

OAKS

PARISH

Children's Membership Guide

Children & Membership

The aim of our children's membership process is seen in the story of young fish. A couple of young fish are swimming along one day. A bigger, older fish swims toward them, and as he passes by the big fish asks, "How's the water?" Swimming further on, one of the little fish turns to the other and asks, "What's water?" The aim of children's discipleship at Oaks Parish is to help kids realize the environment in which they swim—namely, God's love and faithfulness. We want our children to learn to abide in Christ Jesus for the renewal of all things.

Fundamentally, the process of children becoming members of the church is no different from that of adults. Both children and adults affirm the five membership questions used across our denomination, the Presbyterian Church in America (P.C.A.). The first four membership questions focus on the gospel and so children who are 'communing members' should have a basic understanding of the gospel and embrace faith in Christ Jesus personally. This confession typically happens through a long process of discipleship that includes family devotions, prayer, conversations at home, and discipleship classes at church. Question number five has to do with one's relationship with the church and involves three primary elements; praying for the church, living generously toward the church, and handling sin and conflict in a biblical way (Matthew 18:15-20). Children can learn these formative rhythms in natural ways. Prayer for the church can happen during devotional time, on the way to school, or before a meal. Tithing to the church and giving to someone in need forms a child's vision for personal finance management (practice with allowance money, for example). Finally, sin and conflict are not hard to find in a child's life. The framework of Matthew 18:15-20 can help a child look to Jesus through the freeing power of repentance and faith. This framework also equips a child to navigate conflict with others in a holy way. The five membership questions guide children in what it means to follow Jesus and live out their faith in the church for the world.

In becoming a church member, no child will be able to articulate a theologically sophisticated gospel description. Nor will any child be perfectly consistent in praying for the church, giving generously, or resolving issues of conflict and sin. But that's the point of the gospel in the first place! Children simply need to look to Jesus for life and salvation, and that's the basis for membership at Oaks. Following Jesus as baptized members of the church, children grow through the formative rhythms of membership.

Guiding the Membership Process

Each fall, we take our kids to the Corn Maze on Sauvie Island, where we face the challenge of working together as a family to reach the finish line. We could go about this in a few different ways. If a farm employee guided us through the maze, it would be a simple process due to the employee's expert knowledge, but it wouldn't be a very meaningful experience for us as a family. On the other hand, if we walked in and wandered around, we might be doing it together but end up pretty lost. There's a third option. Before entering the maze, we pick up a guide comprised of easy-to-answer trivia questions. The guide helps our family make the right decisions inside the maze.

Helping children become communing members of the church can sometimes feel like a maze. Some churches host confirmation classes where experts, usually pastoral staff, teach and guide students through the process. Children often get the support they need, but it's not a very meaningful experience for the family. On the other hand, without any direction from the church, many families feel lost navigating membership with their children. At Oaks Parish, we follow a third way. We welcome children into membership through the ongoing partnership between families and the church. No child should feel pressured into membership. Instead, they should follow Jesus as he calls. In this way, we hope to resource the families of our church as they guide their children in becoming gospel-centered members of Christ's church. Simply put, we want to provide helpful direction in the maze.

Practically, this process can play out in two different ways depending on your experience thus far in the church. First, some children are on a 'Covenant Path'. In this scenario, a child becomes a non-communing member of the church through their baptism early on in life. This child is definitively a member of the body, but they've yet to express faith in Christ personally. Eventually, the child begins to profess faith in Christ, an eternal reality worth celebrating! Then, in a membership conference with one of our OP Kids leaders and an elder, children confess their faith and affirm the five membership questions. We celebrate their faith in worship, recognizing their communion at the Lord's Supper for the first time.

Other children follow a 'Credal Path.' Maybe the family is new to faith, participated in a church community that didn't baptize infants, or waited to baptize their child. In this scenario, children experience discipleship and begin personally professing faith. Again, this is an eternal reality worth celebrating! In a membership conference with one of our OP Kids leaders and an elder, children confess their faith and affirm the five membership questions. After that, we publicly celebrate their faith in worship through baptism and communion for the first time.

Covenant Path

Child → Early Baptism → Discipleship → Profession of Faith → Membership Conference → Lord's Supper

Credal Path

Child → Discipleship → Profession of Faith → Membership Conference → Baptism → Lord's Supper

Preparing Your Child for Membership Conference

A child's membership conference should be the fruit of a cumulative process of discipleship. We recommend using the resources below to cultivate gospel faith with children. To prepare a child for the membership conference, spend time reviewing the Covenant Membership Questions with them. Unpack the meaning of each question as discussed in Membership Gathering and ensure that they can answer each question in the affirmative. Most children cannot share a fully formed story of faith and a vivid personal testimony often comes with the benefit of hindsight and maturity. Therefore, in the membership conference, we're not listening for specific answers but looking for evidence of the Holy Spirit's work in a child's heart.

Covenant Membership Questions

1. Do you believe the Scriptures to be the Word of God and the final authority for life and faith?
2. Do you acknowledge your need for the grace of God, humbling yourself, offering no morality or righteousness of your own, but asking only for the mercy of God in Christ?
3. Do you accept Christ as the Sacrifice for your sin, as the Prophet for all your truth, and as the King of all your life, resting on him and his righteousness alone for your salvation?
4. Do you now resolve to live a life worthy of your calling, growing in the gospel of Christ and trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit for life?
5. Do you promise to support this communion with your prayers and offerings, to pursue its purity and peace, and to submit to its leadership according to the Scriptures?

Resources for Nurturing Gospel Faith

- *New City Catechism* A great devotional and theological resource for discipleship at home. There are several versions of this resource geared to younger and older children as well as an app for iPhone/iPad.
- *Why Do We Baptize Infants?* By Brian Chapell-This book provides a fundamental understanding of baptism and address why we baptize infants and young children.
- *What is the Lord's Supper?* By Richard D. Phillips-This book provides a fundamental understanding of the Lord's Supper.
- *You Are What You Love* By Jamie Smith-This is an Oaks Parish favorite that points to the power of formative rhythms. In this book, Smith lays out the dynamics and aim of Christian education and discipleship. This is not a children's book, but rather one that will help you think about discipleship for your children.
- *Faithful Families*, Traci Smith
- *To Dance with God*, Gertrud Mueller Nelson
- *Read A Loud Bible Stories* (various volumes), Ella Lindvall
- *Jesus is Alive* and other stories, Kees De Kort
- *The Jesus Storybook Bible*, Sally Lloyd Jones
- *Thoughts to Make Your Heart Sing*, Sally Lloyd Jones
- *Lectio for Families* app

- *The Ology* by Marty Machowski
- *Gospel Parenting* by Paul David Tripp
- *Storybooks* by David Pawlison and Ed Welch
- *The Whole Brain Child* by Daniel Siegel and Tina Bryson
- *Good Inside* by Becky Kennedy