



Special: Children & Communion

The Admission of Children to Holy Communion before Confirmation

In late June and early July, all five churches of our local Cluster will be following a special teaching series on Sunday mornings, investigating our options for the potential admission of children to Holy Communion before Confirmation.

The admittance of children to communion is now a well established practice within the Church of England. Baptized children who have not yet been confirmed, and who are not yet ready and desirous to be confirmed, may be admitted to Holy Communion provided various conditions are satisfied and the Parish Church has carefully made a decision to allow the practice.

The ability to admit children before Confirmation has been around since the 1970s and, in some parts of the Church of England, is increasingly the norm. In our contexts here, there are certain parts of our Cluster where the ability to enable children to participate in Holy Communion is a real mission imperative.

Having discussed it as local Clergy, there is a logic to all five churches considering the matter at the same time; not least in regard to those times when we gather as a Cluster for worship.

Over a year ago it was discussed at Deanery Synod, where it became apparent that most churches which surround our local cluster are already well established in the practice.

In the churches with a large proportion of children (Mereworth, Kings Hill, and

increasingly Offham) the children are aware of being excluded and in some cases have begun to ask questions as to why they cannot receive. This is particularly the case where some families have joined us from other church denominations where the participation of children in the Eucharist is commonplace.

The Diocesan guidelines for “admitting Children to Communion before Confirmation” was discussed at the Cluster Council meeting around 12 months ago. The Cluster representatives took this information back to their respective PCC/MLT groups who further discussed it and all agreed they wished to explore their options further.

To make this change, the Bishop of Rochester must be asked for permission to move ahead and before that happens, each PCC needs to discuss the matter and agree their response. Before they can do that, the guidelines stipulate that the entire church must follow a sermon series to enable everyone to learn more and make up their own minds.

Each church will receive teaching on the following four subjects between 25 June and the end of July:

- ❖ Holy Communion in the early church;
- ❖ Jesus and children;
- ❖ Issues of justice;
- ❖ Jesus and mealtimes.

How does it work in practice?

Having concluded that Confirmation should properly signify the beginning of adult membership of the church rather than the end of childhood membership, a PCC can agree that baptized children in, for example, year 3, 4 or 5 (7 to 10 years old) could be invited to consider whether they wish to be admitted.

Those that wish to do so are invited to a preparation course, and following successful completion of that course of study, a special service is held where they are admitted for the first time - similar to 'First Communion' in the Catholic church.

Can children understand fully?

Children are certainly able to understand the origin and specialness of sharing bread and wine. A deeper understanding of the mystery of the sacrament is a lifetime's work for all of us, and one that will never be complete however old we are.

Will they take it seriously?

Children respond to the mood and atmosphere around them. The experience of many churches is that the vast majority of children take their lead from the way the adult members of the congregation behave as they receive the bread and wine. Receiving Communion is a very powerful moment, and the power is certainly not lost on children - in fact they have an openness to the Holy which many adults find it hard to recapture.

How will the Vicar know who can receive?

A record must be kept of all the children who have been admitted to Communion before Confirmation, and the parish clergy will have been involved in preparing the children for admission.

What happens if a family moves to a parish which doesn't admit?

In practice, this has not proved to be a difficulty: the incumbent of the parish in which the child has been admitted simply provides a letter to their new incumbent requesting that they continue to receive Communion. The principle, supported by the House of Bishops, is that no one who has been admitted to receiving the sacrament should ever subsequently be denied it.



What about Confirmation?

Confirmation has traditionally been given two meanings: as a 'gateway' to receiving Communion; and as an act of adult commitment to the faith. For those confirmed at 11, 12 or 13, the second of these meanings has rarely worked. But if it is no longer linked to receiving Communion, Confirmation tends to take place much later when the children are a little more grown and at a time which is far more appropriate for an adult act of commitment.

What about unbaptized children?

No one who is not baptised can be admitted to receive Holy Communion. If an unbaptised child wishes to be prepared for admission then they must be baptised before they are admitted.

What if children do not want to be admitted to Communion before they are confirmed?

Consent is vital at all levels in admitting children to Communion. No one must feel that they are being forced into the practice.

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Abbey Library gets official new opening

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The parish as a whole must be supportive, and so must any family whose children are going to be involved. But most important, the individual children must make a free choice to be admitted. It may well be that some children in a particular church ask to be prepared for admission, and some do not.

What happens if everyone doesn't agree to the change?

It is rare to have complete agreement on any development in the Church - or any other large organisation for that matter. It is not necessary to have 100% agreement in the parish for admission to go ahead; however, PCC should only make an application where they are confident that there is substantial support. Admission should not be a practice that disappears from the life of a parish if the Vicar or a few enthusiastic families move elsewhere. For this reason the Bishop will want to see the voting figures when a PCC agrees to go forward with admission, and will want to see a reasonable majority in favour before granting permission.

West Malling & Offham NSPCC Supporters Group invites you to an

Offham Garden Safari

on Sunday 10 September 2017
12.00pm through to 5.00pm

Save the date!

★ Enjoy local gardens and have tea and cakes on the Green! ★
★ Come and have fun and support children and young people in the UK★

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Pictures by John Challicom & Tom Hull - posed by models