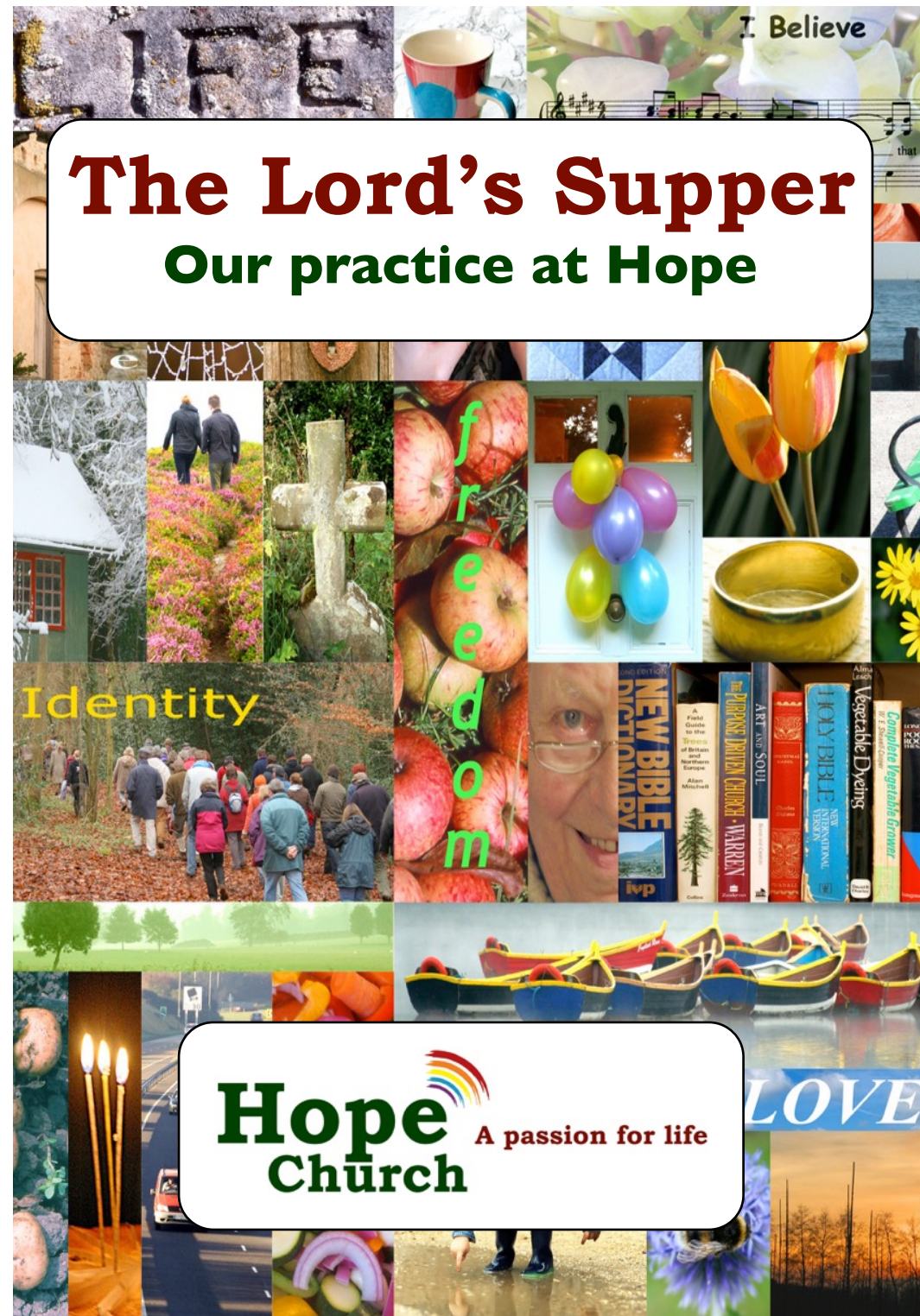




The Lord's Supper

Our practice at Hope

Identity

Hope Church
A passion for life

faith and commitment to the Lord is credible, and if/when the child has been baptised (either, within the framework of infant baptism, as the child of believing parents; or as a believer in their own right), then they are not only allowed but encouraged to take part in the Lord's Supper. The first time that a child takes part in the Lord's Supper, the one presiding may draw attention to this fact and welcome them.

The Lord's Supper is one of our most joyful and inclusive occasions, and we do not set any bounds to our practice lightly or without careful consideration. But Paul warns against participating in the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner as this would be eating and drinking judgement on oneself,¹⁰ and tells the churches to ensure that in our meetings everything should be done 'decently and in order'.¹¹ We hope that these minimal rules will help us to do so.

The elders, March 2015

*(Policy is reviewed every 3 years – contact the elders
with any suggestions for future revision)*

¹ Luke 22:19; Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17; 11:17ff.

² See e.g. Matthew 26:27; 1 Corinthians 10:17; 11:33

³ 1 Corinthians 11:24–26

⁴ 1 Corinthians 11:28

⁵ Matthew 5:23-24

⁶ In an exceptional circumstance, where a visitor was known to be living unrepentantly in a way that was bringing disgrace on the Gospel, some intervention by the elders might be appropriate; just as, in a serious case of discipline within the church family, suspension from the Lord's Supper may be deemed necessary for a time.

⁷ 1 Corinthians 10:16

⁸ 1 Corinthians 11:29

⁹ In John 6:53-57 Jesus links the symbolic eating of his flesh and drinking of his blood with having eternal life.

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 11:27-29

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 14:40.

The Lord's Supper – our practice at Hope

Summary We welcome at the Lord's Supper all fellow disciples of the Lord Jesus. Before taking part, we encourage everyone to examine themselves in their relationship with the Lord and particularly with others, in order to recognise the significance of the self-giving sacrifice, which we are celebrating, of the Lord Jesus for our sins. Children are warmly welcome to be present, but we ask that they should first declare their own faith through baptism/confirmation before taking part in the bread and wine.

Introduction We are regularly asked what is the policy of Hope Church regarding participation in the Lord's Supper by children, and by those visiting from other churches. This paper sets out to answer those questions briefly, and to offer some guidance to those responsible for presiding at the Lord's Supper.

At the Lord's Supper, sometimes known as 'Communion' or 'the breaking of bread', God's people celebrate together his amazing grace to us through the willing sacrificial death of our Lord Jesus. The bread and wine are symbols that point us to Jesus' body and blood, given up to death on the cross so that we can, by faith in him, be made right with God, receiving forgiveness and new life. Jesus told his disciples to remember him through the Lord's Supper and this became the regular practice of the first Christians.¹

Although the Lord's Supper should therefore be both a solemn and a joyful occasion, it has at times, sadly, also been an occasion for disharmony within the church, even from the earliest days (1 Corinthians 11). It has always been necessary for churches to lay down certain guidelines about how the Lord's Supper should be celebrated and about who may take part.

We are aware that within Hope Church there is a certain range of viewpoints about who may take the Lord's Supper, and particularly about the

basis on which children may do so. As elders seeking the unity and good order of the church, we need to ensure that our practice reflects our current best understanding of what Scripture teaches. We also need to explain our practice clearly so that it can be applied fairly and consistently. We readily acknowledge that fellow believers in other churches may in good conscience choose to follow different practices, and we ask those within Hope who might disagree with us to bear with us in grace.

When do we celebrate the Lord's Supper? The Lord's Supper is given for Christians to celebrate together as the body of Christ, and is normally celebrated at a time when the whole church meets together.² There is no rule in Scripture as to how often this should be: our current practice is to celebrate it on the first Sunday of each month, but it could be more frequent. Unlike some churches, however, we do not insist that the Lord's Supper is restricted to whole-church gatherings: we are happy for smaller groups within the church to celebrate it together in an orderly and seemly way. The Lord's Supper is not normally celebrated by individuals on their own, but special provision should be made for those who are house-bound.

Who may 'preside' at the Lord's Supper? The Bible does not restrict this role, and we believe that, under the general discipline of the elders, any church member may lead the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Who may take the Lord's Supper? The Lord's Supper is for all believers. Not only may all believers take part, but all believers *should* take part. Some within Hope hold that the Lord's Supper is a 'sacrament', a specific means by which God grants his grace to believers. Others hold that it is simply a memorial. Either way, we are commanded to take part in the Lord's Supper regularly and often, as a reminder, a celebration and a proclamation of the New Covenant in Jesus.³

Paul tells us to examine ourselves before we take part,⁴ not in order to find a reason to exclude ourselves but to ensure that we are in appropriate relationships with the Lord and everyone else so that we *can* take part. This is parallel to the way Jesus tells us to put right our relationships with one another promptly so that we can appear acceptably in the Lord's presence.⁵ The one presiding at the Lord's Table may specifically encourage the congregation to examine themselves in this way before proceeding to the bread and wine.

What about visitors? All who are baptised disciples of Jesus are welcome to join with us in the Lord's Supper. Visitors, like ourselves, should examine themselves to ensure they are in a proper state to take part. So if a visitor is with us because sin or broken relationships make it uncomfortable or impossible for them to join with their own church, this might well be a reason for them not to take part. But we do not believe it is for us to police other people's consciences, and in most cases we leave it to the individual to decide.⁶

What about children? In the Old Testament children took part in various meals that the people of Israel enjoyed in the presence of God (e.g. Deuteronomy 14:26), and the Lord's Supper is a meal that God's people eat together in his presence. Our children are warmly included in the life of the church family. However, to participate in the Lord's Supper we believe children need to come to a personal faith of their own in Jesus.

The Lord's Supper is a participation in the body and blood of Christ,⁷ and those who take part in it are told to 'examine themselves' beforehand, and to recognise that they are celebrating with the wider body of believers.⁸ We believe it is proper therefore to restrict participation to those who have come to a personal faith in Jesus and his sacrifice for their sins,⁹ and who have some measure of ability to reflect on their faith, their standing with the Lord, and what they are doing in coming to the Lord's table with the church. We therefore welcome any child to join with us in the Lord's Supper who has come to faith and been baptised.

At what age might a child take the Lord's Supper? There is no age restriction. A child, like any believer, must be able to make a credible profession of faith (this is one that *can* be believed, rather than one that compels belief; it can be expressed in very simple form, and does not require great depth of theological understanding). We actively discourage any pressure being put on children to 'make a decision'. Some may grow up not remembering a time when they did not believe. Others may have many questions and doubts, which they need to be able to articulate and discuss. We leave the onus therefore on the child to ask to take the Lord's Supper, when they feel it is appropriate to do so.

When a child wants to take the Lord's Supper, we ask that they first meet with an elder to discuss their faith. If the elder is satisfied that the child's