

2. Regulations for the Admission of the Baptised to Holy Communion in the Diocese of Salisbury

1. Parishes wishing to admit children to Holy Communion must have the Bishop's permission. The Bishop expects parishes to work in conjunction with the Diocesan Children's Adviser.

2. ADMISSION

- The children must want to receive Communion themselves. Children may be admitted at any time from their baptism onwards.
- The Parish Priest, after consultation with the parents and those responsible for the child's formation, and with the parents' goodwill, decided whether to admit them.
- The authorised Order for Admission is used.
- A register of all persons so admitted must be kept and a Certificate of Communicant Status given. This register must be available for inspection by the Archdeacon, and kept with all other parish registers.

3. PERMISSION

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

- There has been a discussion of the issues in the parish/benefice, and the PCC (and the Ecumenical partners, where appropriate) has agreed to the pattern being adopted.
- All those receiving Communion are present in church for the Eucharistic Prayer (ie from The Peace onwards)
- There is a pattern for preparation for all those to be admitted, and a structure for continuing formation.
- There is the active involvement of the parents and those in the Church responsible for the child's development in faith.
- The process of discernment and admission in Section 2 above is followed.

4. CONFIRMATION

Confirmation marks the moment at which the baptised (and communicant) members of the Church take public responsibility for their baptismal status. At least by the age of 16, those so admitted should be challenged about Confirmation, and by the age of 18 they should have decided and been prepared and presented for Confirmation.

+David Sarum
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A Short Summary of the History and Theology of Children and Communion

The early church welcomed all baptised members regardless of age or status. Whilst there is no explicit mention of any special approach to the baptism of children in the New Testament, they were included with the family or household, and welcomed at the Eucharist.

The completing of John 3:5 *'unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God,'* with John 6:53, *'unless you eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you,'* establishes what is necessary for participation in the Christian community.

The history of children and Communion in the West is a story of children gradually losing their place at the central table of the community. In the East the right and need of children to receive Communion is unquestioned.

During the Medieval period, for a variety of reasons, baptism, confirmation and admission to communion came to be seen as separate events. The practicalities of the availability of bishops encouraged the division of these liturgical moments. At the reformation instruction and understanding became significant concepts in deciding who should receive communion. In the nineteenth century Confirmation developed into the familiar 'gateway to communion', and twentieth century Anglicans came to believe that it had always been the precondition for receiving the sacrament.

After many reports and a good deal of study, the Church of England has come to a position of rediscovery of sharing communion with children. The convincing arguments in favour of a change in practice seem to have been

- The nature of baptism
- The acceptance of children in the church
- Children's need for spiritual nourishment
- Children's need to belong
- The needs of adults to 'become as a child'

It is on the basis of baptism that we are bidden to express our membership in the receiving of the bread and the wine at Holy Communion. To exclude children is therefore to deny them their baptism. Jesus' acceptance of children was explicit and particular;

'They brought children for him to touch. The disciples rebuked them, but when Jesus saw this he was indignant, and said to them, 'Let the children come to me, do not try to stop them; for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these.' And he put his arms round them, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.' Mark 10:13, 14,16

The church is being challenged to be as welcoming and accepting of children as Jesus was.

From 'Children and Holy Communion' by Steve Pearce and Diana Murrie

Preparing to Proceed with Admitting Children to Holy Communion

The Bishop's Regulations emphasise the importance of careful consideration and preparation. You are therefore invited to follow the following procedure.

- Contact the Diocesan Children's Adviser, barbara.meardon@salisbury.anglican.org who will send you an information booklet.
- Hold a discussion with the Clergy, Churchwardens and/or Standing Committee/Ministry Team.
- Plan a substantial discussion at a PCC meeting, perhaps inviting an outside speaker/adviser. You may wish to make this an open PCC, and especially to invite those who work with the children in your parish.
- Some may wish to set up a working party for detailed discussion.
- Allow time for prayer, reflection and discussion amongst all those so far involved.
- Move to a PCC discussion at a subsequent meeting. Inform the Children's Adviser of the decision, whichever way it goes. In the event of a decision not to proceed, plan feedback to the congregation, pastoral strategy for those most affected, and review in due course.
- Plan for the involvement of the whole congregation. Allow plenty of time to listen to those who may have concerns or uncertainties.
- Consult with parents and children's leaders about practicalities and the preparation programme.
- Select and train leaders for the preparation programme.
- Consider the implications for your pattern of services, the liturgy, the participation of all ages and you baptism policy/preparation.
- Communicate your finalised plans to the Bishop via the Children's Adviser.
- Invite parents and children to declare an interest in receiving Communion. Give parents details of the new arrangements, the preparation programme, ways they can help or be involved and maybe an invitation to a sociable learning or information occasion.
- Deliver the programme.
- Plan the service at which children will first be admitted.
- Implement on receiving the Bishop's permission.

Preparing Children to Receive Holy Communion

Children may receive Holy Communion through their membership of Christ's Body, the Church. It is, however, good to prepare them for this new experience. Preparation will need to be appropriate to the child's age and experience. It will need to be undertaken in collaboration with the child's parents, and will need to be a continual process to take account of the child's continuing growth in understanding. This will fulfil the requirements of the Bishop's Guidelines.

There are several possible patterns for this teaching, and these are just some suggestions. Think carefully about the children concerned (and you will know them best), who will be responsible for the teaching (possibly your usual children's leaders or LPAs), and when will be the best time for this to happen. Make sure you involve the parents too. Adapt the ideas as you think wise. There are several published resources you can use.

- Plan three or four sessions to take place in your usual children's groups. This will be good if most of the children are to be admitted to Holy Communion. You might like to invite the children's parents to the first or the last session.
- Hold a workshop day on a Saturday. Have teaching and activities for the children, perhaps divided into groups by age, with games, crafts and fun as well as teaching. You could also have workshops and discussion for the parents, and other church members who might like to come. Worship together at the beginning and end of the day, and share a meal. Perhaps the children could make some bread to be shared at the meal. Or they could make pizza, or cut and taste different types of bread.
- Plan a series of talks for three or four all-age services, taking the themes of the Eucharist. This way everyone will be learning together.
- During the time of preparation, perhaps your house-groups, if you have them, could also be discussing Communion.
- There are many Bible stories that you could use with children to develop their ideas about Communion. Some are more obvious than others.
 - The Last Supper
 - The Feeding of the 5000
 - The Parable of the Great Banquet
 - God gives the people of God manna in the desert
 - The 'I am' statements – Jesus as the Bread of Life, Jesus the true vine
 - The Parable of the Good Shepherd
 - The Emmaus Road Story

Remember that these sessions are not 'mini confirmation classes'. They are to teach children that God loves us and provides for us, that all are cared for and invited to be in relationship with God. Remember too that if you provide on-going teaching as the children grow in faith and understanding, there will be appropriate times later to talk more about the sacraments.

Some Questions and Answers

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 ways, the other major Christian churches (Orthodox and Roman Catholic) have continued in this tradition.

Why did the Church of England depart from this tradition?

The Anglican reformers felt that it was important to encourage people to come to confirmation and so linked this with receiving communion for the first time.

What study has the Church of England put into this change?

Work began on this in the 1970s. Some parishes in three dioceses were given permission to experiment, and all were convinced of the benefits to the children and the whole life of the church. Many parts of the world-wide Anglican Communion were already admitting baptised children to Communion.

What will happen to confirmation?

Confirmation is being restored to its proper place as the rite of adult commitment to Christ after a period of instruction in the faith.

What about the need for understanding?

This is about belonging not just understanding. How many of us can claim to fully understand communion? We all come to Communion not because of what we but because we are invited.

Can children be serious and reverent enough?

The experience of parishes that have already begun is that the children have surprised, and taught, everyone by their joy and simplicity of faith.

What about children who aren't baptised?

This needs sensitive pastoral care. Admission to Communion is always linked to Baptism, and if children are not baptised there needs to be early consultation with parents. Unbaptised children may have parents who are not churchgoers, or their parents may have decided to wait until the child understands.

However, Baptism does not depend on understanding, which is always imperfect, but on God's grace. Preparing unbaptised children, and their parents, is a great opportunity and an important part of the preparation for Communion. Baptism should then become part of the preparation for receiving Communion. Care and openness are required of all involved.

This is our faith

Some ideas for how families can share their faith in the home

‘You shall put these words of mine in your heart and soul....Teach them to your children, talking to them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise.’ Deuteronomy 11;18-19.

Children will learn more about God and Jesus from their family than they will in church. Home is the place where they will learn to love others, share emotional moments and ask deep questions. Parents are the people the children will trust, and who will influence how the children grow up.

Churches can help and encourage parents with some simple advice, and by listening to them. Perhaps you could organise an evening event for parents to discuss this and share their ideas. Keep it informal, have a meal, and enjoy learning together.

Parents will also learn so much from their children, about unconditional love and about a simplicity of faith and a directness in prayer to the whole family’s heavenly Father.

But parents often feel unable to fulfil this privilege. They may say;

‘We don’t know enough ourselves so how can we answer our children.’

‘We might get it wrong.’

‘We are embarrassed about talking about God or Jesus.’

These are common feelings – but try to put them aside. If you are in any way anxious, start with small things and see what happens. Here are some suggestions to get you going.

- Say a very simple Grace before family meals. Take turns. Even very small children can say ‘Thank you God for our food.’ Encourage everyone as they find their own words.
- Gradually you can introduce prayers for special concerns.
- At the end of the day, talk about all the things that have happened. Thank God together for the good things, ask for help with things that are difficult, and share your concerns about other people. It is important that children learn that prayer is about talking to God. It is not just a ‘shopping list’ of the things we would like God to do or provide. If we talk to people we love, we talk about all sorts of things; what makes us happy or frightened, what our hopes and dreams are, and we say thank you. It should be the same when we help children to pray.
- Talk about answers to prayers. Have you noticed when prayers have been answered, if in a way different from how you thought?

- Start some simple family rituals that give an opportunity to remember God. Maybe light a candle on the table when you have a meal together, and remember that Jesus is with you all. You could say together, ‘Jesus is the Light of the World, and He loves us.’
- Start simply saying ‘God bless’ when you say good-night to the children. You want the very best for your children, and so does God.
- Take time to look at things and wonder together about how good the creation is. Look carefully at a flower, a bird, or a seashell when you are out. Talk about how good God is to make silky coats on cats, waggly tails on dogs or anything else you see.
- Read simple Bible story books together.
- Look out for simply Christian messages in the ‘ordinary’ books you read with the children. Do the characters care for each other, or explore God’s world? Do difficult situations turn out alright in the end?

Don’t worry if the children ask questions you feel unable to answer. Talk about the question, and agree that there are things that are hard to understand. It is good for children to know that everyone wonders about some things. We are all learning, all our lives. Look out for answers or clues to answers, and talk about what you are seeing. It is good to share the journey.

This is Our Story

Children and Communion in the Bridport Team Ministry

Bridport Team Ministry first admitted children to communion in 2001. Since that time children have regularly received communion, and it has become the norm in the main parish communion services where they spend the first part of the service in a separate place learning, singing and praying – preparing themselves in their own way to receive the sacrament.

Once a month, however, at St. Mary's Bridport we hold Children Worship at 11 am. No two services are the same, but they always include prayers, readings and activities. A couple of times a year they include a Eucharist. The theme of the service when we have communion is always being close to God – we in him and he in us.

The children's worship always begins with tea, juice and biscuits. The people coming for the children's worship mingle with the people from the Parish Communion who end their service with refreshments. This provides a social bridge and helps older people to know that young families do relate to the church when it is done differently.

In July 2005, we had around 35 people, most of them families. There were 17 children of ranging in age from 1 to 14. After sharing the peace we came to stand in a circle around the table. As we did so we made sure of the names of the people we were standing next to that would use at the giving of communion. (The altar table was a small portable one that stands 35 cm. from the ground - so the children can see easily). The responses were on a screen behind the celebrant.

At the giving of communion each person (from age 3 upwards) was invited to hold out the pattern or chalice to the person on their left and say “*N*, The body/blood of Christ”. Sometimes the children used their parents' Christian names, sometimes they just said “Mummy” or “Daddy”. (The liveliest little girl, aged 8, who has the reputation of being disruptive, was standing firmly to the celebrant's right, which meant she was the last to receive communion before the celebrant!). Whilst this was happening there was really wonderful silence. Everyone was concentrating on the communion of the sacrament and the hearts of the people. Being able to give the communion as well as receive it was really special to the children. After the last child gave the chalice by name to the celebrant and he had received, we followed up by singing a very lively song and were then sent out to love and serve the Lord.

Experiences of St James' Church, Southbroom

We first introduced children at Communion in 2003. We had a large group in the age range 5 to 9 who kept saying – “why can't we share in the bread and wine?” There being no compelling theological reason for them not to share we invited Janet Delaney to come and speak to first our PCC and then the congregation and it was unanimously agreed that children, given proper instruction, should be able to receive Communion before Confirmation.

I have to say that our experience has been entirely good. We have never had a child acting irreverently but always thankfully and joyfully, and this I suppose is a credit to the Children's Team who prepared them. If you are thinking of taking the plunge – do! Children have a deep spirituality, which is humbling at times, and our learning and sharing together is what our Lord would have us do.

Children and Communion in Wilton

Children discern for themselves when they are ready to receive Holy Communion. We wait until the child asks, and is aged 7 or over. Often several children present together. Children meet for six preparation sessions with Sunday Club leaders and the curate. We use published material, and parents have a parallel session with the Rector.

A child may be a regular church member but we then find that he/she has not been baptised. Baptising that child in the main service provides a defining moment for both child and congregation. New birth indeed.....

We have seen these children grow in reverence. They have encountered Jesus and they have an expectation when they approach Him. We have seen a deepening spirituality within them.

Woodford Valley CE VA Primary School

School Eucharist?

We are very fortunate in that our school is situated in an almost idyllic setting, just a stone's throw from the church building and within a small village in a beautiful river valley. We are a primary school of 150 pupils with a specialist learning centre for Autism attached. We have now achieved an established annual pattern of worship that includes regular Eucharist. We offer pupils in Key Stage 2 the opportunity to be admitted to Communion and in Year 6 children can take Confirmation classes.

The suggestion could be made that it must be very easy to both make and maintain strong close links with the church and community. In a way it has been a very smooth process throughout the 6 years since the idea first came. However, new ideas, if they are going to work, require a certain level of commitment, effort and time.

As in all church schools, the act of Christian worship has been the essential and most important element of each day. At Woodford Valley the format for this has evolved in a number of ways and includes use of some traditional liturgy, particular responses, prayers of intercession, etc. In addition

- The school maintains strong links with the community achieved through regular participation in the Parish services;
- The Vicar regularly leads worship in school;
- The school frequently uses the church building in order to celebrate the Christian festivals, services for parents, etc.

This school aims to be a totally inclusive community, not just in the academic sense, but also in ensuring that all can participate in worship at whatever level they feel comfortable at. To enhance and increase this inclusion we wanted to further extend the range of worship opportunities and give some children a deeper knowledge of Eucharist. We also wanted to give children a sense of belonging to a world-wide faith community.

We have been very fortunate that our annual service of First Admission to Communion has been led by the Bishop and we invite as many people from the school and its wider community as we can. The vicarage lawn is the usual venue for this.

I feel we have made a real difference in providing the opportunities to develop personal faith. We are in many ways the 'church' for many children who do not normally regularly attend with their families. Two teachers have also been baptised and confirmed. The links between school, church and community have flourished, not just in the aspect of developing worship but also in the tangible enrichment of our culture overall.

Ros Hart
Headteacher