

Communion *before* Confirmation

Policy, Process and Resources for
Admitting Children to Communion in your
Parish.

April 2014

Contents

1. Letter from The Bishop of Portsmouth
2. Summary of Steps to take
3. Step 1- Consultation
4. Step 2 - Policy Making
5. Step 3 - Preparation of Children
6. Step 4 - Admission Service
7. Step 5 - Review
8. Appendices
 - 8.1 Parish Application Form
 - 8.2 Frequently asked questions
 - 8.3 General Synod Guidelines
 - 8.4 Parish Policy – Template
 - 8.5 Material for Preparation Courses
 - 8.6 Resources
 - 8.7 Certificate for Children

1. Letter from the Bishop of Portsmouth

Children are the church, here and now, alongside people of all ages, participating in the life of the community in their own unique way. They are *not* 'the church of tomorrow.'

How best to meet children's spiritual needs, to enable them to grow and develop in the faith and as responsible Christian participants in society, is an ongoing one that involves a vast range of people - school teachers, youth workers, Sunday school leaders, Messy Church volunteers, clergy, parents and grandparents to name but a few. This policy document is one small part of that vital task. It offers one important route by which children might be supported and encouraged in their spiritual growth. Children's spirituality is immensely powerful. They may not be able to recite the creed (yet!); they may not be fully au fait with the reasons beyond all our liturgical practices; they may not

yet be able to participate fully in the life of a PCC or sit on a committee. Indeed none of us can claim such complete competence.

But my own experience of seeing children kneel before me at the altar rail to receive Holy Communion or to receive a blessing has rarely been anything other than humbling and moving. So I hope and pray that you will explore the question of whether to admit children to communion before confirmation with the prayerfulness and diligence it deserves. The Youth and Children's work Advisers will be entirely happy to help you with that exploration, as indeed will I, as together we discern God's will and minister in our varied parishes in Jesus' name."

+ Christopher, April 2014

2. Summary of the steps to take

Step 1- Consultation

- Download this Communion *before* Confirmation pack from the Diocesan website
- Have an open discussion with the PCC which will then lead to consultation with the congregation and wider community
- Prepare a programme of preparation and continuing nurture

Step 2 -Policy making

- Agree a policy with the PCC and record voting
- Submit the policy to Bishop's office
- The Bishop's Office gives approval
- The PCC formally adopts the policy and communicates the arrangements with the congregation

Step 3- Preparation of children

- Prepare leaders to deliver the course
- Invite children to consider preparing to receive Communion
- Deliver the preparation course, encouraging parents to be involved wherever possible
- Plan for the ongoing nurture and discipleship of children

Step 4- Admission service

- Arrange a service for children to take their first Communion following preparation
- Present certificates and if possible endorse Baptism certificate
- Keep a Register or Record of Children admitted to Communion

Step 5- Review

- Review the policy, procedures and preparation with the PCC every three years
- Maintain the expectation that Children admitted to Communion will be prepared for Confirmation as they become adults
- Provide letter of commendation to accompany any who move away to a new parish explaining they have been receiving Holy Communion in your church

3 Step 1 - Consultation

The PCC must discuss the issue fully, looking at all the implications. There must be a two thirds majority in favour. Consultation should take place within the congregation and wider community. The incumbent must ensure that there has been adequate opportunity for teaching and open discussion. This could be done through sermons, group discussions, magazine articles etc

Consideration of the implications for worship should be made, especially the following;

- How much of the liturgy the communicant children will attend
- Their involvement and participation in worship
- How frequently they will take communion
- How accessible is the liturgy and service for children

The place of Confirmation should be discussed and it is expected that baptized children should in due course offer themselves for Confirmation, so that they may make a mature and reflective confession of faith and commitment to Christian discipleship and the Church

A programme for preparation needs to be adopted, with leaders having appropriate Safe guarding procedures in place

Some Historical, Pastoral and Theological considerations:

HISTORICAL

- The practice of the earliest Christians with regard to receiving Holy Communion is not clear but certainly whole households were baptised and it is assumed that children would have been included. It seems that Communion immediately followed Baptism, and there is no indication that children were excluded. The Eastern Orthodox Churches have always communicated children immediately after Baptism.
- The subsequent 'divorce' of Communion from Baptism has been the combined result of the theological preoccupations and practical circumstances of following centuries: e.g. the doctrine of original sin lead to the promotion of infant Baptism; church expansion necessitated Baptism by priests rather than bishops, followed by laying on of hands by bishops during periodic tours; the failure of parishioners to present children to the bishop on these occasions contributed to the bishops' demand that 'laying on of hands' precede Communion; the development of 'laying on of hands' into a rite involving the confirmation of baptismal vows produced an emphasis on the need for teaching before Confirmation.
- The moves in recent times from afternoon to morning meetings of Sunday school, and towards Parish Communion as the regular Sunday service have led to a new practical situation in which children find themselves regularly in church at a service in which they cannot fully participate.

- The tradition of the church regarding admission of children to Communion is not represented by a static 'norm' but is characterised by a continued development in practice in the light of changing situations: in the spirit of this tradition, what developments are appropriate to our situation today?

PASTORAL

- Child psychologists and experts in children's spiritual development alike point to the importance of children taking part in practical activities – learning by doing – and of their natural facility for engaging with symbol and mystery. Full participation in Communion is sometimes claimed to be an erosion of childhood, but instead it could be seen as cherishing and making best use of the very characteristics of childhood.
- One important characteristic of childhood is the need to belong. Partaking in Holy Communion is a powerful indication of belonging – to God, and to one another in the Church. Much is made of what children may or may not understand about the sacrament, but they will certainly understand the rejection implied in being denied food at the Lord's Table.
- If Confirmation is seen as the 'gateway to Communion', there will continue to be pressure for it to occur in the early teens or before. However Confirmation is also held to represent an adult commitment of faith. No other 'adult' decisions or responsibilities are taken on at such an early age – e.g. driving, voting, military service; the major 'life commitment' of marriage is not permitted before 16 - and the 20s are generally thought of as the earliest appropriate age: by confirming at 12 or 13 are we saying that the faith commitment of Confirmation is less important than these other undertakings?
- One of the most marked characteristics of the teens is to question and reject institutions, whilst a characteristic of those in their late 20s is to 'revisit' and engage with them. Thus to expect Confirmation of teenagers runs counter to their developmental needs whilst 'using up' a rite which they might value deeply as a public demonstration of their return to the faith at a later stage in their lives.

THEOLOGICAL

- Baptism is the undisputed rite of entry into membership of the Body of Christ: "In the one Spirit we were all baptised into one body" (Common Worship p290); and membership of that body is affirmed in the reception of Holy Communion: "we are one body, because we all share in one bread" (Common Worship p179). To deny Holy Communion to any baptised Christian could be seen as denying the full validity of their Baptism.
- If a sacrament is seen as a free, unearned gift of grace expressing God's unconditional love, to what extent can conditions be imposed regarding admission to the sacrament of Holy Communion?
- Jesus uses children as an example of what 'the greatest in the kingdom of heaven' are like. How is this reflected in our practice if we make children the least at the Communion Table by denying their full participation? Some passages of scripture to consider: Matthew 18:1-5; 19:13-14; 21:14-17.

- If Confirmation is made a condition of receiving Holy Communion it could be seen as having a confused significance. It would then compete with Baptism for importance as a rite of entry - rather than having a clear and distinct significance of its own as a rite of adult commitment.

A programme for preparation needs to be adopted, with leaders having appropriate safe guarding procedures in place.

4. Step 2 - Policy making

A formal resolution must be carried and recorded in the minutes of the PCC. There needs to be a two thirds majority. Under "normal" circumstances such a policy would only be approved where there was unanimity across the Team/ Benefice.

The PCC needs to ensure that the child is

- Baptised
- Desiring to receive communion
- The parents have given consent and support the Child
- The age of admission will depend on the child's appreciation of the significance of the sacrament. This should be at the discretion of the Parish Priest, with the child usually being of a minimum age of 7 years

A Parish Policy needs to be written. A sample policy is in the appendices which may be used as a guideline. The General Synod(regulations 2006) – Admission of Children into Holy Communion can also be found in the appendices, which may be of guidance

The Policy is submitted to the Bishop's office for approval, along with the Parish application form.

When approval is granted, the PCC need to inform the congregation of the decision made and also record it in the minutes of the PCC

5. Step 3 -Preparation of Children

For the children the time of preparation isn't about what they can learn and understand theologically about the communion, but rather its place in the Christian story and the story of the church. It is also important for children to gain some sense of their belonging to God through the significance of the sacrament.

Children learn best through ways which are age appropriate, varied and interactive. There should be ways of linking it to their life experiences. Creative prayer should be part of each session.

The content of the course may include the following topics:

- **Belonging** – in our homes, church family and God's family
- **Why we belong to God** – Baptism, Jesus' love for us
- **How we belong** – prayer, sharing, symbols of the church
- **Celebration** – sharing meals, special foods and special times, remembering, the Last Supper
- **The Church** – the people, who does what, the service
- **My Communion** – sharing thoughts about Communion and the way ahead

A list of resources is in the appendices. The Children's and Youth team have copies of them for viewing. The team are happy to offer practical advice to help the Parish through this process.

Parents should be involved within the process of the preparation of the children. Opportunities for this could be a meeting at the beginning of the process to explain the approach and also with tasks to complete as parent and child at home throughout the course

All leaders of the preparation course must comply with the Safeguarding guidelines of the diocese.

6. Step 4 - Service of Admission

The Service of Admission should be promoted amongst the congregation. This could become an annual event, if appropriate. A Church Patronal Festival may be a good time for such a celebration. While the service needs to be special, it should not differ too much from the normal liturgy to which the candidates are accustomed.

Certificates should be issued to each candidate and their Baptism certificate endorsed.

Some congregations plan a celebration after the service and it can be an ideal opportunity to invite friends and families to attend.

The PCC should record the names of those who have been admitted.

If a child moves away to a new Parish, then a letter of commendation should be written both to the Priest and PCC secretary for their records

7. Step 5 – Review

The parish should review the Policy and materials regularly. As a church develops patterns and styles of worship in response to mission opportunities care should be taken to assess the preparation and ongoing nurture of Children who have been admitted to receive Communion