

How I'm Talking to My Children

Rev. Jim Morrow

What about my children? Can they vote at the Church Conference? If they're full, professing members, they can. So, not only do we have to navigate this season for ourselves, but we've also got to figure out how to navigate it with our kids, too.

Let's be honest. This is uncomfortable for us as adults. Imagine how uncomfortable it must be for kids and teens. Talking to our children about serious topics isn't easy. Similarly, it isn't easy to discern what is wise to discuss with our children and how to do it. Every child is at a different stage of life with unique personalities and needs.

Amanda and I have three children living in our home, each active in the church. Two of them are full, professing members eligible to vote at our Church Conference. Because we have children across different ages, stages, and membership statuses, our family demographic might connect with yours. So, I would like to share how Amanda and I are talking to our children about our Church Conference.

While we are part of a "First" church, **our home is our first church**. You can imagine that as pastor's kids, my kids are at the church *a lot* (and you'd be right!). However, as much as they are at church, it only amounts to an average of 3% of the hours in a year. Our kids will spend more time elsewhere, shaped by media, peers, and other means—much of which will seek to form them as consumers, constituents, and more. That tells me that Amanda and I must be intentional in our children's Christian formation. As such, we are taking an active role in discussing the Church Conference with them.

1. We are clear on the membership status of children. While our seven-year-old has been baptized and has given her heart to Jesus, she is not yet a full, professing church member. Therefore, she will not be eligible to vote at the Church Conference. My teenage boys are full, professing members of the church. They were baptized as infants and later, through Confirmation, stood before the church and willingly took their membership vows. They will be eligible to vote. (If you aren't sure if your children are full, professing members, go ahead and give the office a call!)

2. We are informing and inviting, not insisting. There are many things we insist our children do. For some things, though, we want our children to exercise their agency and do what they feel called and equipped to do.

While our boys can vote, we do not insist they do so. They have full rights as members of the church to vote. However, we recognize that they may feel uncomfortable being involved in such a weighty and sensitive decision. Whichever decision they make, they will know that we support them and are proud of their choice.

It is worth noting that if we had very young children who were members, we would use our judgment about allowing them to vote if we felt that it was too intense or challenging a topic for them. We would not, however, prevent our children from voting simply because they may vote in a way we didn't like.

3. We are educating and praying with them. First, we are not hiding this matter from any of our children. Our youngest is aware that our church is praying about important decisions. At the same time, we are careful to recognize what information is helpful for her to know and how to share it according to her stage of development. We gladly share answers to her questions, but again, we frame things carefully to avoid unnecessarily overburdening her young heart.

Our older children are fully aware of the subjects and nature of the Church Conference. We want them to understand the conversation, why it's happening, and their potential choices. We are using the information that our church has provided, openly answering all questions. It's important to note that, though we want our children to understand all aspects of these matters, they are being raised in our household. We are very clear with them about what we believe to be faithful biblical and theological teaching.

Above all, we are praying together for our church. We're praying for each other, the Church Conference, and our beloved church members.

4. If they vote, their vote will be their vote. We will not make our children vote a certain way. Nor will we use them as proxy votes for our positions. We don't want to use our children as objects. If they choose to vote, they know they must be thoroughly and prayerfully educated.

This has been a window into how my family is discussing this. I hope it helps you have important discussions with your family. I'd love to hear your helpful insights, too. You are valuable partners in raising our children, so your wisdom means a lot to us.

Know that I'm praying for you and your children and teens. We're here to help you and walk with you. Please feel free to contact me, Allison Vandenberg, or Phillip George if we can assist you in any way.

Note: You can find my other reflections on our upcoming Church Conference, including "Frequently Asked Questions with Pastor Jim," on our website at www.firstmethodistalbany.com/discernment.