them draw the lamb and bitter sauce and use this opportunity to share with them the meaning of these Passover symbols.

### **Wednesday: The Communion Scene**

Items: *raisins, big round or star stickers, coloured card paper, matzos / peanuts, glue*

Help your child to cut out a rectangular piece of coloured card and stick it onto a white piece of paper. This will form the table. Help them stick twelve stickers around the table for the disciples and a different colour for Jesus in the middle of the table. Help them stick the raisins on the table to pretend they are the juice and pieces of matzos/peanuts which they can pretend are the unleavened bread.

Use this opportunity to speak to them about the order in which Christ introduced the first communion service.

### **Thursday: The Wine**

Items: *bowl, bag of red grapes, glass*

Make sure your child/ren's hands are clean. Help them squash the grapes so that it will form juice. Drain the juice into a glass and let them drink it. Or help them to make grape juice in a juice extractor if you have one. Use this opportunity to explain to them why we use grape juice and not wine during communion. Also use this opportunity to explain to them the meaning of this symbol.

### **Friday: Unleavened Bread**

Items: *Unleavened Bread Recipe, Grape Juice*

Take time to help your child make unleavened bread. Here is a recipe:

2 cups whole wheat flour

½ tsp salt

7 tbsp oil (1/2 cup oil less 1 tbsp)

½ cup water

Whip oil and water in blender until mixture turns white. Immediately add mixture to flour and salt and knead for several minutes until dough is elastic and ready for rolling. Roll out a thin (3/16") even layer directly onto cookie sheet. Score into 3/4" squares and prick each square with fork or toothpick.

Bake at 350F or 180C for 12-15 minutes. Do not over-bake as when it becomes too brown it tastes bitter.

While you make the bread talk to them about communion and what the bread means. Eat it with them while drinking some grape juice. By now you would have explained the meaning of the grape juice. Ask them if they remember what the grape juice symbolises in the communion service.

Pastor Jacques Venter, SEC

## **A Visit to the Upper Room**

(Resource from Advent Source  
<http://plusline.org/article.php?id=199>)

Children of all ages often feel left out on "Communion Sabbath." Not only is the symbolism above their heads, but the ritual seems strange—even rigid. And adults are often at a loss to know what to do with the children; will they be welcome at the foot washing? Are they allowed to take part?

Seventh-day Adventists practice open communion—adults don't have to be a member to take part. So why should children be required to wait until baptism? But they should understand what is happening and sincerely desire to follow Jesus.

You can help children experience, understand, and value communion through "A Visit to the Upper Room." This programme can easily be staged at your church. All it takes is someone willing to organize the programme and send out the invitations.

### **Who attends?**

Children of school-age, especially those who have participated in communion before, and children preparing for baptism are the primary audience for The Upper Room. You may also want to invite their families. This could also be an opportunity to strengthen the commitment of adults, although the programme is geared to the kids.

You will need enough adult helpers/presenters for one to every five or six kids. Also invite the pastor or head elder to offer the blessing over the emblems. This could be an opportunity for the pastor to get closer to the kids of the church. And, yes, it's OK to celebrate communion with an elder leading out

### **Where do you meet?**

In an upstairs room at the church—if you have one—or any inviting classroom at the church. Prepare the room in a friendly arrangement, providing a place to sit—maybe on the carpet, and a corner for the table that dispenses water, towels, and bowls for the foot washing

### **When to celebrate the "Upper Room?"**

Sabbath vespers, prayer meeting, or during the 11 o'clock hour are possible times. Winter or fall seasons, when the sun sets early on Fridays, will possibly be most convenient for a Friday evening service. In summer, the service may be a great way to end the Sabbath.

## **Planning Strategies**

Form a support group to plan the programme, preferably two or more couples.

Invite a pastor and/or elder to meet at least once with your support group.

Explain the objectives of the upper room, and invite their suggestions and cooperation.

Decide on the target audience.

*Option 1: Baptized elementary school age children.*

*Option 2: All fourth through eighth graders with their families or sponsoring adults*

## **Preparation**

Ahead of time. Decide on the order of programme and assign the presentations to various speakers. See the programme outline. List the equipment needed and assign to helpers. Mail invitations; write bulletin announcements.

The day before. Prepare the room, bake the bread.

An hour before. Arrive early, put out the water, bread, wine.

## **Create Ambiance.**

Set up the room with reminders of things from Jesus' time. Provide a place at the door where people remove their shoes. Leave a pair of leather sandals there to set the A.D. 34 scene.

\*Have adult helpers dress in costume of Bible times.

\*Display a basket each of bread and grapes.

\*Play soft background music as people enter.

Initiating this service was one of the last acts of ministry that Jesus performed before He died, so make the service meaningful for everyone. He planned the service to symbolize His life and death and instruct us to do this "to remember Me."

## **Programme objectives**

As the result of this service, children will:

Know the meaning of the various symbols and the reason for taking part in the foot washing and the communion service.

Feel the joy of following Jesus' instruction "this do in remembrance of Me."

Respond by determining to always prepare for communion service. Plan Ahead. Here are some things to do ahead of time:

1. An area near the door where people may leave their shoes.
2. A table with bowls, towels, and water for foot washing.
3. A table set with the bread and wine.
4. Chairs in informal groupings or cushions on the floor.

Arrange for presenters to explain the Passover, foot washing, bread, wine, and disposal of the remaining emblems.

### **The Shopping List**

Decoration: candles, matches, small table with white cloth, flowers, picture of Jesus, cross, baskets of bread and grapes, pitcher, cups.

Food: grape juice, unleavened bread (see recipe below)

Foot washing: basins, towels, buckets of water, ladles or pitchers.

Mood: stereo music, costumes, materials for building a fire outside.

### **Programme Presentation**

*Welcome.* A team of greeters welcomes people as they arrive, explain the custom of removing shoes, invite the people to do so, and help them find a place to sit. Enough greeters will be needed so that nobody stands at the door, wondering what to do.

*Song Service.* Suggested songs from He Is Our Song, "Come into His Presence," 2; "Clap Your Hands," 13; "god So Loved the World," 43; "Special Delivery," 41. Suggested songs from Sing for Joy, "Oh, How He Loves You and Me," 28; "All Nations of the Earth," 22; "God Is with Us," 104.

*The Passover Explained.* Presenter A invites people to imagine themselves in the year 34 A.D. The Passover reminded people of the night that Israel left Egypt—blood was sprinkled on the door posts so that the angel of death would pass over. People ate a lamb with bitter herbs and unleavened bread. They were not to break any of the bones nor leave any until morning.

*Scripture Reading.* Mark 14:12-16. This reading may be done responsively or read while two disciples and a man carrying a water jar, all dressed in period costume, re-enact the scene.

At the conclusion of the scripture reading, Presenter A explains that the disciples were expecting a traditional Passover supper when they entered that upper room. But Jesus had planned something even more meaningful.

## **The Foot Washing**

*A. The custom explained.* Talk about the custom of walking the dusty roads of Palestine in open sandals so that feet quickly become dirty. Before reclining on the couch to eat, people washed both their hands and their feet. A servant often performed this task. The washing of feet still holds great significance in Asia and Africa where people wear open sandals and walk dusty paths. Touching another person's feet is a sign of humility. To wash somebody's feet says that you do not consider yourself better than they.

*B. Scripture Reading.* John 13:3-10 (Read from the New International Version, or half-read, half-tell the story.)

*C. Foot Washing.* One of the presenters explains the procedure; everyone will follow for the foot washing. As far as possible, pair a child with an adult. Invite everyone to hum or sing along with the background music. Let the children take their own towels and bowls back. Request each group to finish with prayer.

*D. Song.* Sing "Seek Ye First" (Sing for Joy, 67).

*E. Scripture.* John 13:12-17, NIV. The reader may give a paraphrase instead of reading.

## **The Bread**

*A. The Symbol.* Presenter B explains that the bread symbolizes the lamb that was slain for the Passover and for the temple service. After Jesus' death it would become a symbol of His body which was broken for our salvation. The bread was to be unleavened. That means that no yeast was used to make the dough rise, forming little air bubbles. In the Old Testament, yeast represented sin, this special unleavened bread was to be without "sin." In Jesus' day people broke off a piece of bread. In churches today the bread is usually broken by the minister. After people take a piece they hold it until the pastor indicates that it is time to eat it.

*B. Breaking the Bread.* The minister and/or elder breaks the bread and blesses it before the helpers serve each participant. Or have the participants come forward and break off a piece for themselves while the minister holds the basket.

*C. Eating the Bread.* Read 1Cor. 11:23-24. Pastor begins to eat bread and participants also.

## **The Wine**

*A. The Symbols:* Presenter C explains the grape juice as a symbol of the blood that was sprinkled on the door posts at the first Passover and later in the temple services. When Jesus died, grape juice became the symbol of His blood that paid the penalty for sin.

*B. Taking the Grape Juice:* Presenter C explains the procedure for receiving the juice, meditating on it until the signal is given to drink it. The pastor blesses the wine and stands at the front ready to serve it. He invites participants to come forward and take a cup that he pours for them (If the group is too large, have the wine already poured).

*C. Scripture and Warning:* Read 1 Cor. 11:25-26. The pastor (or Presenter C) explains Paul's warning about taking the bread and the wine without being properly prepared (1 Cor. 11:27-29). Allow time to meditate on the meaning of the wine and Jesus' death and our need to ask His forgiveness for sins.

*D. Drinking the Wine.* The pastor says, "Drink ye all of it" and begins to drink from his cup.

Disposing of the Leftover Emblems. Explain that in church we don't usually see what happens to the leftover wine and bread. In accordance with the Passover custom, the remaining wine is poured out on the ground, and the bread is burned before they become stale, because Christ's body did not decay in the tomb. In a safe place (take the group to the parking lot) pour out the wine and burn the bread. While the bread is burning, sing "Redeemed" (any version).

### **Close with a conversational prayer.**

Optional Sharing Service. Presenter D explains that in the early Advent church it was common for people to share their joy in serving Jesus with one another. Invite participants to tell how much Jesus means to them. This is not a time for tearful confessions; those should be done in private. This time is for sharing the joy of loving and serving Jesus. The presenter sets the tone by telling something personal Jesus has done for him/her during the past week.

### **Appendix**

#### Recipe for Unleavened Bread

2 cups whole wheat flour  
½ tsp salt  
7 tbsp oil (1/2 cup oil less 1 tbsp)  
½ cup water

Whip oil and water in blender until mixture turns white. Immediately add mixture to flour and salt and knead for several minutes until dough is elastic and ready for rolling. Roll out a thin (3/16") even layer directly onto cookie sheet. Score into 3/4" squares and prick each square with fork or toothpick. Bake at 350 degrees for 12-15 minutes. Do not overbake as when it becomes too brown it tastes bitter. (Yield: two cookie sheets full-approximately 400-500 pieces.) If communion bread is frozen, reheat for a few minutes at low temperature before using.

A PlusLine.org Idea Resource