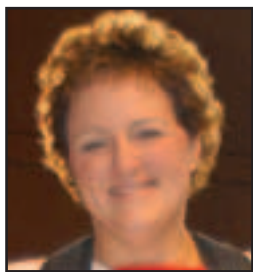


# LIVE B.I.G. Salutes Carolyn Scanlan-Craighead



Carolyn Scanlan-Craighead is Minister of Joy and Celebration at St. Luke's United Methodist Church in Indianapolis, Indiana. She believes whenever the family of God meets together for worship, communion should be served. On the forthcoming Live B.I.G. video—prepared as part of a children's Sunday school resource by the United Methodist Publishing

House—she asks children what their families do when they get together for family celebrations. The children reply that they play board games, go outdoors, get presents—and eat meals together.

Dr. Scanlan-Craighead then says, “And do you know what? Some 2000 years ago Jesus was no different from us. Jesus gathered with his family and his friends, and they shared in meals and celebrations together.

“One of those days he was with his friends in the upper room and he thought to himself, ‘How is it that my friends will be able to remember me even if I’m no longer physically present with them?’

“And he thought and he thought, and then he realized that everybody must eat and drink every day.

“So Jesus used food as a way for us to remember him always.”

Dr. Scanlan-Craighead leads two contemporary worship services every Sunday. “We have 13 services on Sundays here, not all on-site, for about 3,000 worshippers,” she says. As her title suggests, she isn't inclined to focus upon the gloomier aspects of crucifixion, blood, and flesh.

**Q. In the Live B.I.G. video, you're explaining communion to children. How difficult is that?**

A. I think that communion is a wonderful gift to us and really does hold us all together from our past to our present to our

future. It's the place where we can gather to meet Christ. Jesus, being the host of the table, invites everyone, which I think is profound. He invites everyone to a feast of life. When we eat, when we share in communion, we're reminded that that's what we need to give us the true energy for living our everyday life. For children, the analogy of putting together a meal, a tangible event that they can associate with Jesus (rather than focusing on blood and flesh) really works. I focus more on the meal and that Jesus is the host of the meal that gives us the energy we need to make it on each step of the journey; it is a place to meet Jesus. For me, this is central to worship. I lead two worship services here each Sunday, and we have Holy Communion every week at those services. And often we'll have children help share the Eucharist, we'll have families help share the Eucharist—it's a family event for us, it's a family meal where we're given the food of true life.

*The meal offers us an opportunity to stand in the loving arms of Jesus Christ and to be empowered by the energy of Jesus' love. That's what is powerful with children. I think that the communion table is a wonderful place to remind children that the spark of God is within them through the power of Jesus Christ.*

**Q. Article XVIII of the Articles of Religion of the United Methodist Church describes the Lord's Supper as something we must be worthy of partaking. Is this a concept that children understand or that they need to understand?**

A. I focus more on the recognition that the divine presence is in the meal and that it gives us a connection with Jesus Christ so that we can embody God's gift of love to the whole world. I recognize that the meal can remove that which keeps us from a close relationship with Jesus Christ, what is weighing us down heavily. Some call it sin that clings to us. Adults can understand this but it is a very difficult concept for children.

The meal offers us an opportunity to stand in the loving arms of Jesus Christ and to be empowered by the energy of Jesus' love. That's what is powerful with children. I think that the communion table is a wonderful place to remind children that the spark of God is within them through the power of Jesus Christ. We can be energized, given that second boost by the power of the Holy Spirit. I

believe that when we are born, it's the love of God we are born into.

Yes, the symbolism of the communion table involves the greatest sacrifice in the world. But that great sacrifice is bound in the love of Jesus Christ. And so, for me, a sin focus just doesn't work with kids. The focus that does work for me is the power and the love of the Holy Spirit in Jesus Christ.

**Q. At what age should we start introducing communion to kids as "partaking of the body and blood of Christ?" As a mother, I know I had difficulty drawing the crucifixion into the dialogue with my son, and I'm not sure how the Sunday school teachers did it. Is this a problem for many parents?**

A. I'm sure it is. A lot of us were raised in situations where we were taught to focus on the darkness of our sin. I was raised in a tradition in which some members of my family felt they were too sinful to take communion. There were some who were so steeped in that tradition that they said to themselves, "I am just not worthy of this relationship with Jesus Christ." That just pains my heart to this day. It pains me that we would think that our sin is so great that it could not be overcome by the power of that loving relationship.

It is not what I did wrong that gives me a relationship with my parents. It's that they empowered me to reach for the stars and to believe that, by the power of God's love that gave me life, if I focus on being a loving person in this world, then I can indeed "do all things through him who strengthens me."

**Q. At what age DO we start talking about the body and blood of Jesus?**

A. I would ask, "What is the tradition of your family and what is the tradition that you wish to bring forth?" In the community that I serve, we share communion on a weekly basis and we do lift the cup and we do say that Jesus said, "This is my body which is broken for you, this is my blood which is shed for you." And then as families, we participate in that meal so the

words of the institution are kept intact.

It's a great question, how kids understand the meaning of communion and when that education takes place. I use the words of the institution, but every sermon in our contemporary services leads us to the communion table. Last week we focused on the race of life. We're in Indianapolis, and it's racing season. The sermon, of course, is geared to adults, but there are children present. And in that sermon, I suggested that we run out of the



Dr. Carolyn Scanlan-Craighead and children of St. Luke's United Methodist Church, Indianapolis, will be highlighted in the new Live B.I.G. curriculum. According to Marj Pon, Director of Children's Resources for the United Methodist Publishing House in Nashville, "Live B.I.G. is a new children's Sunday school curriculum that integrates short video clips each week to enliven and supplement the lesson plan. Each month there is an "On the Road" segment where a crew traveled to churches and mission projects around the country to videotape and interview people and highlight their ministries." You can learn more about Live B.I.G. at [iLiveBIG.com](http://iLiveBIG.com).

race of life and we run to the communion table, we run to that love, we run into the loving arms of Jesus Christ. I used the Paul text—we run to that table and at that table, all of that which clings to us, all the sin that clings to us is removed. Isn't that powerful!

I'm bound by the words of the institution, but when I'm sharing the table with children, I never use "blood" and "flesh." I focus on the meal aspect of the experience and that Jesus is present, that energy is present in the meal. In fact we discussed this when we were making the [Live B.I.G.] video.

**Q. How do you explain the "living presence of Jesus" in the communion?**

A. By grace and love and by Jesus being the host of the table. One of the most powerful gifts we have in the United

Methodist Church is the recognition that everyone is invited to that table because our host invites them to the table. It's not a human decision as to who attends the feast, Jesus invites all to the table.

I recognize that there are those who can name and claim their sinfulness in such a way that the sacrifice, that the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ, can overcome that sin. And it is in that traditional context that some people need to come to the communion table. I think, though, that it

is our responsibility, as representatives of Jesus Christ, to create a situation where the table will feed, in whatever fashion it does, and to be open enough—as Jesus was open—to honor traditions and to encourage folks to share in the meal. We are God's children and God has created us in love and grace. Through this meal we are reminded of just how much God loves us. Central to that love is the great sacrifice but also new life and resurrection. It doesn't stop at the crucifixion. It starts in new life, in new beginnings.

**Q. What can parents do to prepare their children for communion?**

A. Traditionally, at St. Luke's they start sharing in Holy Communion in first grade on Worldwide Communion Sunday. We're reminded that we connect

and share in a relationship with people throughout the world, and all kids are invited to partake in the Holy Communion table. Parents are well aware that we all share in this feast together. There's a very intentional one Sunday a year where our focus as a congregation is communion. And I know that with the kids we had here for the [Live B.I.G.] video, the concentration was very similar to what I do, which is to focus on the meal, the connection with Christ and the love of Christ.

In the United Methodist tradition we talk about "those who rightly, worthily and in faith eat the broken bread and drink the blessed cup." And you might wonder, "Well, what determines who's rightly and worthily?" It's grace, and who are more representative of the grace of God than children?

On a weekly basis, we have families

who come forward and share in Holy Communion together. That's interesting to me because I was raised in a tradition where you didn't have Holy Communion until you were in the third grade. Something magical happened in the third grade! And I know that there are other traditions where Holy Communion doesn't take place until you choose for yourself, or you're in con-

firmation class, where it takes on a new meaning.

I think of a little girl we baptized. She is probably now about three years old. She goes up with her parents every week to share in Holy Communion. There's power in witnessing this family share in this feast, this life-giving feast, and I would never dream of questioning whether or not that child has a right to be there. □