

Bishops Guidelines for the agreed approaches to Children, Young People and Holy Communion and Confirmation

Dear Colleagues,

For many years it has been the widespread practice in the Church of England to prepare children for Confirmation from age 11 upwards and for them then to receive Holy Communion. However the present practice of confirming in Year 6 can create a series of challenges. It can create the feeling that Confirmation is part of a 'passing out parade' that pupils undertake as they leave Primary school. The church then faces the challenge of losing contact with these children as they move on to their secondary school. Another difficulty in confirming in Year 6 can be that this is often a very busy year for the student with their end of Key Stage SATs.

Since the publication of the Diocesan strategy Reaching New Generations and with the new SIAMS (Statutory Inspection for Anglican and Methodist Schools) framework which encourage our Church Schools to be more distinctively Christian and explore Holy Communion, the traditional practice has come under review. A growing number of churches have begun to explore how they can include and engage our children and young people in the celebration of Holy Communion both before the age of 11 and before Confirmation.

This new approach is supported by extensive research into children's spirituality which highlights the fact that all humans are born spiritual beings and not empty vessels needing to be filled. Our children are spiritual beings who need the church to provide opportunities to engage and nurture their spirituality, not just verbally but also sacramentally. Further support comes from the Canon Law of the Church of England. Canon Law B15 A states:

"2. Children who have been baptised but who have not yet been confirmed and who are not yet ready and desirous to be confirmed as required by paragraph 1(a) of Canon B15A may be admitted to Holy Communion provided that the conditions set out in these Regulations are satisfied."

With this in mind and in order to provide further clarity and guidance, the Bishops of Lichfield Diocese have agreed that the following practices may be permitted:

1. Admission to Holy Communion following preparation through school or church from Year 3 (age 7) upwards, with possibly Confirmation from Year 7 (age 11) upwards
2. Confirmation in Year 5 (age 10) with preparation through school or church with admission to Holy Communion following this.

The advantage of option 1 is that it will encourage more young people to feel part of the church community through Baptism and Holy Communion. Confirmation at a later age can be linked with more 'adult' decisions such as being elected on to the PCC or taking other more public responsibilities in church life.

The advantage of option 2 is that young people feel part of the church community through Baptism and Holy Communion and that this sense of belonging will carry them forward to adult discipleship. By encouraging Confirmation in Year 5, there are opportunities to continue the discipleship during Year 6. For instance, the Confirmation group can continue to meet together to ensure the young person feels a part of the wider church community before moving on to the next stage of their education.

A fuller explanation of the theological and practical considerations involved, along with recommended resources and interviews with children and young people can be found [HERE](#).

On the additional sheet there is a flow chart (Appendix A) of the basic path that needs to be followed as well as links to some useful resources (Appendix B) for you to begin discussions within the PCC and wider church. Further resources and training can be provided on request.

When a church considers its policy and practice regarding admission to Holy Communion and Confirmation it needs to be supported by thorough discussion in PCC and with the local school. These are not stand alone events and need to be clearly thought through from the perspective of a whole–church strategy and continuing discipleship. Appendix C contains some suggested questions to consider.

Any church looking to take up Communion before Confirmation must inform their Area bishop by contacting the Area Office.

With our prayers and good wishes

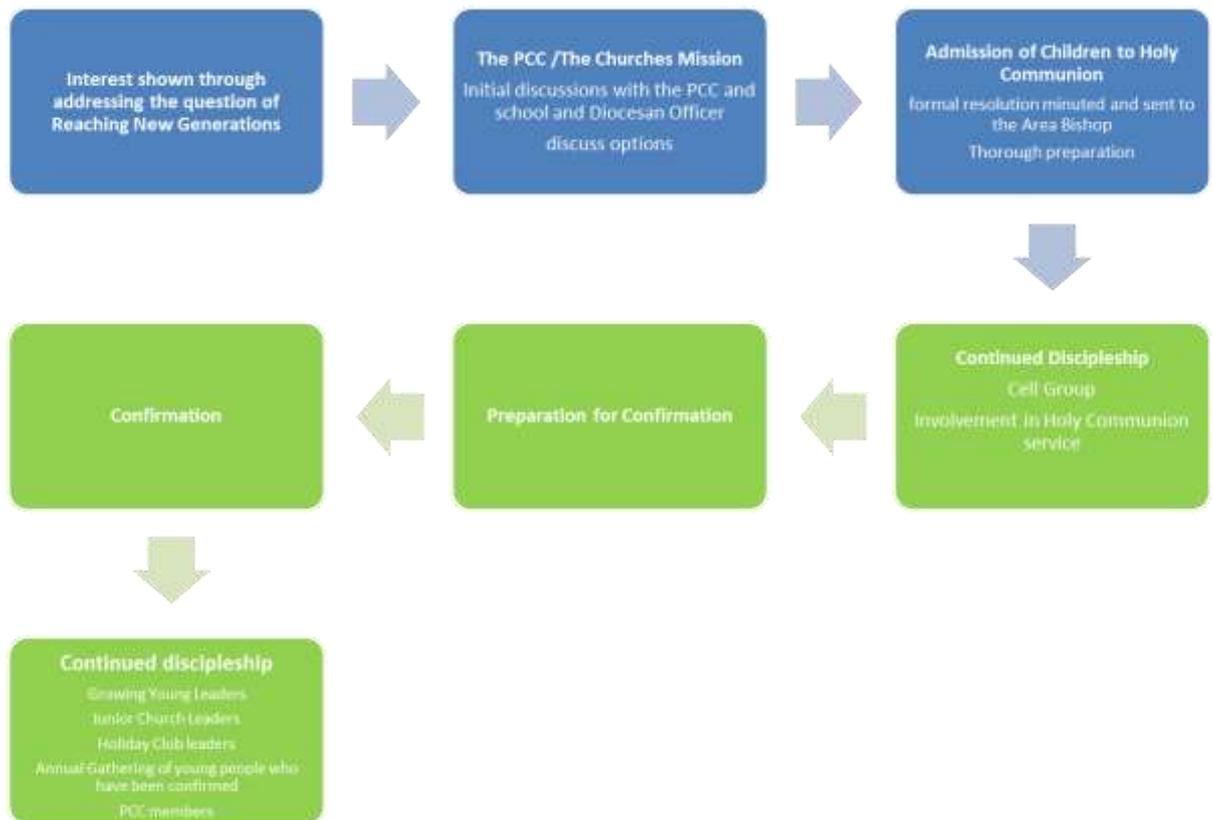
Salop –

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Appendix A

A flowchart of the process for admitting to Holy Communion before Confirmation



Appendix B

Useful Resources

Books

Reconnecting with Confirmation P. Maidment, S. Mapledoram with S. Lake (Church House Publishing)

Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus, D. Csinos and I. Beckwith (IVP Books)

Children's Spirituality - What it is and why it matters R. Nye (Church House Publishing)

Introducing Additional Eucharistic Prayers T. Stratford, P. Tovey (Grove Books Ltd)

Children at Communion, How to involve Children in the Eucharist (Grove Books Ltd)

Websites

Diocese of Liverpool - www.liverpool.anglican.org/Children---Holy-Communion

Diocese of Manchester -

https://cofemanchester.contentfiles.net/media/documents/document/2017/06/ADMISSION_OF_CHILDREN_TO_COMMUNION_BEFORE_CONFIRMATION_Web_June_2017_.pdf

Appendix C

Key Questions PCCs need to consider

The PCC should decide whether and how admission to Communion before Confirmation would help in the church's plans for young people. A formal resolution to admit children to communion before confirmation should be passed and minuted and sent to the Area Bishop.

- What do we do at present for our children and young people?
- How does admission to Communion fit in with the overall parish policy on the nurture of children and young people within the framework of Baptism, Communion and Confirmation?
- When will we have period of preparation and discussion with the congregation(s) with time for questions concerns and issues to be addressed?
- What do those churches that have young families do to attract them? e.g. Messy Church? or other Fresh Expressions?
- Do our present patterns of worship (type of service and music etc.) suit children and young people?
- What advice do we need and where do we get it from?
- What budget would we be willing to raise for our work with children and young people?
- How could the church(es) and local schools help each other? What is popular with children in the school collective worship?
- Would head teachers welcome a new approach to children's and youth work in the area, which would include a course leading to communion before confirmation?
- Considering there may be students who attend other churches what are the Ecumenical considerations should be addressed? Is this something that we could be doing with, for instance, the Methodists?
- How will the volunteers, who are preparing the children, receive appropriate training?
- What are the implications for worship that need to be addressed? How much of the liturgy will communicant children attend, how could they be involved, and how often will they receive Communion, and will the present worship pattern hinder the process?
- Where do uniformed groups fit into the discussion?
- How can parents or guardians be involved both in the period of preparation, and in the process of deciding whether and when individual children are ready? If parents wish to be confirmed how will this be managed?
- How should the circumstances of families where the parents do not normally attend church be addressed?
- How could the needs of children with learning difficulties be catered for?
- Who will be asked to maintain the register of people admitted to Communion before Confirmation with a view to reminding them of the need to be confirmed at a later date?
- How is the church going to nurture ongoing discipleship?