



Working on Worship (6)

Celebrating the Eucharist in C of E schools

What is the Eucharist?

The Eucharist is one name given to the service at which Christians obey Jesus' command to 'remember him' in bread and wine. Jesus gave this command at the last meal he had with his followers before he died; Jesus said the bread and wine represented his body and blood about to be offered as a sacrifice for them. The service may also be called Holy Communion, the Lord's Supper or Mass. For many Christians, receiving 'bread and wine' is an important part of their worship.

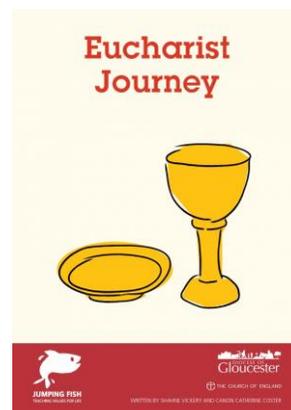
In the Anglican church the Eucharist is the most important act of worship and takes place regularly. Children in Anglican churches generally wait until being 'confirmed' in their faith before taking bread and wine themselves but a move towards communion before confirmation is gaining ground. Catholic children take 'First Holy Communion' at about seven years of age and children in Orthodox churches from baptism onwards.

Learning about the Eucharist in a Church school

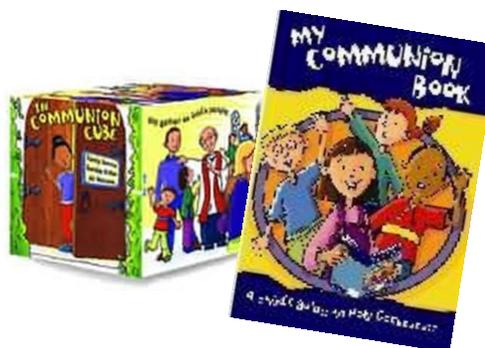
Pupils in all schools should learn about Eucharist or Holy Communion as part of RE. They may visit a church to find out about a communion service or have the chance to ask local clergy about the service, explore its symbolism and so on.

A useful KS2 resource for this is **Eucharist Journey**, an interactive and creative set of six stations to build around a church based on key Christian symbols. A complete script with directions (written in italics) is provided for leaders. A sample page is available from:

<https://www.gloucester.anglican.org/schools/jumping-fish-publications/experience-journeys/>



RE websites can help you find resources for teaching about Eucharist in RE and there are a number produced for churches which can be used as 'artefacts' in school e.g. children's communion books, or the Communion cube by www.chpublishing.co.uk



Deciding to hold a School Eucharist



Every Church of England school must provide a daily act of Christian worship which reflects their Anglican character. Some schools like to celebrate a school Eucharist as part of their overall pattern of worship but it is not a requirement for a CE school to do so.

In some schools, children and staff join a regular mid-week celebration at the parish church once a term, meeting other members of the church congregation. In some schools a

Eucharist takes place termly or on special occasions such as Easter or Leavers' Day and is specifically for those connected with the school.

This is a service which will be led by a priest and should involve early discussion between the church, staff, governors and pupils. Good preparation is essential so that the service offered is of good quality, honouring to God and both nurturing and challenging for the worshippers. Advice should be sought from the local Diocese, possibly through the Schools' Adviser.

One key piece of advice is to consider having a 'narrated' Eucharist, where a teacher or older pupils explains what is happening simply as the service progresses.

What help is available for those preparing a School Eucharist?

One good source is to talk to other schools who have celebrated a Eucharist before but there are also helpful publications which can guide all those involved:

- **Exploring Holy Communion in Primary Schools** - a pack in which each year group has a different part of the service to learn about and contribute to in the Eucharist so that over a number of years they grow in understanding of the Communion service. The pack has discussion notes for staff and governors and an official service outline.

http://www.going4growth.com/downloads/Exploring_HC_in_Primary_Schools_-_Gloucester_Diocese.pdf

- **Take a Look at Our School Eucharist** – a picture pack and booklet taking schools through how one school prepared and celebrated their first Eucharist, including lessons around key themes and a 'narrated' service outline. Contact www.cofesuffolk.org

What about those who do not 'take communion'?

Taking communion i.e. receiving the 'bread and wine' is an important rite for Christian believers; in an Anglican church those who are 'confirmed' take communion and in some parishes, children take communion before their confirmation. Those in good standing in other Christian denominations are also welcome to take communion. Local practice should be followed in a school Eucharist with regard to children who normally attend an Anglican church.

However, if a school holds a Eucharist, the majority of children and staff may not 'take communion' and the effect can be very negative. It is important to remember that 'Eucharist' means 'thanksgiving' – giving thanks is something everyone can do, everyone can participate, and a carefully structured Eucharist can include many opportunities for thanks of all kinds.

A Eucharist can thus become a feast which is inclusive not exclusive. A good parallel is that of a football match: going to the match is not just for the players. A limited number are on the pitch, playing and scoring goals but everyone can get involved – cheering, celebrating, watching, waiting, encouraging, even refereeing and commentating.



At a Eucharist, the point is to be part of the celebration and thanksgiving, to remember Jesus, to recognize him in the bread and wine, as well as to eat. There are opportunities for:



- praising God, using instruments and our voices
- confessing wrongdoing and being forgiven
- reading and listening to stories of Jesus
- thinking about our lives
- praying for ourselves, our school, our families and world
- singing of many kinds and in many languages
- making peace / being reconciled with others
- receiving a blessing from God
- offering our gifts, and work, as well as bread and wine

Each of these can be inclusive in some way of all pupils and staff.

All depends on the quality of the preparation and the way in which the different elements of the service are explored e.g. children prepare their own offerings of good things they have done, which are processed to the altar with the 'bread and wine'

Where children come specifically from another faith tradition, particular efforts to explore possibilities with parents should be made. In some schools, the children have been the official recorders of the event, using the school i-pads, in others they have been allowed a blessing form the priest provided the head is not touched, etc. A school Eucharist is both an act of worship and an RE lesson in a school – either side may be emphasized.

What help is available from the Church of England nationally?

The National Liturgical Commission report on 'Transforming Worship' writes encouragingly about worship in the school context. It says:

'Many church schools have regular (if not always frequent) celebrations of the eucharist. The growth in the admission of the baptized to communion will have a growing impact on this. There is a need to resource eucharistic worship in schools so that, within an acceptable framework, it is creatively-planned, well-conducted and appropriate to the school community.'



A number of new responsive prayers for celebrating the Eucharist when the majority of participants are children are now available, and priests can be encouraged to use these, maybe choosing with the help of older pupils.

Specific and detailed guidance can be found here:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/holy-communion//additional-eucharistic-prayers/guidance-on-celebrating-the-eucharist-with-children>

