Mercy Presbyterian Church- *Membership Process for Children*

Purpose and Definition:

We believe that God reveals Himself in Scripture through covenants. To the extent that this covenantal relationship is so prevalent within the Old and New Testaments, we believe it is helpful to see that all of God's revelation can be summarized by its understanding within this Covenant Theology. Within Scripture and covenant theology, there is provision, not only for believers, but also the children of believers inside this covenant family (Genesis 17:1-14, Acts 2:39).

Therefore, in accordance with Scripture, we believe that although young children are born and exist in sin, they are specially marked out from the world, and thus we describe them as "non-communing members" within the visible church. In Chapter 6 of our Book of Church Order there is a helpful distinction made between the non-communing and communing member of a PCA church. 6-1 says: "The children of believers are, through the covenant and by right of birth, *non-communing members* of the church. Hence they are entitled to baptism, and to the pastoral oversight, instruction and government of the church, with a view to their embracing Christ and thus possessing personally all benefits of the covenant." In comparison 6-2 says: "*Communing members* are those who have made a profession of faith in Christ, have been baptized, and have been admitted by the Session to the Lord's Table." These instructions, principles drawn from Scriptural truths impress upon us the unique responsibility to these children and encourages us to take seriously the work of God in their lives (*see Christ's example in Matthew 19:13-15).*

Families are encouraged to guide and instruct their children concerning sin, redemption, and its application through the Scriptures. Believers' children should be*, "taught to love God, and to obey and serve the Lord Jesus Christ. When they are able to understand the Gospel, they should be earnestly reminded that they are members of the Church by birthright, and that it is their duty and privilege personally to accept Christ, to confess Him before men, and to seek admission to the Lord's Supper* (PCA Book of Church Order 57-1)." It is important to note that children who make a public profession of faith and are admitted by the Session to the Lord's Table are not joining our church. Rather, they are already members (non-communing) by virtue of their birth into a Christian home and are simply changing their status from non-communing to communing members by a personal profession of faith. This is the culmination of what we have witnessed so many times in the church, during the baptism of our children. The key difference between communing and non-communing membership is that a communicant member of the church is an individual who has made a credible public profession of personal faith and whose life gives evidence of union with Christ Jesus.

Self Examination (parts borrowed from *Holy Trinity)*:

It's important that families be aware of both the seriousness of the Lord's Supper and the characteristics of saving faith. First considering the Lord's Supper, the apostle Paul tells us, "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup." This warning, along with the instruction on how we ought to take part in the Lord's Supper earlier in this chapter and in other passages, provides at least two important things to keep in mind. First, this table is not *our* table or any particular churches table, but it is the table of the Lord Jesus Christ. In taking Communion we are eating the Lord's bread, drinking the Lord's cup, and there is a spiritual presence of the Lord as we participate. So much so, that the text says that those who eat and drink in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the *body* and the *blood* of Jesus Himself. By implication, there is a right and wrong way to go about taking part in the Lord's Supper, and it is Jesus Himself, and not particular churches, who dictates the right way to take part in communion. It is clear from Scripture that Jesus Christ desires that Christian's who take their faith, church, and walk with the Lord seriously should take part in the Lord's Supper. Those Christian's should be living under the rule of Christ Jesus, without secret unrepentant sin, and living according to the commands of God and the nature of Christ Himself, not perfectly but sincerely and with evident fruit. To take part in communion apart from this would be to participate in an unworthy manner.

Second, it's crucial for parents to understand and examine the nature of saving faith as it pertains to their children. Saving faith is a change affected by the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer in which the believer exemplifies

characteristics which include a hate for sin, a love for Christ and the things of Christ, a pursuit of holiness, a desire to bring glory to God, heavenly joy in the midst of worldly challenges, and the growing fruits of the Spirit in their life. There is a noticeable change between the unregenerate and the regenerate heart. Parents ought to look for these characteristics in their children which *accompany* saving faith and a public profession of the same. Parents ought to also be mindful of things which have the appearance of true faith but are not. Parroting is a typical danger in Christian families in which children mimic the behavior or language of their parents, which is fruitful for children as they grow but which needs to be distinguished from actual, saving faith. Overvaluing the public profession apart from fruit; a contemporary issue is the emphasis on "praying a prayer" without teaching and seeing a changed heart in your children. A Christian is a follower of Christ who has Godly sorrow concerning their sin and whose life has come into submission to the Lord Jesus Christ, in word and in deed. Finally, parents ought to trust the timing and the work of the Holy Spirit. God has a plan for our families and our children and often we can be impatient with God. The truth of the matter is that as parents we will see the hand of God at work in our children's lives from infancy. Salvation is a process of God that we experience in time and space, and we ought to not feel the pressure to rush our children or to nail down a time and a date of their profession of faith. It is our hope that as God works in our children, and as parents are faithful in their ministry to their children, they will not remember a day when they did not know the love and care of Christ Jesus their Lord.

It is a vital role that parents play in the life of their children. Parents, this is the mission field that God has called you to, preach the gospel to your children in season and out of season understanding that God has uniquely called you to faithfully minister to these young children of the covenant.

The Process and Timing (include helpful questions):

Our plan is to offer a *"Communicant's Class"* to our children. We desire that our children, together with their parents, who believe that they have transitioned from living under a family faith to a more personal, visible, and internal faith of their own, to attend this class as part of their admittance to the church as communing members. In addition, we also welcome other children who may not have their own profession of faith, but nonetheless may be interested in learning more about faith in Christ and would find the class beneficial in their growth and understanding.

The *Communicant's Class* is a 4-week class meant to help cement and increase the child's understanding of their salvation in Christ and membership in the church, but it cannot function as a crutch or stand-alone tool for training young Christians. For children, the Communicant's Class, is often only as effective as the preparation that has been done at home through the work of the parents by the power of the Spirit of God. To that end, we strongly encourage parents before and during the class to be actively involved in their children's learning and understanding. We strongly encourage parents to join their child in class each week. For parents who are unable to be there with them, we recommend they ask their child what they learned in the class each week. Inquire into the nature of their faith. Talk with them about baptism, whether they have already been or whether they will be, upon being received as a communing member. Be sure to emphasize the importance of church membership and the seriousness of becoming a communing member of the visible church. We cannot overstate the importance of the involvement of parents in the life of the child, especially as they wrestle with their own personal faith.

The Communicant's Class will deal extensively with the membership questions of the PCA; the same questions that your children will be asked to affirm if they become a communing member of the church. We strongly encourage parents to begin talking about these questions (provided here) with your children in preparation:

1. Do you acknowledge yourselves to be sinners in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure, and without hope save in His sovereign mercy?
2. Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation as He is offered in the Gospel?
3. Do you now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes the followers of Christ?
4. Do you promise to support the church in its worship and work to the best of your ability?
5. Do you submit yourselves to the government and discipline of the church, and promise to study its purity and

peace?

During the Communicant's Class, children will be asked to complete accompanying worksheets, on certain key doctrines and their own profession of faith in Christ Jesus.

Following the Communicant's Class, children will be encouraged to discuss with their parents their desire to become a communing member of the church. If the child desires to become a communing member, a time will be scheduled with a pastor and an elder of the church. Prior to an interview, the child will be asked to provide Communicant's Class worksheets for the reflection of the elders.

If, through extenuating circumstances, a child is ready to become a communing member of the church and is unable to attend the class, there are alternative avenues available at the request of the parents.