



DIocese OF CANterbury
CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S MINISTRY

Children and Holy Communion: Preparation Notes

Telling the next Generation

Nurturing our children is not just something that happens in 'Sunday School', in the church hall or reserved for Family Services. It is the handing down of the faith of the Church to its children by sharing of experience and example as much as by direct teaching. Three groups of people are involved: the child's parents, the parish children's workers, and the whole church community.

Things we have heard and known, things our ancestors told us. We will not keep them from our children; we will tell the next generation.

Psalm 78:3-4

Every member of the congregation is involved in this nurture. Children learn from example and will copy what they see. The way they see adults worship God, and behave towards other people, both within the Christian family and the wider community will teach them more about being a Christian than the best teaching courses in the world.

Preparation and Meetings

If a parish decides to discuss admitting children to Holy Communion, it should give an opportunity for every member of the congregation, and this must include the children to hear and be heard. Teaching through sermons, discussion groups, and an open meeting are vital. A companion paper, Children and Holy Communion; the background, gives a brief historical background and answers some of the most common questions, and is designed to provide some basic information before any discussion or formal meeting takes place. A variety of resources are available on loan from the Children's Ministry Adviser.

However a parish sets about discussing the subject, it remains an emotive one. Some people will rejoice, others will be deeply opposed for a variety of reasons. Many will feel that the normal formative pattern should continue. There will be worry about the disappearance of familiar patterns, but also excitement and a desire to know more. Alongside the main discussion, there will probably be people asking questions about baptism, which they have never raised before. Whatever the views, some will be deeply held, it is important that they are all treated with respect. For these reasons alone, it is advisable to invite someone from outside the parish to present the subject and answer questions. This allows the clergy to remain 'neutral' and gives the meeting the benefit of information and experience from the wider church.

Possible subjects for Discussion Groups

- Grace not worthiness
- Being part of the Church family
- A review of the Family Communion service
- Supporting Christian children - a vulnerable minority
- Study on Baptism

Where are we now?

The question that a parish needs to ask is not whether children should be allowed to receive Holy Communion at all, but **whether this is a right move for this parish at this time**. In some cases the answer will be 'Yes'. That may be with the proviso that the PCC needs to consider some revisions to its Holy Communion Service, or re-organise the Sunday morning nurtured programme first. There may even be some logistical matters like deciding whether the children being prepared should be present for more of the service than hitherto and so on. In other parishes the answer may be 'Not Yet' and the PCC will need to plan if or when to revisit the subject.

Although the Application Form asks for the results of a PCC vote, it is best if the parish can come to a consensus without a group of people, albeit a minority, who are bitterly opposed to the move being outvoted.

Once admittedshould not be deprived

Even if a parish decides that this is not a right move for it, it is important that it is aware of these changes. We live in a transient society and it is likely that a communicant child will attend your service at some time in the near future. Clergy and lay people who administer Holy Communion need to be ready to allow such children to partake, as ***no baptised person, child or adult, who has once been admitted to Holy Communion should be anywhere deprived of it*** (House of Bishop's Guidelines GS Misc 488). Similarly, people need to know that, having a communicant child in its congregation does not imply that the parish's policy will immediately be altered.

Pastoral Situations

Sensitivity needs to be shown to families were the parents have decided that the children should not be baptised as infants. It could be said that, if a child wishes to be a follower of Jesus Christ and meet him in Holy Communion, he or she could also declare his or her faith and be prepared for baptism at the same time. As with any other pastoral matter, each situation is unique and should be handled accordingly.

It may occasionally be appropriate to admit a child to Holy Communion though preparation groups may not become the norm for some time. Examples may include when a whole family is baptised together and the youngest is not of an age for Confirmation, or when a child is the only non-communicant in an adult choir. In these cases, the same process of debate and seeking permission from the bishop must be followed, and it is for the PCC to decide how it will proceed after then.

There may be a child in the group with learning or behavioural difficulties. It is vital that such children are given any extra help that is needed. Ask the parents for advice and, if necessary, arrange for the particular child to have someone to sit alongside him or her and to liaise with the parents after each session. Help may be needed for children from single parent families who may miss classes because they are visiting the other parent or in need of practical support.

Many children who are described as difficult are carrying burdens connected with home and school. These range from minor problems through to neglect and abuse. Such children can easily be excluded as 'unsuitable' but they may be those who are most in need of these signs of belonging to the Church and God's love for them. Every effort should be made to include them in preparation and affirm them as valued members of the Christian family.

Ask...

- Does our church provide a welcoming environment for children to grow in faith?
 - Is the whole congregation aware of its responsibility for the nurture of its children by prayer, example and teaching?
 - Are we providing continuous support to our young people and their parents?
 - Are young people regularly involved in our Eucharistic worship? Can this be developed?
 - Are our children's leaders adequately supported and trained?
- If the answer to any of these questions is negative, how can we start to bring about change?

Further Assistance

The Children & Young People's Ministry Adviser is happy to provide help and advice on any stage in the preparation process. This can include leading a meeting or talking through specific issues.

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