

The Diocese of St Albans



PREPARING THE WAY

Admission of Children to Communion before Confirmation

**If anyone accepts children like this in my name,
then he is also accepting me. Mark 9:37**

'Just as with adults, the spiritual life of baptised children is enriched by the receiving of Holy Communion and their sense of belonging is affirmed and encouraged. This has required churches to engage with the sacrament in new and different ways, to the enrichment of children and adults alike, as they journey in faith together'.

The Rt Revd and Rt Hon Dr Rowan Williams

In this diocese it is the expectation that children to be admitted to Communion will be from around the age of seven years, followed by Confirmation from the age of twelve.

What are the essential requirements when a parish wishes to consider the admission of baptised children to Holy Communion before Confirmation?

The following steps need to take place. They may not necessarily be in this order, and some will overlap, depending on the situation in the parish or benefice and the pastoral needs of members of the congregation(s). Resources are available for loan or purchase at the Diocesan Resources Centre in St Albans. The Diocesan Children's Work Adviser also welcomes invitations to be of assistance.

- 1. The incumbent must be in favour of the move.**
- 2. Following discussion at a PCC meeting, the incumbent and PCC must take a vote in principle with a simple majority in favour of exploring such a move.** The meeting should give careful consideration to this issue, including background information. A PCC member or visiting adviser may be used to take the lead in this. It may be helpful to have held a discussion in the Standing Committee first.
- 3. Time should be taken for prayer and reflection.**
- 4. Consultation with children's leaders and the local Church School if appropriate.** Some of the specifics below may well be raised at this time and will need to be finalised before applying to the Bishop for permission.
- 5. Initial contact with the Diocesan Children's Work Adviser.** S/he will be able to offer advice and put a parish in contact with churches who have already successfully taken this step. S/he may also be available to give a presentation to PCC or to the parish meeting.
- 6. Consultation with ecumenical partners where appropriate.** If the parish is part of a Local Ecumenical Partnership, care will need to be taken in consulting the partners about the proposed application and the possible impact on the working life of the partnership.
- 7. The people of the parish, including children and those with parental responsibility, must have the opportunity to carefully consider and explore over a reasonable period of time our Anglican understanding of the theology of baptism, the Eucharist, confirmation and the nature of the church.**
 - This might take the form of a sermon series on Communion and the place of children in the Church
 - An open meeting with perhaps a presentation and plenty of time for questions is recommended. The Diocesan Children's Work Adviser or someone from a parish which has already admitted children to Communion before Confirmation could be invited
 - The parish magazine, pew sheet or a specially produced leaflet are useful means of informing the congregation
 - House group discussions and Junior Church sessions may also feature in the exploration and consultation process.

8. Consideration of the following areas:

- How will admission to Communion fit in with the overall parish policy on the nurture of children within the framework of Baptism, Communion and Confirmation?
- Implications for worship. How much of the liturgy will communicant children attend, how will they be involved, and how often will they receive Communion?
- How will parents or guardians be involved in the process of deciding whether and when individual children are ready to take Communion and in the period of preparation?
- How will the circumstances of families where the parents do not normally attend church be addressed?
- How will the needs of any children with learning difficulties be catered for?
- Who will be responsible for maintaining the register of people admitted to Communion before Confirmation and for writing letters of commendation to new parishes when children move away?

9. A practical programme of teaching and learning for children and their families will need to be devised to introduce and sustain the new pattern.

- What provision will be made for the preparation of the children?
 - Who will be responsible and what materials will be used?
 - What will be the pattern of ongoing nurture?
- (See the Programme and Resources sections)*

10. The PCC must take a further vote and approve by a simple majority the decision to adopt the new pattern. If the vote is close, the parish may decide that further time is needed for prayer and reflection.

11. An application must be made in writing to the Bishop of St Albans on a prescribed form, together with evidence of all the above for his permission to adopt the new pattern.

Note: Where a decision is taken to retain the inherited order, this decision needs to be communicated to the parish. Notwithstanding this, any child who had been admitted to Communion under the House of Bishop's Guidelines on the Admission of Baptised Persons to Holy Communion before Confirmation, is permitted to continue to receive Communion in any parish even if that parish has not adopted the new pattern but provided that the child can produce appropriate evidence of that right.

Having received the Bishop's permission:

- (a) With children's leaders and parents, identify children who are desirous of and ready to receive Communion. The child must be attend church regularly and be around the age of seven or older. *(In some instances it may be appropriate to prepare children who are not yet seven)*

- (b) Ensure the children have been baptised and that those with parental responsibility support the child's request. (In the case of children whose parents do not normally attend church, it might be wise to get written consent.)
- (c) Arrange for the children's preparation course to take place and give details of the dates and course to the parents, indicating how they can be involved. *(NB There must be some form of preparation before admission to Holy Communion can begin)*
- (d) Involve the congregation in prayer and support for the children.
- (e) Arrange the service at which children will receive Holy Communion for the first time. Some parishes hold a special annual service.
- (f) Record the names of all children admitted to Communion in a register, presenting them with a certificate of admission and amending their baptism form. (See *Certificates*.)

All these requirements are in accordance with the General Synod Regulations (2006) Canon B15A

Ongoing:

- (a) Arrange to review these procedures and their contribution to the life of the church on an annual basis.
- (b) Ensure that children are receiving an ongoing programme of nurture linked to their participation in the Eucharist.
- (c) When children move away, be sure to write letters of commendation to their new parish.

The Preparation Programme

The parish will need to consider the most appropriate form of preparation for those with parental responsibility, as well as for the children themselves.

What form will the preparation take?

- **a published course**
- **an adapted version of a course**
- **a locally produced course.**

There are a number of published courses. A number of suggested programmes have been published (*See Resources*). Inevitably, content will need to be adapted as appropriate to the needs of the group, depending upon the age, maturity and experience of the children. Some courses are far too long for the purpose of preparation, however some of the material could be used as part of the on-going nurture programme. In cases where there is only one child eligible for admission, it may be a case of priest, parent and child working together informally after school. The **Diocesan Children's Work Adviser** is available in the first instance to give advice concerning preparation courses and on-going nurture.

It would be wise to look at several and then adopt/adapt the one that is most suited to the parish circumstances.

You may wish to consider the following:

Method

- Current 'best practice' in teaching methods should be used
- Children should be fully engaged in the sessions
- There should be clear links to their own life experience
- Material should be appropriate to the age of the children, and should take account of any special needs
- There should be plenty of variety within sessions, including practical activities and opportunities for discussion
- Parents/carers should be encouraged to be involved
- Creative use of prayer should form part of each session.

Content might include:

- life's journey and the journey of faith
- links with Baptism
- identity and belonging
- the structure of the Eucharist/Holy Communion
- the Bible
- prayer
- living the Christian life
- Confirmation.

Congregational involvement

Adults from the congregation, other than the course leaders, should be involved.

There should be provision for marking progress through the course during Sunday services, including the encouragement of prayerful support.

What preparation is needed for those with parental responsibility?

- **an explanation about what the admission to Communion means and where it fits into the parish's initiation policy**
- **an explanation of the parish's expectations of the child and the supporting adult(s)**
- **an explanation of the course content and the arrangements for the sessions**
- **details of the provision of on-going nurture and the adult's role in that**
- **the expectations regarding Confirmation.**

Those with parental responsibility have a role to play in the preparation and nurture of the child. It is important that the responsible adults are kept informed and consulted throughout the process either by the incumbent, another member of the staff team or by those responsible for the preparation. No child may be admitted to Communion without the agreement of the person who has parental responsibility. The adult must be supportive; also the expectation that the child will be encouraged to present him/herself for Confirmation from the age of 12 onwards must be clearly understood.

When will the preparation of the children take place?

- **midweek after school**
- **during the Sunday programme**
- **once a week over a period of 4 - 6 weeks**
- **in a more concentrated period over 1 - 2 weeks**

Each parish is different and the nurture of children will vary from Sunday activities, midweek groups to regular participation in the weekly services. It is therefore important that the way children are prepared to receive Communion fits into the church's pattern. Some may want preparation to take place over a series of weeks maybe as part of the ongoing programme. Other churches may wish to prepare the children to be admitted to Communion at another time during the week. Whatever pattern is adopted it is envisaged that the initial period of preparation will be spread over four to six sessions.

Who will be responsible for the preparation course?

- **those already working with the children**
- **a priest with a member of the congregation**
- **the incumbent and the adult with parental responsibility**
- **other people who might be approached to undertake this important ministry.**

It is important for each parish to consider the human resources available for this task. At least two people must be prepared to devote some time to the preparation programme. Because of their existing workload, some children's workers may not want to undertake this task and their wishes need to be respected. Clergy may decide that the preparation process is a good opportunity for them to build relationships with the children preparing for Communion. Where someone expresses an interest in this work but perhaps lacks confidence, it may be possible to work alongside someone who has the skills and experience of working with children and thus receive help and training for this ministry. All those who are entrusted with the task of preparing children for communion must be subject to the Child Protection policy and procedures adopted by the PCC.

Where will the preparation sessions be held?

- **the same place each time**
- **in church**
- **in the usual meeting place for children's work**
- **at another venue**
- **different venues according to the content of the session.**

No matter where the preparation takes place, permission must be sought from the adult who has parental responsibility for the child. The meeting place needs to be conducive to learning and therefore questions of welcome, heating and lighting need to be considered. On occasions, it might be appropriate to meet in the church, e.g. to re-enact the baptismal rite or to run through the logistics of receiving Communion.

How will the parish mark the admission of children to Communion?

- **on a special day in the liturgical calendar, e.g. the patronal festival**
- **with additional liturgical material**
- **with a certificate.**

The occasion needs to be marked so that the congregation is aware that certain children have been admitted to Communion. The children should be encouraged to invite their godparents. Some churches may have more than one occasion in the year because of the number of children coming forward; others will have a more sporadic pattern. Suggested liturgical material currently in use elsewhere in the Church of England and approved by the Bishop is included in this pack. Care must be taken that any material used does not give the impression that admission to Communion is identical with or a replacement of the rite of Confirmation, e.g. it would be inappropriate to ask the children to take on for themselves the baptismal promises since this pre-empts what they will be asked to do by the Bishop at their confirmation. Each child should be issued with a certificate or have their baptism certificate endorsed so that it is clear that they have been admitted to Communion before Confirmation. Diocesan certificates are available from the Children's Work Department.

In what form will the parish keep a record of those admitted?

- **In a separate register in accordance with General Synod Regulations (2006)**

The Regulations require the incumbent to maintain a register of all children admitted to Holy Communion under these provisions and also to record on the child's baptism certificate the date and place of the child's first Communion. The register will fall within the definition of a "record in parochial custody" for the purposes of the Parochial Registers and Records Measure 1978 and should therefore be inspected by the Archdeacon in the course of the Annual Visitation.

A specific register is available from the Canterbury Press ISBN-13: 9781853119415

A register may be made locally providing that the following information is recorded:

Full name, Date of Birth, Address, Date of Baptism, Place of Baptism, Date admitted to Communion. The book should be suitably bound and made available with other registers for inspection. A useful template is available from the Children's Work Department.

It is the duty of each incumbent to ensure that records are kept. If a family moves house, a letter should be sent to the receiving parish to advise them of any children within that household who have been admitted to Communion before Confirmation. It must be remembered that once admitted to Communion, a child has the right to receive Communion in any other parish, regardless of local policy on the matter. Therefore it is important that records are kept and that those with parental responsibility retain the certificate. When attending a different church, whether on holiday, whilst visiting friends and relatives or as a result of moving house, as a matter of courtesy, the accompanying adults should have a polite word before the service with the priest, other minister or official within that church to inform them of any children who will be receiving Communion at the service. At the administration, the child's hands should be held up high to minimise any practical confusion.

What will be the pattern of on-going nurture for the children once admitted?

This may take place:

- **through the existing programme**
- **in regular group meetings at particular points in the year**
- **through periodic teaching on specific aspects of baptism, Communion, Confirmation and the nature of the church**
- **at special meetings just for those admitted to Communion**
- **during regular all age Eucharists with teaching through the sermon**
- **through annual teaching Eucharists with a commentary.**

When considering on-going nurture, it is important to review your current pattern of work with children and include in your submission to the Bishop the many existing ways in which children are encouraged to deepen their understanding of the Christian faith and the meaning of Communion within it. Then identify specific occasions throughout the year when it is natural to include teaching for every age group on baptism, Communion, Confirmation and the nature of the church. In addition, parishes might like to consider the use of all age events to explore these areas. Regular attendance at the Eucharist is an important part of nurture too.

What are the implications for Eucharistic worship that a parish needs to consider?

- **the way the liturgy is celebrated**
- **the level of involvement and participation of all ages**
- **the balance between the visual and the spoken aspects of Eucharistic celebration**
- **the balance between time spent working in age groups and worshipping together as a community**
- **the administration of Communion itself and the training of all involved**
- **the pastoral care of those who for whatever reason do not receive Communion.**

Parishes should consider how children might be present throughout the entire liturgy without needing to make the liturgy childish, or how they might be present for a part of the liturgy without thereby diminishing the totality. These aspects of the issue need very careful consideration at local level. There are now a number of resources becoming available that can be used alongside Common Worship. Admitting children to Communion before Confirmation can provide the opportunity to consider the needs of all ages in this respect. There are two Additional Eucharistic prayers which can be used when “a significant number of children are present.”

If children are to be admitted to Communion before Confirmation, then their inclusion in the action of the liturgy needs be addressed. The least that is expected is that they be present for the Liturgy of the Sacrament, i.e. the Eucharistic prayer. It is not intended that children’s experience of the Eucharist should rest solely on receiving the bread and wine.

Some churches already have children present for the whole of the liturgy, as they have no on-site facilities for separate children's groups; others have limited facilities and therefore children go into a group for the sermon slot, the Creed and perhaps the Intercessions before re-joining the congregation; yet others have developed a programme where children spend the maximum amount of time in groups and a limited amount of time with the rest of the church. It is this last group where the most adjustment may have to be made.

Practical arrangements should also be made both with individual children and with those administering the sacrament at the altar. Some children will need to stand to receive as their height restricts the space available for the use of the chalice. All should be taught to hold their hands up high to receive the bread, to kneel upright and to respond 'Amen' to the words of administration.

In all cases, care must be taken that the decisions taken on this matter are carefully and consistently explained to everyone. The needs of those who are not admitted to Communion need to be taken into account too. The diversity of practice within the Church of England on this issue needs to be acknowledged and the choices people make affirmed. Equally, those who decide to retain the inherited pattern need to be tolerant of those who opt for the new pattern.

What is the timetable for the Parochial Church Council discussion and decisions?

The new Diocesan Guidelines came into effect from the Feast of Corpus Christi, i.e. 15 June 2006.

There are a number of parishes that already admit baptised children to Communion under the regime introduced in 1997 by the House of Bishops' Guidelines. The new Diocesan Guidelines supersede the 1997 Guidelines and so those parishes operating under the 1997 regime must apply afresh to Bishop Alan for a new permission. This will not prevent those children already taking Communion from doing so after the 15 June. It means that a parish cannot admit any new children until Bishop Alan's permission has been granted following an application by the parish.

Clearly each PCC needs to decide upon its own timetable for the process which must include all the elements outlined on the first page of this document. That timetable needs to be publicised within the parish so that people can contribute to the discussion before the PCC takes its final vote on the matter. In Team Ministries, time may need to be allowed for each DCC to have a discussion before the PCC comes to its decision which is then binding on the whole parish. Similarly, in a United Benefice each PCC will need to have a discussion before the benefice as a whole comes to a decision. Ecumenical partners will be involved in the process where a church is part of an LEP.

These notes cannot cover every aspect of the issue in detail. If there are specific issues which a parish wishes to raise, please contact the **Diocesan Children's Work Adviser**.

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