

ADMISSION OF CHILDREN TO HOLY COMMUNION: DIOCESAN GUIDELINES & INFORMATION

Children & Holy Communion

Diocesan Framework for Admission of Children to Communion before Confirmation

A Framework for Admission of Children to Communion before Confirmation

This Diocesan Framework is based on the Guidelines drawn up by the Church of England's House of Bishops which formed part of a Report (GS1212) presented to the General Synod on 27th November 1996. The Synod took note of the Report and welcomed it, encouraging the House of Bishops to confirm the Guidelines. In 2006, the House of Bishops produced a set of Regulations. The Guidelines offered here are a pastoral interpretation of the regulations to aid parishes in considering admitting children to communion before Confirmation.

1. Permission from the Bishop

Since communion before confirmation is a departure from the inherited norms of the Church of England, it requires special permission. Each parish must seek the permission of the Bishop of Ely before admitting children to Holy Communion.

2. A Parish Framework for Admission of Children to Holy Communion

The Bishop will wish to know that both the Incumbent and the PCC support an application for permission to admit children to Holy Communion. In order to ensure that a church community moves forward together on this, each parish will be asked to consult carefully and decide upon a framework for the admission of children to Holy Communion. Guidelines for the creation of such a framework are contained in Appendix 2(see below)

[You can download a Parish Application Form from the website](#)

3. Baptism

Baptism always precedes admission to Holy Communion and so before admitting a person to communion, a priest must seek evidence of baptism.

4. Marking admission

Admission to communion should be formally marked and should take place during the Sunday Eucharist in the church community where the child normally worships. It will probably be appropriate to make this service special in some way for the candidate(s), and the community in which their faith has been nurtured. Advice about the ways in which this may be done, and suggestions of texts to be used, see Appendix 2.

5. Register

A register should be kept of every person admitted to Holy Communion before confirmation and each should be given a certificate marking his or her admission.

[You can download a Certificate for Admission to Holy Communion from the website](#)

No baptised person, child or adult, who has once been admitted to Holy Communion and remains in good standing with the Church, should anywhere be deprived of it. When a family moves to another area, the incumbent of the parish they are leaving should contact their new incumbent to ensure that there is no confusion regarding the communicant status of children.

6. Age and circumstances of admission

Children who are to be admitted should themselves express a wish to receive communion and they should attend church regularly. They will need to have parental support or the personal support of another adult within the church community and provision should be made by the parish for preparation before admission. People are not admitted to communion by virtue of their age. However candidates will need to be old enough to express for themselves a wish to receive communion, to ask for baptism if they have not already been baptised and to take part in the preparation provided. As a general guideline it is suggested that seven be considered an appropriate age for this. Special care should be taken to ensure that appropriate provision is made, if necessary, to include children with special needs and advice should be taken from those responsible for their care and education about this.

7. Christian nurture, Christian education and preparation for admission to communion

Admission to communion should be considered within the general context of both the ministry that is carried out in the parish through initiation and also of the continuing nurture of people in the Christian faith. An appropriate pattern of preparation for admission to communion should be followed and the bishop will need to be satisfied that a

programme of continuing Christian nurture is in place leading to confirmation in due course.

The circumstances of each parish are different and patterns and programmes for Christian education will vary. Nevertheless it is the responsibility of each church community to review regularly the provision it makes for the nurture of young Christians and to ensure that there is an appropriate pattern of Christian education. The incumbent and PCC should take care regarding the quality of educational material and the advice of diocesan officers and other professional advisers should be taken into account.

The priest must decide exactly how much of the liturgy communicant children will attend. Even if there is a separate 'Ministry of the Word' for children, anyone who is to receive Holy Communion should be present in the main assembly at least for the Eucharistic Prayer.

8. Services of Baptism and Confirmation

Since baptism is at the heart of initiation, it is important for the bishop regularly to be the minister of holy baptism, and particularly at services where candidates will be both baptised and confirmed. It is generally inappropriate for candidates who are preparing for initiation into the Christian life in baptism and confirmation to receive baptism at a service other than the one in which they are to be confirmed.

In using rites of public re-affirmation of faith other than baptism and confirmation, care should be taken to avoid the impression that they are identical with confirmation. In the case of people who have not been confirmed, it will be more appropriate for the incumbent to propose that they be confirmed.

Appendix 1

Guidelines for Creating a Parish Framework on the Admission of Children to Holy Communion before Confirmation

The headings below and the points associated with them may provide a helpful guide to creating a parish framework. They should be regarded as a guide, not as a straitjacket, and you may wish to adapt the headings to make them more suitable for your situation.

Principles

This section may contain

- a statement about the place of children in your church
- a statement about why the parish wishes to admit children to Holy Communion before confirmation

The consultation procedure and its outcome

Provide

- a brief outline of the consultation procedure undertaken by the parish and details of the outcome, including any formal decisions made by the PCC

Christian nurture and Christian education in the parish

This section may contain

an outline of the ways in which the church community encourages and supports the nurture of children in the Christian faith through

- baptism preparation (any individual or group preparation for parents and god-parents before the baptism service, support offered and provided by congregations to those who bring children for baptism, any follow up, both personal and in the form of anniversary cards)
- resources and support for Christian parents (both personal and in the form of books and resources)
- procedures to support children whose parents do not regularly attend worship
- the welcome given to children at worship and the steps which are taken to enable and encourage children to be part of the worshipping community
- a programme of Christian education (you may like to think about any groups you have and give an outline of the work they undertake as well as seasonal and special events, for example pre-school groups, Sunday school, junior church etc, mid-week groups for Christian teaching, youth groups, choirs, informal learning events, seasonal events, home groups, courses etc)
- preparation for confirmation (how are people encouraged to consider confirmation and what preparation do they receive in preparation?)

Preparation for Communion

You may like to outline

- details of the preparation for admission to Communion that you will offer to those children wishing to be admitted.

The implications for worship in the parish

- Think about and outline any consequent changes in the pattern of services, the conduct of the liturgy and provision for the participation of all age groups

The support of parents or other adults

- Provide an indication of the way in which children will be invited to declare an interest in receiving communion and how parents or other significant adults will be involved in preparation and support of the children

Marking admission

- Outline how it is proposed that the admission of the children to Holy Communion will be marked by the church community? See also Appendix 2(below) for guidance

Provision for Record Keeping

- Create a register of the names of all children admitted to communion (an ordinary hardbacked A4 notebook will be quite adequate.)
- Provide certificates marking admission (the diocese provides a simple certificate or the child's baptism certificate may be used)
- Make provision for a letter of commendation to a new parish for any children who move (an example is provided at Appendix 4)

Appendix 2

Suggestions and Texts for a Service marking Admission to Holy Communion

1. Children should be admitted to Holy Communion at a normal Sunday morning service in the presence of the regular congregation.
2. The service should be a significant occasion for those who are to be admitted and they should each be invited to take part in the service in ways that are appropriate to their age and gifts. For example, provision may be made for material produced in the preparation programme to be used in the church building or during the liturgy. One suggestion is that candidates produce a banner or altar frontal illustrating the prayer often used at the end of the Rite A service beginning 'Father of all, we give you thanks and praise.' (Outline art work to help with this will be available to those who would find it helpful.)
3. Children may be encouraged to invite their Godparents and wider family to the service.
4. The children should each be given their certificate of admission, or their baptism certificate should record their admission, and they should know that their names have been included in a register of those admitted to Holy Communion.
5. The children who are to be admitted should be named during the service. It would be appropriate to do this either at The Greeting, at the bidding to the Collect or during the Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession.
6. It is not necessary to use every part of the order provided.

7. The children might be actively involved in the service in one or more of the following: the Ministry of the Word, the Intercession, the presentation of the gifts, the preparation of the table, leading people in the dismissal.
 8. The children should receive with their families and friends.
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Texts

1. At the Greeting

The president may introduce the celebration by greeting the children in these or other similar words

*Today we express our love and support for N and N ..
Our common life is enriched by their presence and gifts. They are taking a new step in the life to which God has called them in their baptism.*

2. At the Collect

This bidding may be said with this special Collect or the Collect of the Day

As N and N [these children] receive the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ for the first time today, let us pray that we may all know and reflect the love of Christ in our lives.

*God of mercy and life,
as by your baptism you call us to your table,
grant that in Christ we may feed on your love,
offer our lives to you for the sake of the world,
and shine with your light all the days of our life:
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the holy spirit,
one God now and for ever. Amen.*

A simpler and more easily accessible version of this would be

*Merciful God,
you give us new life in baptism
and call us to your table.
As we feed on your love,
help us to live our lives for the sake of others
and to shine as your lights in the world;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord. Amen.*

3. At the Intercession

The following words may be included in the prayer

*We pray for N and N [these children],
that they may know the transforming power of your love in their lives.*

4. Proper Preface

*And now we give you thanks
that you call these children [N and N] into the communion of your love;
your overflowing grace makes them partakers in the divine nature
and a sign of your kingdom.*

5. At the dismissal

The blessing of the day of Pentecost may be used. The children may be addressed as follows:

*[N and N] God has touched you with his love
and given you a place among his people.
Together with all God's people
you must explore the way of Christ
and grow in friendship with God,
in love for his people and in serving others.*

The children may lead the dismissal using this form

*To a troubled world
Peace from Christ*

*To a searching world
Love from Christ*

*To a waiting world
Hope from Christ*

Appendix 3

Sample Letters

1. Information letter to parents

Dear Parents

Following a consultation by the PCC, our church has been given permission by the Bishop to admit children to Holy Communion.

The PCC has developed a framework within which this will be undertaken, following the framework provided by the diocese. This indicates that children to be admitted to Holy Communion should be regular attenders at worship, have expressed a wish themselves to receive Holy Communion and should take part in a course of preparation before they receive the sacrament.

Our preparation course is planned for

We shall be having a preliminary information meeting for parents on and you are warmly invited to attend.

Yours sincerely

2. Parents/Carers Response Form

Admission of Children to Holy Communion

I/We have discussed admission to Holy Communion with my/our child/children and we should now like to take this further.

I/We understand that to be admitted to Holy Communion, children must be baptised, attend church regularly and be willing to take part in the preparation sessions provided. We also understand that children who are admitted to Holy Communion before they are confirmed are admitted on the understanding that they will continue to be encouraged and nurtured in faith so that they will be ready to request confirmation when they are older.

I/We are prepared to support my/our child /children in this part of their journey of faith and take part with them in the preparation sessions (as required)

Name(s) of Child(ren)
Dates of Birth and Baptism
Signature of Parent(s)

3. Letter of commendation to a new church

Dear

I understand that (Names.....) with their/his/her children (names.....) are soon to move into your parish.

(Children's names) were admitted to Holy Communion in this church on (dates) and have received Holy Communion regularly since that time. They will be looking forward to continuing as communicants in their new church and we hope that you will make them very welcome. They each have a diocesan certificate marking their admission to Holy Communion.

Yours sincerely

Parish Priest

Appendix 4

Some Frequently Asked Questions

Why should we bother with confirmation at all, if baptism is the full initiation into Christ?

If baptism were simply a ritual of admission to a club or society, then the logic behind this question would be impeccable. Someone who had passed through the process would simply belong to the club. You would only put that person through a second ritual, if you thought there was something missing from the first; baptism would be the first stage, and confirmation the second. Something like this used to be said by those who claimed that baptism was only a first instalment of the Holy Spirit.

But this view is not satisfactory. Baptism is an eschatological sacrament; that is to say an 'effectual sign' (Article 25 of the Thirty-nine Articles) of God's justifying grace, which has as its final purpose that the baptised may 'enjoy the everlasting benediction of [God's] heavenly washing and may come to the eternal kingdom' (Book of Common Prayer). Were a person to die before confirmation, that person would not lack any essential gift for the enjoyment of salvation. Baptism bestows regeneration with the Holy Spirit, reception into God's family by adoption, and incorporation into the church.

But because we live in time, and because of all the damage that the world, the flesh and the devil are able still to inflict on us, there is constant need for repentance and renewal. We always need to be reminded of our baptism. We need daily to be renewed in 'all virtue and godliness of living' (BCP). Confirmation is a solemn and public reminder of baptism, a solemn and public self-commitment to live the Christian life, and a solemn and public

prayer of the whole church that the candidate be strengthened by the Holy Spirit for that public witness and service. It is a 'coming out' for Christ, supported by the gift of the Holy Spirit. The fact that baptism is full initiation into Christ is not a reason for dispensing with confirmation.

Ought not those who come to Holy Communion understand what they are doing, and how can children do so?

There is a strong and worthy tradition in our church that to come to Holy Communion implies both a capacity for self-examination and the due acknowledgement of sin, and also an awareness of what it means to eat the flesh and drink the blood of Jesus Christ. We are far from being experts in child psychology, but we do believe that perceptions of these matters can be conveyed to a young child, if not in complex language, then by the attitudes and practices of grown-ups with whom the child is associated. In our view, it is fundamental that Holy Communion be understood to be truly holy - children know instinctively when something serious is happening. And we would also regard it as fundamental that a child should be able to distinguish between the consecrated elements and ordinary food and drink. For this reason we would recommend an age limit below which admission to Holy Communion should not take place; but more particularly that admission should not take place unless there is evidence of a capacity and a readiness to treat the sacrament with reverence.

The issues surrounding learning disabilities are also relevant to this discussion. But there are other principles which apply to that state of affairs, which are not identical when dealing with the nurture and expectations of children without such disabilities. We have had no hesitation in confirming people with even severe learning disabilities, when their supporters and carers request it.
