*Hey Pastor Brian, what is the appropriate age for my child to receive their first communion?*

This is a good question. First communion can and does happen at many different ages throughout congregations of the ELCA. A guiding resource from the ELCA called the *Use of the Means of grace* notes that, *“There is no command from our Lord regarding the age at which people should be…first communed.”*

The age at which people receive communion for the first time has varied over time. Some folks have shared with me that they received their first communion at the time of their confirmation. Other have received communion at fifth grade, and at St. Stephen the Martyr we have followed the practice of third grade as the age for first communion.

The *Use of the Means of Grace* offers some guidance about receiving the sacrament of holy communion as it comes from the invitation of the Lord. *“Baptized children begin to commune on a regular basis at a time determined through mutual conversation that includes the pastor, the child, and the parents or sponsors involved, within the accepted practices of the congregation.”*

With our church council and youth and family teams we have begun some conversation about communion practices, specifically the age at which first communion takes place. I look forward to continued dialogue as well.

At SSM, in recent years the practice has been that youth receive their first communion on Maundy Thursday after an instructional class. This year we will be trying something different as we will have some instruction using a resource called *Fed and Forgiven* in May and children can receive their first communion on Pentecost Sunday, June 4. Parents can help in the decision of deciding if they feel their child is ready at a younger age than 3rd grade.

You may ask, “Okay Pastor Brian, how do I know if my child is ready to receive communion?” A child’s readiness is best determined by a parent or one who knows the child well. Here are a few guiding questions to consider…

*Has she or he been baptized?* *Is your child comfortable in various locations around the church, including the altar?* *Will the child extend his or her hands when asked to do so?* *Is he/she aware enough of others in the congregation and their needs to show a degree of respect for their communion experience?* *Are you as parents or caregivers prepared to help make this a positive process?*

These are just a few questions to consider, you do not have to say yes to all these before your child is ready to receive their first communion. More information about holy communion will be shared in the weeks ahead as well as information about instruction time in May.

This month in April we journey with Jesus to the cross and reflect on the meaning of Jesus life, death, and resurrection for us. As we remember Jesus’ being a servant to all we will follow his example and have foot washing as part of worship on Maundy Thursday, April 13. Why not step out of your comfort zone and try it? We move forward together faithful friends.

Peace, Pastor Brian