



**Mennonite
Church**
Canada

Resource Centre

From our Churches

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Children and Communion

A service of Inclusion

Peter Zacharias, Pastor of Blumenort Mennonite Church in Gretna, Manitoba, said and reviewed the following in a telephone conversation with Elsie Rempel, Director of Christian Education and Nurture, on December 22, 2005.

Introductory comments

- I've struggled with how to include children in Communion for a number of years, especially after participating in a Clinical Pastoral Course in Morden with pastors from the United and Catholic Churches who have developed good ways of including children.
- I've also worshipped in an Anglican service passing through Moose Jaw. I introduced myself to the priest before the service. Later, during communion, he said to me "The blood of Christ shed for you, Peter". It meant a lot. I realized then, how important it was to use a person's name when giving them the elements.
- I make it part of my ministry to know every baby and child in my church by name.
- Sending children away while adults celebrate communion, which is what we have done previously, reminds me of my childhood when I was not permitted to attend Communion. I wondered what was going on, wondered if this ritual was totally above board. Why were they drinking wine, which we didn't drink otherwise?
- Lorne and Donna Enns, missionaries in Burkina Faso are our mission partners. Recently, when they were on NA assignment, they conducted what we called an 'African Love Feast' in our church basement. I wouldn't have gotten away with this yet, but they did. We sat in a circle; there was a circular dance movement and we received food with a spiritual meaning attached to it. This influenced me and paved the way for the way we conducted our last communion service.
- In an earlier prayer service, I had invited children to come forward, and receive a chocolate as a way of experiencing the love of Jesus. Why chocolate? That was inspired by the Jewish ritual at bar/batmizvah where they put a drop of honey on the Bible, so that the young person will taste and see that the Lord is good. I didn't want the mess of honey. Chocolate is also sweet, but it is wrapped and clean.
- I hardly slept the night before this service.

Describing the Communion Service

At this Communion service, my wife, Valentine, and I served together.

Part 1:

I invited the children to come forward in a line, like at an Anglican Communion service. Val held the basket filled with wrapped chocolates, and gave them to me. I gave them to each child and said “Jesus loves you”.

The children just loved it. Their beaming faces were a real blessing and confirmation to me that doing this was right. Expressing the fact that Jesus loves them in this concrete way and telling each one so personally, was very meaningful. (I didn’t mention their name though, because of concern about the impact of forgetting a name, or the importance of including a visiting child equally)

Part 2:

We have a large number of youth who are in two large groups. There are 25 in grades 7 and 8 and another 40 in Grades 9 -12. We have a full time youth pastor who works with them.

I couldn’t use chocolates because then the Jr Highs would object to being treated like children. So we purchased and wrapped breadsticks.

Val held them in a basket and passed them to me. I held the breadstick for them and they had to break a piece off. Together, Val and I had pondered, “What do I tell them? How do I maintain my Mennonite integrity?”

I invited all junior and senior youth. Even if they were baptized and intended to participate in the third part of the service, I wanted them to come forward for this part where every youth was equal.

To each one I said, “Jesus died for you. Serve him with joy”. I did not put the onus on their faith but emphasized Jesus action and that one of the best things to do with your life is to serve Jesus. The youth leaders told me this had been very meaningful for the youth. They had just come from an inspiring youth retreat and this was an important way of being acknowledged and accepted by the church.

Part 3:

I knew had to include the deacons meaningfully in this service as well and couldn’t cut them out of serving in the Communion experience. They had been a bit uneasy, when I told them what I was going to do. I assured them that we would serve the 3rd part for all who are baptized and believe (I didn’t include “upon confession of their faith because we have some Catholics among us) along the benches in traditional Mennonite style. I read the same passages as usual. We wanted participation in this part to be a genuine expression of their commitment to Jesus. We made it clear that this is for believers so that there is no trivializing of the faith. This is important to me and many older people in our congregation.