

# Children as Apprentices in the Eucharist

## The Whole Congregation Can Gain a New Understanding

Congregations likely recognize that faith development is more than just sharing information. The Eucharist can be a profound educative tool. The practice of apprenticeship to involve children fully in the Eucharist can inspire the entire church community while developing the children's faith.

The Eucharist is a transformative experience, and by regularly including children in our deepest transformative experiences, we move faith instruction beyond simple "telling"—we invite children to share our faith.

Children who take part in the Eucharist have the power to strengthen its meaning. As they contribute meaningfully to the experience of the Eucharist, they begin to own their faith. Participating in all tasks associated with the Eucharist allows them to experience the visceral component of their faith.

From the various teams and guilds that support the Eucharist, children also learn the skills that guide them toward full inclusion in the faith community.

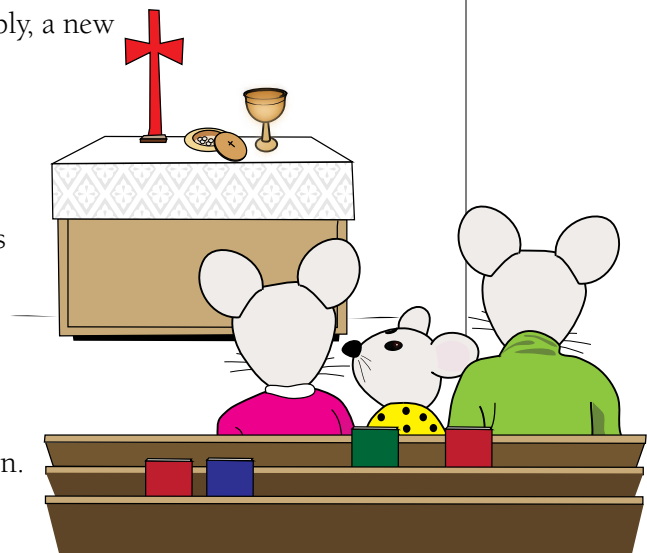
For the congregation, how to best include children in the Eucharist intensifies their contemplation of church activities. Inevitably, a new understanding emerges.

## How We Do What We Do ... and Why

Children's participation in the Eucharist requires a multi-faceted community effort.

To begin, guided by the faith community's leaders and educators, guild and team leaders who support the Eucharist could explain the simplest aspects of their tasks to the older children.

Young children benefit most from observation.



Distant observation occurs while children are present in the sanctuary.

Close observation happens while children stand beside someone who is engaged in a task. Guild and team leaders can model and explain what they are doing. While leaders guide children, leaders consider **how** they do what they do and **why**.

Easy “hands-on” tasks, when combined with guidance, encourage a child’s appreciation of the Eucharist. When children’s knowledge transforms through participation in a particular task, they are ready to try other tasks. Children carry their transformative knowledge into new and different experiences. As they gather understanding, they move closer to the heart of the community and begin to comprehend what exactly they are being invited to become—practising Christians.

### **Can All Children Participate?**

Some children will be too young to participate in any aspect of the service. Though cut-off ages are helpful, they may curtail the participation of children who, through regular attendance, have the experience to take on challenging tasks. Both the amount of time that a child has spent observing the service and parental interest are good indicators of what a child might be able to take on.

Any child who is actively observing and following the activities of others during the Eucharist is participating through observation. Even though a child may not be actively participating in eucharistic tasks, the presence of young children can have a significant effect on how eucharistic tasks happen.

*Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.” (Matthew 19:14)*

### **How Will Members of the Congregation Become Interested?**

Integration of children into the Eucharist happens as members of the faith community find a similar understanding of what children mean to the faith community.

Likewise, through the process of introduction, leaders will emerge who are willing to integrate children into their guilds and teams; some team leaders may already include children. The participation of these leaders could help



provide a blueprint for other guilds and teams to include children in their tasks—the method of inclusion will be different for every congregation.

## **A Vibrant, Transformative Eucharist**

As members of the faith community interact during the apprenticeship experience, new awareness emerges. Children learn the skills that guide them toward full inclusion in the faith community. Children change the roles that they play in church as they move closer to the centre of the activity. We can begin to consider children anew. We witness a vibrant, transformative Eucharist.

## **References**

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- Wertsch, J.V. 1985. *Vygotsky and the Social Formation of Mind*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
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## **Starting the Apprenticeship Experience**

1. Begin by talking with the clergy.
2. With the help of clergy, contact parents as well as team and guild leaders.
3. Discuss ways of including children in the eucharistic tasks.
  - a. The Welcoming Team is a great place to start.
4. Decide on a date for your first Children’s Gift Sunday.
5. Provide a task rota for the older and/or experienced children and their families, so that they know what they are doing.
  - a. Parents will likely be proud of their children’s participation and will become your best allies. Do not underestimate the power of dinner conversations that can happen when parents are truly interested in what their children are learning.
6. Provide a welcoming area for the younger and inexperienced children who are participating.



- a. Make sure that they have a clear view of the altar.
  - b. Consider having some engaging visual books and activities, such as puzzles.
  - c. Continually and joyfully redirect attention from the provided activities to the altar activities.
  - d. Know that during times of long texts, younger and inexperienced children who direct their attention to the alternate activities you have provided may still be listening!
7. Know that probably it will take some time for the congregation to get used to the children's apprenticeship and the gentle noise that may happen as they learn the practices of the Eucharist.
    - a. Generally, by the seventh apprenticeship Eucharist you will start to see the "fruits" of your labours. The time may vary, depending on how many new children you have welcomed and the culture of your church community. Remember, a little bit of noise from the children is a clear sign that your church has a future.
  8. Write about your experience on the General Synod website. Photographs are greatly appreciated—see **Photo Permission Form**.

