



DIOCESE of
WINCHESTER

COMMUNION GUIDELINES FOR PARISHES

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A letter from the Bishop of Winchester

July 2016

Dear Friends,

“Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”


Mark 10:15

We have so much to learn from children. Jesus urges us to become child-like in order to receive the kingdom of God – an invitation (among other things) to be trusting, open-hearted, uncomplicated, enthusiastic and life-affirming.

In this Diocese, we’ve been at the forefront of ensuring that children are fully part of the worshipping life of the Church by enabling churches to admit children to communion before confirmation. Since 2006 this has been based on Regulations made by General Synod, on which this booklet is based.

I am grateful to the staff in the School of Mission who have helped to produce this guidance. The Diocesan Children and Families Discipleship Adviser is always happy to have a conversation about how the process works, and to offer practical advice about how to implement it.

I pray that, in exploring this process in your own context and among the families you know, you will discover more of what it means to receive the kingdom of God as a child.

+  Timothy Winter

+Tim

Rt Rev Tim Dakin, Bishop of Winchester

Introduction

Preparing a Parish for the Admission of Children to Communion before Confirmation in the Diocese of Winchester

This booklet is designed to help those parishes that are considering admitting children to Communion before Confirmation. This is a subject that involves discussion not just by the PCC, children and their parents but the whole congregation. The intention of this booklet is to be practical rather than theological, but it is important that the matter is discussed widely and at a number of levels, theologically, historically, pastorally and educationally.

Where there is a church school in the parish, or children from the congregation attend a church school in a nearby parish, there should be co-ordination with the school in terms both of Christian nurture and of admission to Communion at the school Eucharist.

The process may take the following form:

- Interest shown
- Initial discussions within the PCC
- Preparation and consultation with the congregation – **Education**
- Consultation and agreement with any church school(s) involved
- First letter to the Bishop of Winchester
- PCC/DCC begin to look at responses – **Developing a Policy**
- Policy to be sent to the Bishop of Winchester for approval
- Parental preparation)
- Children’s preparation) – **Implementation of Policy**
- Children admitted to Communion)
- Ongoing monitoring – **Review**

Whilst it is the PCC’s responsibility to own the overall policy, this should be done in consultation with the whole church, and with reference to the Diocesan procedures. A specially appointed working group may be set up to manage and implement the scheme on the PCC’s behalf. In all instances the Bishop’s permission must be sought.

The decision to admit children to Communion is a challenging but exciting step. The PCC will need to consider the nurture and care of all its members. Issues of faith development, patterns of worship and the place of Confirmation will all need to be considered. It is therefore not a decision that should be taken lightly. Considerable time and commitment will be needed for its proper implementation, but it is well worth the effort and help is available from the Children’s Adviser and from Diocesan Education staff about church school involvement.

It is hoped that this booklet will help you to begin to explore this issue with a step by step guide through the Diocesan procedures, as well as information and details of further resources.

Guidelines

Guidelines for the Admission of the Baptised to Holy Communion in the Diocese of Winchester

The Guidelines in this booklet must be read in conjunction with the Admission of Baptised Children to Holy Communion Regulations 2006, which are reproduced as Annex 1 at the end of this booklet.

Parishes which wish to admit Children to Holy Communion before Confirmation should have the Bishop's permission. The Bishop expects parishes to work in conjunction with the School of Mission. Further information and advice can be obtained from the team administrator at Wolvesey on 01962 710983 and, where a church school is involved, the Education Department on 023 9289 9680.

1. ADMISSION

- a) Only the baptised may be admitted to Communion.
- b) The Parish Priest, after consultation with the parents or those responsible for the child's nurture and development, and with the parents' goodwill, decides whether to admit them.
- c) A Register of all persons so admitted must be kept and a Certificate of Communicant Status given – this might be an endorsement on the Baptism Certificate or parishes may wish to design their own simple certificate to be signed by the incumbent.

2. PERMISSION

Permission will normally be given only if the following criteria are satisfied:

- a) There has been a discussion of the issues in the parish/benefice (including church schools involved), and the PCC (and the Ecumenical Partners, where appropriate) has agreed to the pattern being adopted.
- b) There is a pattern for preparation for all those to be admitted, and a structure for ongoing nurture.
- c) There is active involvement of the parents and those in the church (and church school(s) where appropriate) responsible for the child's development in faith.

3. CONFIRMATION

Confirmation marks the moment at which the baptised (and communicant) members of the Church take public responsibility for their baptismal status.

Children admitted to Communion should be encouraged to seek Confirmation by the time they are adult.

The process

Admitting Children to Communion before Confirmation

1. EDUCATION

The Incumbent must ensure that there has been adequate opportunity for teaching and open discussion about this matter with the whole congregation and, where relevant, the church school community.

Some possible ways of doing this are:

- **Introductory sermons**
- **Articles in the parish magazine or notice sheet**
- **Agenda item at the next Annual General Meeting**
- **Evening teach-in and discussion**
- **Circulation of paper on theological principles**
- **Church school assemblies, staff meetings, governor meetings and letters to parents**

Raising awareness

“Imagine a group of people of all ages going for a long walk together. At times the children and adults will walk along together, talking as they go, sharing stories with first one person and then another, each observing different things and sharing their discoveries. At times the children will lag behind and some of the adults will have to wait for them or urge them on, sometimes the smallest children may ask to be carried. At other times, though, the children will dash ahead making new discoveries and may, perhaps, pull the adults along to see what they have found. Some adults may well behave like these children, of course. For all there will be times of progress and times of rest and refreshment, time to admire the view, and times of plodding on, and the eventual satisfaction of arrival at their destination.”

Children in the Way, a Report of the General Synod Board of Education, the National Society and Church House Publishing 1988 (p.17).

Additional discussion questions:

- 1) **How closely does this image describe the situation in your church?**
- 2) **How would the question of allowing children to receive Communion before Confirmation affect and change that situation?**
- 3) **In what ways can the whole congregation be involved in exploring the issue of Communion before Confirmation?**

2. DEVELOPING A POLICY

The admission of children to Communion must be set in the wider context of the Church’s commitment to mission and the faith development of people of all ages.

The PCC/DCC should discuss the issue fully, ensuring that all the implications for the parish are considered. A formal resolution must be carried and recorded in the minutes. Under normal circumstances such a policy

would only be approved where there is agreement and consistency across the whole benefice/team regarding its adoption.

The process will include:

- the PCC reviewing the provision of nurture and care across the ages but especially with children.
- the PCC drawing up principles and guidelines of provision for nurture and care of children and young people and beginning to make appropriate plans for implementation of these principles. It may delegate the implementation to a sub-group. In parishes with children in church schools, this will include the schools in question.
- the PCC looking at implications for worship: how much of the liturgy communicant children will attend, their involvement and participation in worship, how frequently they will receive Communion.
- the PCC discussing the place of Confirmation as an opportunity for a more mature and reflective confession of faith in perhaps the later teen years.
- a presentation of the policy and procedures being submitted to the congregation for their information and prayerful reflection.
- the PCC setting up the procedure for the implementation for the policy and its outworking.
- the PCC working with the local church school(s).
- the PCC submitting the policy and procedures to the Bishop for approval.
- The Bishop recommends a minimum age of 7 years (or Year 3 at school) for admission. Parishes should consult their Suffragan Bishop if they wish to depart from this guideline.

“You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Jesus Christ.”

Galatians 3:26-28.

Additional discussion questions:

- 1) Does the Church have a strategy of nurture and care from birth to the grave? How is it expressed?
- 2) Is the worship of the Church accessible to all its members?
- 3) How might the children be meaningfully included in the Eucharist?

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY

- Meet with parents of children eligible to receive Communion before Confirmation to discuss the issues and look at the teaching material.
- Ideally at least one parent should attend church regularly and be a communicant member. Where this is not possible a suitable sponsor may be appointed. In these cases the parents' permission must be given.

- **Appropriate teaching material should be used with the children.**
- **A record should be kept of those children admitted to Communion and a certificate given (or an endorsement of their baptismal certificate).**
- **It is important that the children receive ongoing nurture and support. This may be through the regular Sunday or the usual midweek children's teaching programme or may involve the church school(s). This should at the appropriate time lead to Confirmation.**
- **Once a child has received Communion in one parish, he/she must be allowed to receive Communion when visiting other churches or when moving to another parish. (See paragraph 10 of the Regulations in Annex 1).**

“They brought children for him to touch. The disciples rebuked them, but Jesus saw this he was indignant, and said to them, ‘Let the children come to me and do not stop them; for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these.’ ”

Mark 10: 13 - 16

Additional discussion questions:

- 1) **What would be the most appropriate format for preparing the children to receive Communion?**
- 2) **How will parents be included in the preparation?**
- 3) **In what ways, if any, will the Church mark the occasion when the children are admitted to Communion?**

4. REVIEW

The Parish should review the scheme at the end of the first year following children being allowed to receive, and regularly thereafter.

“Whoever welcomes in my name one of these children, welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me, welcomes not only me but also the one who sent me.”

Mark 9:37

Additional discussion questions:

- 1) **How will the Church monitor the admission of children to Communion?**
- 2) **What ongoing nurture and support will be offered to the children and their families?**
- 3) **How is the admission of children to Communion contributing to the overall experience of worship in the Church?**

Preparing the way

Instructions on the preparation of Children to receive Communion

Each parish is different and the nurture of the children will vary from Sunday to midweek groups, to participation in the weekly services. It is therefore important that how the 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. One parish in this Diocese prepares the children to receive their first Communion in the week leading up to the Sunday through a series of evening meetings so that the whole week becomes the preparation and planning for the event. Another parish has a preparation day for children and adults before the first Communion. Schemes may vary in parishes, some of whose children attend church schools.

Preparation and its content

For the children the time of preparation is not 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 should also be an opportunity for them to gain some sense of their belonging to God through the significance of the sacrament.

The sessions may include:

- Belonging – In our homes, the Church family and Jesus' family.
- Why we belong to God – Baptism, Jesus' love for us, God's Story Book.
- How we belong – Prayer, sharing, symbols of the church.
- Celebration – Sharing meals, special times, remembering, the Last Supper.
- The Church – The people, who does what, the service.
- Communion – Sharing thoughts after receiving Communion, expressing feelings and looking at the way ahead.

Please refer to the Resources list for helpful materials when preparing sessions.

1. THE CLERGY'S ROLE

It has been commonly assumed in the past that the preparation for the sacraments is the job of the priest or minister. He or she has the responsibility for the teaching and nurture of all of the congregation and it has been argued that, as the professional, he alone has the knowledge and authority to carry out this most important teaching.

In some churches, the priest or minister may be a skilled and inspiring teacher. He or she may have been a school teacher at some time or have other experience in the training field. If this is the case, there is every reason to use these talents and give the minister a chance to form a relationship with each child and family at an important stage in their lives.

It is however important that the priest work with one or two other people who are skilled in this area, modelling collaborative ministry and employing the gifts of others. Church school staff may be able to make a major contribution.

Furthermore, as a matter of good practice under our safeguarding policy, people should not be working on their own with a group of children.

Whatever teachers and leaders are used, the clergy should discuss the programme with them, attend planning meetings and provide general support. They should also make opportunities to get to know the children and their families by attending some sessions, and visiting their homes.

2. USING LAY LEADERS

In all denominations, the tradition is for the laity to have responsibility for the children's work, and there is every reason for preparation for Holy Communion to follow the same pattern with the support and overview of the priest or minister:

- The children's teaching usually takes place during the Sunday morning when the clergy are leading the main worship. Some of the preparation for Holy Communion may also take place at this time. Extra teaching, maybe after school, will be more effective if the leaders and children are already known to each other. Some preparation may take place at church schools during school hours.
- It affirms the value of the work done by the leaders who nurture the children week by week and encourages high standards for all of the children's work.
- It is a way of showing the children that their nurture is an ongoing process which involves the whole Christian family.
- The priest or minister may not relate well to young children or understand the sort of teaching that they need, but there may be several people in the congregation with teaching or communication skills who would be ideal as leaders.
- As already stated, there are potential problems with one adult taking a group of children. For safety reasons, a group should have at least two leaders.

3. THE PARENTS' ROLE

Preparation to receive Holy Communion is not just something for a group of children to do on Sunday morning, or on a special course lasting a few weeks. It is part of the passing on of the Christian faith, both the tradition that has been handed down and our personal experiences of Holy Communion, to the next generation of Christians. Our faith will make most sense to the children when it is seen and acted out in the context of the family, because it is in relationships that the children should experience a glimpse of God's unconditional love for us and our service to each other in daily life, when we are sick, sad, and lonely, as well as in celebrations.

For some parents who only attend church occasionally, their child's asking to be admitted to Holy Communion may be the start of renewal of their own faith. Such parents, and many others, may feel insecure about their own beliefs so it would be a good idea to run a short course on the basics of Christian faith and practice at the same time. This could be by parents joining a Confirmation group, having a special course like *Alpha*, or simply by holding a discussion group based on the elements of the children's preparation course.

4. USING SPONSORS

There are, however, many reasons why parents, while wanting a Christian upbringing for their children, do not regularly attend church.

There are several situations in which it would be pastorally sensitive to suggest appointing a sponsor to act *in loco parentis* or to provide extra help. The ideal person would be a godparent but, sadly, many godparents do not have that commitment themselves and/or do not live locally. Another relative should be considered next, but a sponsor from the congregation could also be used. A friend of the whole family or the parent of a child who has done the course would be good choices. Whoever is invited to take on this role must be clear that their support is not needed just through the few weeks of the course but will be ongoing – in fact, a similar role to that of a godparent.

If clergy need guidance on the choice of sponsors or people to provide practical help, it is important to ensure that as a safeguard the Diocesan Guidelines on Child Protection are fully observed.

Some questions and answers

Q. Where has this idea come from?

This is not a new idea. The early Church always practised the giving of Communion to children by virtue of their baptism. In their own way, the other major Christian churches (Orthodox and Roman Catholic) have continued this tradition.

Q. What study has the Church put into this subject?

The Church of England has been working on this for over thirty years; a number of parishes in the Diocese have been doing this for many years and in some parts of the country it is relatively common practice. It happens in many parts of the Anglican Communion.

Q. What will happen to Confirmation?

Both for parishes that wish to admit Children to Communion before Confirmation and those that do not, Confirmation retains its importance as the rite of adult commitment to Christ after a period of instruction in the faith.

Q. What about the need for understanding?

This is about belonging not just understanding. How many of us can claim fully to understand the Communion? We come to Holy Communion not because of what we know but because we are invited by the Lord.

Q. What about children who are not baptised?

This needs sensitive pastoral care. Baptism always precedes a child's admission. Unbaptised children are usually unchurched or their parents have decided to defer their baptism until later. Baptism should become part of the preparation for receiving Communion. Those who choose to wait are more likely to understand their reasons and the position of the church. Care and openness are required of all.

Q. Will there be a difficulty when children move from a parish that admits children to Communion before Confirmation to one that does not?

The Admission of Baptised Children to Holy Communion Regulations clearly states that no one who has been admitted to Holy Communion "should be anywhere deprived of it", (see paragraph 10 in Annex 1). Families leaving one parish for another should ask the incumbent for a letter to the new incumbent explaining their communicant status.

Annex 1 General Synod

ADMISSION OF BAPTISED CHILDREN TO HOLY COMMUNION REGULATIONS 2006

The General Synod hereby makes the following Regulations under paragraph 1(c) of Canon B15A :-

1. These Regulations may be cited as the **Admission of Baptised Children to Holy Communion Regulations 2006** and shall come into force on such day as the Archbishops of Canterbury and York may jointly appoint.
2. Children who have been baptised but who have not yet been confirmed and who are not yet ready and desirous to be confirmed as required by paragraph 1(a) of Canon B15A may be admitted to Holy Communion provided that the conditions set out in these Regulations are satisfied.
3. Every diocesan bishop may at any time make a direction to the effect that applications from parishes under these Regulations may be made in his diocese. The bishop's discretion in this respect shall be absolute, and he may at any time revoke such a direction (without prejudice to the validity of any permissions already granted thereunder).
4. Where a direction under paragraph 3 is in force in a diocese, an incumbent may apply to the bishop for permission that children falling within the definition in paragraph 2 may be admitted to Holy Communion in one or more of the parishes in the incumbent's charge. Such application must be made in writing and must be accompanied by a copy of a resolution in support of the application passed by the parochial church council of each parish in respect of which the application is made.
5. Before granting any permission under paragraph 4, the bishop must first satisfy himself (a) that the parish concerned has made adequate provision for preparation and continuing nurture in the Christian life and will encourage any child admitted to Holy Communion under these Regulations to be confirmed at the appropriate time and (b) where the parish concerned is within the area of a local ecumenical project established under Canon B 44, that the other participating Churches have been consulted.
6. The bishop's decision in relation to any application under paragraph 4 shall be final, but a refusal shall not prevent a further application being made on behalf of the parish concerned, provided that at least one year has elapsed since the most recent previous application was refused.
7. Any permission granted under paragraph 4 shall remain in force unless and until revoked by the bishop. The bishop must revoke such permission upon receipt of an application for the purpose made by the incumbent. Such application must be made in writing and accompanied by a copy of a resolution in support of the application passed by the parochial church council of each parish in respect of which the application is made. Otherwise, the bishop may only revoke a permission granted under paragraph 4 if he considers that the conditions specified in paragraph 5 are no longer being satisfactorily discharged. Before revoking any permission on these grounds, the bishop shall first notify the incumbent of his concerns in writing and shall afford the incumbent a reasonable time to respond and, where appropriate, to take remedial action.
8. Where a permission granted under paragraph 4 is in force, the incumbent shall not admit any child to Holy Communion unless he or she is satisfied that (a) the child has been baptised and (b) a person having parental responsibility for the child is content that the child should be so admitted. Otherwise, subject to any direction of the bishop, it is within the incumbent's absolute discretion to decide whether, and if so when, any child should first be admitted to Holy Communion.

9. The incumbent shall maintain a register of all children admitted to Holy Communion under these Regulations, and where practicable will record on the child's baptismal certificate the date and place of the child's first admission. If the baptismal certificate is not available, the incumbent shall present the child with a separate certificate recording the same details.
10. A child who presents evidence in the form stipulated in paragraph 9 that he or she has been admitted to Holy Communion under these Regulations shall be so admitted at any service of Holy Communion conducted according to the rites of the Church of England in any place, regardless of whether or not any permission under paragraph 4 is in force in that place or was in force in that place until revoked.
11. These Regulations shall apply to a cathedral as if it were a parish, with the modifications that:
 - (a) any application under paragraphs 3 or 7 must be made by the dean of the cathedral concerned, accompanied by a copy of a resolution in support of the application passed by the chapter of the cathedral concerned;
 - (b) the obligations imposed on the incumbent under paragraphs 8 and 9 shall be imposed on the dean of the cathedral concerned.
12. A diocesan bishop may delegate any of his functions under these Regulations (except his functions under paragraph 3) to a person appointed by him for the purpose, being a suffragan or assistant bishop or archdeacon of the diocese.
13. In these Regulations:
 - (a) 'incumbent', in relation to a parish, includes:
 - (i) in a case where the benefice concerned is vacant (and paragraph (ii) below does not apply), the rural dean;
 - (ii) in a case where a suspension period (within the meaning of the Pastoral Measure 1983) applies to the benefice concerned, the priest-in-charge; and
 - (iii) in a case where a special cure of souls in respect of the parish has been assigned to a vicar in a team ministry by a Scheme under the Pastoral Measure 1983 or by licence from the bishop, that vicar; and
 - (b) references to paragraph numbers are to the relevant paragraph or paragraphs in these Regulations.

Resources

CHILDREN AND COMMUNION

Let the Children come to Communion Stephen Lake	SPCK 2006 ISBN 0 281 05795 8
Children, Churches and Christian Learning Leslie J. Francis and Jeff Astley	SPCK 2002 ISBN 0 281 05532 7
Children and Holy Communion Diana Murrie and Steve Pearce	Kevin Mayhew 2003 ISBN 1 84417 151 5
Mission-shaped Children Margaret Withers	Church House Publishing 2006 ISBN 0 7151 4081 7
Come and join the Celebration John Muir and Betty Pedley	Church House Publishing 2001 ISBN 0 7151 4947 4

PREPARATION MATERIAL FOR CHILDREN

Ready to Share One Bread Nick Harding and Sandra Millar	SPCK 2015 ISBN 978-0-281-07053-4
My Baptism Book Diana Murrie Baptism Cube	Church House Publishing 2006 ISBN 0 7151 4091 4 ISBN 0 7151 4077 9
My Communion Book Diana Murrie Communion Cube	Church House Publishing 2002 ISBN 0 7151 4946 6 ISBN 0 7151 4976 8
His Spirit is with us Leslie Francis and Diane Drayson	Kevin Mayhew 2003 ISBN 1 84417 018 7
Bread and Wine People Susan Sayers	Kevin Mayhew 2001 ISBN 1 84003 694 X
Welcome to the Lord's Table Margaret Withers	Bible Reading Fellowship 2006 ISBN 1 84101 043 X
Share: A Communion Preparation Course for 7-11's Nick Harding	Kevin Mayhew 2002 ISBN 1 84003 927 2

COMMUNION SERVICE BOOKLETS

The Lord is Here!	Kevin Mayhew 2003 ISBN 1 84417 017 9
I can join in Common Worship	SPCK 2003 ISBN 0 281 05568 8
My Holy Communion Book	Redemptorist 2001 ISBN 0 85231 238 528

These books are available to borrow or consult in the Resource Room at the Winchester Cathedral Education Centre ☎ 01962 624760.