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# Admission to Holy Communion before Confirmation Guidance



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Revised 2024

## Foreword

Holy Communion has sometimes been described as the Christian Church's family meal. It may be much more than that, but it is certainly nothing less. Exceptionally, receiving Communion may be a private act, but for most of us, most of the time, it is something we do gathered together as a whole congregation, adults and children worshipping God in the same place and time. None of us understands it fully, whilst even a primary school aged child can appreciate that in the sacrament we are somehow drawn closer to Jesus, encountering him not only through the words we hear, but in the very taste of bread and wine, and the bodily acts of eating and drinking.

As a Church committed to growing younger, it is right that we seek to include, as much as we possibly can, our younger members in our worship. No parish is required to have a policy to admit children to Communion at an age before that at which they can make their baptismal promises for themselves in public at Confirmation. However, for those parishes that wish to do so, this booklet sets out the necessary processes and guidance. I hope that it will be useful both to those parishes with long experience of admitting children, and those for whom this is a fresh venture in mission.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "David Mandel". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

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## Introduction

For many of us, our experience of initiation and nurture in the Church of England has been one which follows the pattern of Baptism, followed by Confirmation in the teenage years, at which time we were admitted to Holy Communion. However, for some time, questions have been raised about this pattern, and since 2000, under certain circumstances and with permission from the bishop, parishes in the Diocese of Manchester have been allowed to admit baptised children to Holy Communion before Confirmation. This is a practice which is widely permitted by dioceses across the Church of England.

It is an important part of every parish's mission and ministry to consider, and make provision for, the inclusion of children in the whole of church life, including Sunday worship. Each parish works out its most effective practice for doing this, and admitting baptised children to Holy Communion before Confirmation may be one way of furthering that practice. For those parishes who already admit baptised children to Holy Communion before Confirmation, we hope this material will assist you in reviewing and developing your practice. For those parishes which currently do not admit baptised children to Holy Communion, but are interested in exploring this further, we hope it will help and support you in that task.

This material updates the previous "Admission of Children to Communion before Confirmation: Study Pack" produced in 2015.

There is now no lower age limit for admission to Holy Communion in the Diocese of Manchester, but, given the need for due preparation (see [Canon B15A on the C of E website](#)) and General Synod Regulations para 5 (Appendix A) and that it is illegal to give alcohol to children under 5, children in the Diocese of Manchester would not normally be admitted to Holy Communion before the age of 5. Parishes can make the case for the admission of under-5s on an exceptional basis, but they would need to give details of the preparation intended in their application to the bishop.

The material is set out in 4 stages:

1. Making the decision;
2. Preparing children for admission to Holy Communion;
3. Creating an inclusive 'Communion Culture'.
4. Looking to Confirmation

Each section consists of information and guidance with links to various resource pages. Do take particular note of the resources included in this document as they are essential reading for Incumbents and PCCs.

*If your parish had already received permission prior to July 2023 to admit children to Holy*

*Communion before Confirmation, we ask that you please re-affirm your practice by completing this form, to ensure that we have an up-to-date record. If you need any further help, please contact the Diocesan Children's Officer, Diocese of Manchester, St John's House, 155-163 The Rock, Bury, BL9 0ND or [rickotto@manchester.anglican.org](mailto:rickotto@manchester.anglican.org)*

## Making the Decision

The process for considering the admission of baptised children to Holy Communion before Confirmation can provide a very positive opportunity for the whole church community to discover more about Holy Communion and to review your church's approach to its mission and ministry among children. It is a process that should involve the whole church community.

### A Suggested Process of Consultation

- a. The incumbent opens the discussion with the PCC, during which they should familiarise the PCC with some important initial information (in particular, the General Synod Regulations 2006 and the current Diocesan Requirements).
- b. Consultation should then take place within the parish, and should include:
  - Children
  - Parents/caregivers
  - PCC members
  - Children's group leaders
  - The wider congregation
  - Local church schools (if appropriate)
  - Local ecumenical partners (if appropriate)

Note: in multi-parish benefices or mission communities it is not necessary for every PCC in the group to agree in this matter, but any parish that decides not to apply for permission must remember that **any communicant child duly admitted as a communicant under this procedure, is entitled to receive Holy Communion in all parishes of the diocese and throughout the Church of England.**

Your discussions might relate to the following areas:

- The meaning of Baptism, Holy Communion and Confirmation
- Understandings from the Bible about Baptism, Communion and Confirmation
- The historical tradition of Holy Communion
- Children's faith and how that grows
- How we nurture people, including children, in the Christian faith
- Being part of the church community
- Any issues of the practice for your parish.

The following Resources in the Appendix will help you in your discussions:

- A. General Synod: Admission of Baptised Children to Holy Communion Regulations 2006
- B. Requirements for the Diocese of Manchester
- C. Parish Policy outline.

**Please note: Appendices A, B, C are essential reading for Incumbents and PCC members.**

Other resources can be found in this document and on the Diocesan website including:

- Admitting Baptised Children to Holy Communion: a short guide: information to enable wider parish engagement.
- Children and Admission to Holy Communion: some history and theology
- Rite of Admission in the Diocese of Manchester
- Background Reading
- Frequently Asked Questions
- Resources
- Involving children in services of Holy Communion

As parishes make decisions about the appropriate ages for admission to Holy Communion and Confirmation, they might want to think about how these steps relate to and shape one another.

A summary of discussions with each group should be kept, to help inform the final decision.

- c. Please inform the Diocesan Children's Officer that you are beginning the consultation process in your parish. You will then be able to arrange for any support or advice that you need.
- d. After consultation with the various groups, the issue must then be debated fully at a PCC meeting taking into account the responses of the various groups involved, the 2006 General Synod Regulations and the Diocesan Requirements. The PCC can then vote on the motion.

It is important that whatever the outcome, the decision and subsequent practice is communicated to the wider church, and, as far as possible "owned" by them, so that it can become embedded in the life of the whole church.

- e. If the decision is made by the PCC to proceed, you should then develop your Parish Policy (See Appendix C) and return it to the Children's Officer, who will pass this on to the Bishop of Manchester for their permission. A policy outline can be found in the Guidelines section.
- If permission is subsequently given, the decision and the planned arrangements should be communicated as widely as possible within your parish. Make sure you include parents/caregivers of younger children so they know what will be happening in the future. If, for any reason, permission is

not given, the PCC will need to consider its next step, depending on the reasons given.



## **Preparing the children**

The General Synod Regulations 2006 require parishes to have made adequate provision for preparation before they admit children to Holy Communion. The purpose of such preparation is to enable children to feel ready to take part in Holy Communion in a meaningful way.

### **Who should lead the preparation?**

Leaders for the preparation should have experience in exploring faith with children and be appreciative of why children are being admitted to Holy Communion. They may be clergy, readers, children's leaders or others experienced in working with children. There should be at least two adults involved in the sessions. They must have current DBS certificates and comply with the Safeguarding Policy of the Church of England. If no one who has relevant experience is available, contact the Diocesan Youth, Children and Families Adviser for support and guidance.

Be considerate if only one child is being prepared. You need to follow best safeguarding practices, but it could be intimidating for two adults to be involved in the preparation. You could ask a parent/caregiver or an adult supporter to be present rather than a second leader or meet on church premises within sight of other children and adults engaged in other activities.

### **Preparation Content**

If you choose to run a course, pre-prepared schemes are available, or you can devise your own programme, or use a mixture of the two!

Whatever you choose, it must be appropriate to the children's ages and abilities, so that they can meaningfully participate. Think about the number of sessions, their length, format and content. It is expected that any preparation course would be no more than three or four sessions.

Consult with parents/caregivers, and children as appropriate about where and when the sessions should happen. You should include choir members or others who might want to explore being admitted to Communion but are not part of your children's groups.

Exploring Holy Communion with children should include stories and activities that would help them understand more about:

- Jesus - his life, ministry, death and resurrection;
- Their Baptism;
- The Last Supper;
- The pattern of the service of Holy Communion.

At the end of the sessions, have a relaxed conversation with each child about whether they still want to be admitted to Holy Communion. Respect their decision, although this may also need a conversation with parents/caregivers as well.

See Appendix E: Resources for material and ideas that you might use or adapt.

### **Involving parents/caregivers**

Ideally, the nurture of a child in the Christian faith should be a partnership between God, the child, the parents/caregivers/family, the church and the school. Parents/caregivers, or those with parental responsibility, must be consulted if their children are considering being admitted to Communion and the significance of the step must be explained. A parent/carer, or someone with parental responsibility, must give their permission.

At the beginning of the process, you could gather parents/caregivers and children together, informally, perhaps with refreshments, so you can talk about children receiving Holy Communion and the process that will be involved. This is an opportunity to explain something of the significance of receiving Holy Communion for their child, the content of the sessions, as well as practical details. Talk about dates and times (that will be important if you have busy families!). Don't pressure them for a decision there and then – give them time to go away and talk about it as a family if that is what they would prefer.

Decide the degree of support that you wish parents/caregivers to give during the preparation. If you are working with younger children, you may want a parent/carer to be involved in all or some of the sessions. This can help build up family relationships and family faith. However, some children, (especially older children) may be less forthcoming if their parents/caregivers are present.

### **Alcohol**

It is important to explain to parents/caregivers and children that the usual practice when receiving Holy Communion is to receive the bread and the wine. This may present a problem for both a child and their parents/caregivers. The law prohibits giving alcohol to children under 5. Even though most children being admitted to Holy Communion will be 5 or over, some children may not want to receive the wine and some parents/caregivers may feel uncomfortable about it.

Parents/caregivers and children need to know that they can receive Holy Communion in one kind (i.e. just the bread) and it is still complete Holy Communion. Another option would be simultaneous administration (the priest dips the bread in the wine on behalf of the child and administers). Ultimately, it is the parents'/caregivers' responsibility as to whether their child has wine.

Near the end of the preparation sessions, it is helpful for the children to be able to taste the

(unconsecrated) bread and wine (with parental/caregiver permission) so they know what to expect. Guidance on this is available on the [Church of England website](#).

As the sessions come to an end and children consider whether they wish to be admitted to Holy Communion, this may raise questions for parents/caregivers about their own faith. This may offer an opportunity to help them move forward on their own faith journey.

### **The Service of Admission to Holy Communion**

The service which marks admission to Holy Communion is conducted by the parish priest and takes place in a main Sunday morning Communion Service. To avoid confusion, it should not be part of a Confirmation service. Some churches make it an annual part of their calendar at a particular festival, while others admit children as they become eligible.

Either the liturgy in *Services and Prayers for the Church of England: Christian Initiation*, page 188 or the rite authorised by the Diocese of Manchester should be used (see *The Rite for Admission of Baptised Children to Holy Communion before Confirmation authorised by the Diocese of Manchester, Appendix F and on the website - LINK*). The diocesan liturgy can be used just before the intercessions which can then begin with appropriate prayers for the children.

The service should be very special for all present, and particularly for the children being admitted. Parents/caregivers and godparents should be invited to the service, as should other children from the children's group.

The overall length of the service needs to be considered, as well as ways in which all can be involved.

It can be planned creatively so that the rite of admission is not just an extra part added in. The service could involve the children making a symbolic connection with their Baptism e.g. they could each dip a finger in the water in the font and make the sign of the cross on their forehead; they could hold a lighted candle at an appropriate point, perhaps the one given to them at Baptism (with due safety precautions). You may wish to include a renewal of Baptismal vows for all present, perhaps in place of the creed.

The children being admitted can be involved in parts of the service, e.g. Bible readings, prayers, choosing some of the music or interviews in which they have the opportunity to say something of their own faith. They could be the first to receive Holy Communion at the invitation. You could present each child with a card and/or gift from the church.

### **After the service**

Enter the names of those who have been admitted to Holy Communion into your church's register. You can purchase a formal register for this purpose. The register should be kept securely along with other registers.

Endorse each child's Baptism certificate with the record of admission (i.e. write on the

certificate Admitted to Holy Communion by <name of minister>, and then sign and date it.) If a child does not have their Baptism certificate, complete, and give them a separate certificate (see certificate Appendix F and on the website - [LINK](#)).

Adding children's names to the register of those who have been admitted to Holy Communion, and endorsing their Baptism certificates are important acts, not just because they provide evidence of formal admission if a person moves to another parish, but also because it signifies admission to Holy Communion as a formal rite of the Church of England (as with Baptism and Confirmation) and marks the occasion as significant in a person's journey of faith. Endorsing a child's Baptism certificate also makes a visible connection between Baptism and admission to Holy Communion.

## **Evaluation**

After the Service of Admission, involve the course leaders, children and parents/caregivers in evaluating the preparation. Use this to help plan for the future. You could also use this group to evaluate the Holy Communion services at which children are included. It is worth putting a date in the diary, perhaps six months after the service, to listen to the children's experiences of Holy Communion, how they have felt and to hear anything they believe God has been saying to them. Listening to, and respecting children's experiences of church on a frequent and regular basis gives worth to those experiences, as well as helping to shape future decision-making.

# Creating an inclusive 'Communion Culture'

## Planning Holy Communion Services to include children

Children who have been admitted to Holy Communion should be encouraged to receive Holy Communion at least once a month. If children are to receive Holy Communion they should be present in church from at least the Peace.

Some churches have developed a monthly all-age Communion service, others have a more regular all-age Communion service. Some churches have the Ministry of the Word with children in one or more separate groups and then everyone joins together for the Ministry of the Sacrament. Each church has to work out what works best for the whole congregation.

Having children present and actively engaging in services of Holy Communion needs careful planning and implementation.

Guidance of Celebrating the Eucharist with Children, prepared by The Liturgical Commission at [www.churchofengland.org](http://www.churchofengland.org)

## Messy Church

If you have a Messy Church, there is Holy Communion in Messy Church. For more details go to: [www.messychurch.org.uk](http://www.messychurch.org.uk)

This is the result of collaboration between Messy Church BRF and the Liturgical Commission of the Church of England. The resource focuses particularly on doing Messy Church Holy Communion in an Anglican setting, and includes a detailed liturgy and suggestions for Bible passages that would work well with a Messy Communion. See Resources on the website for more information.

## Including learning about Holy Communion in children's group programmes

Children – and their parents/caregivers - need to know about Holy Communion before they can make an informed decision about whether they want to be admitted. Introducing children to, and informing them about, Holy Communion in ways that are appropriate to their age should be part of the programme for both Sunday groups and mid-week groups at least every two years.

## Introducing Holy Communion to under 5s

If children are going to be admitted to Holy Communion from the age of 5, it is important that they grow up with some experience of it from their earliest involvement in church worship.

Some people may think that Holy Communion is beyond under 5s but even in these early years,

they are already cultivating many of the ingredients that will enable them to participate and be involved in Holy Communion if channeled in appropriate ways.

Children in these early years are already developing:

- An appreciation of familiar patterns, rhythms and rituals – and a desire to join in with them;
- A memory for actions and a desire to copy, join in with, and repeat them;
- The capacity to make sense of their experiences intuitively through their senses and through their spirits, before they can articulate their understanding and feelings through language;
- An openness to moments of awe and wonder;
- A love of stories;
- An appreciation of symbol – they use symbol in their play all the time;
- A love of celebration.

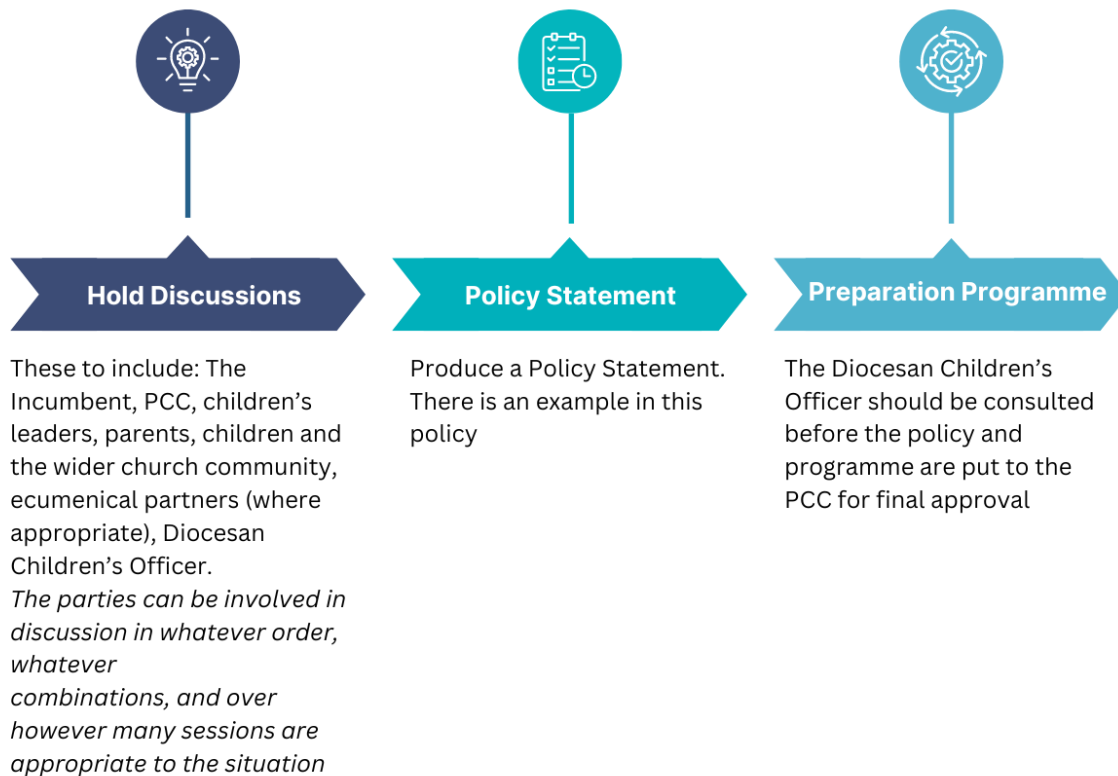
For advice about introducing Holy Communion to under 5s, see [We All Share: Introducing Holy Communion to Under 5s through Play, Exploration and Creativity](#) in 'Involving Children in services of Holy Communion' on the website.

## Looking to Confirmation

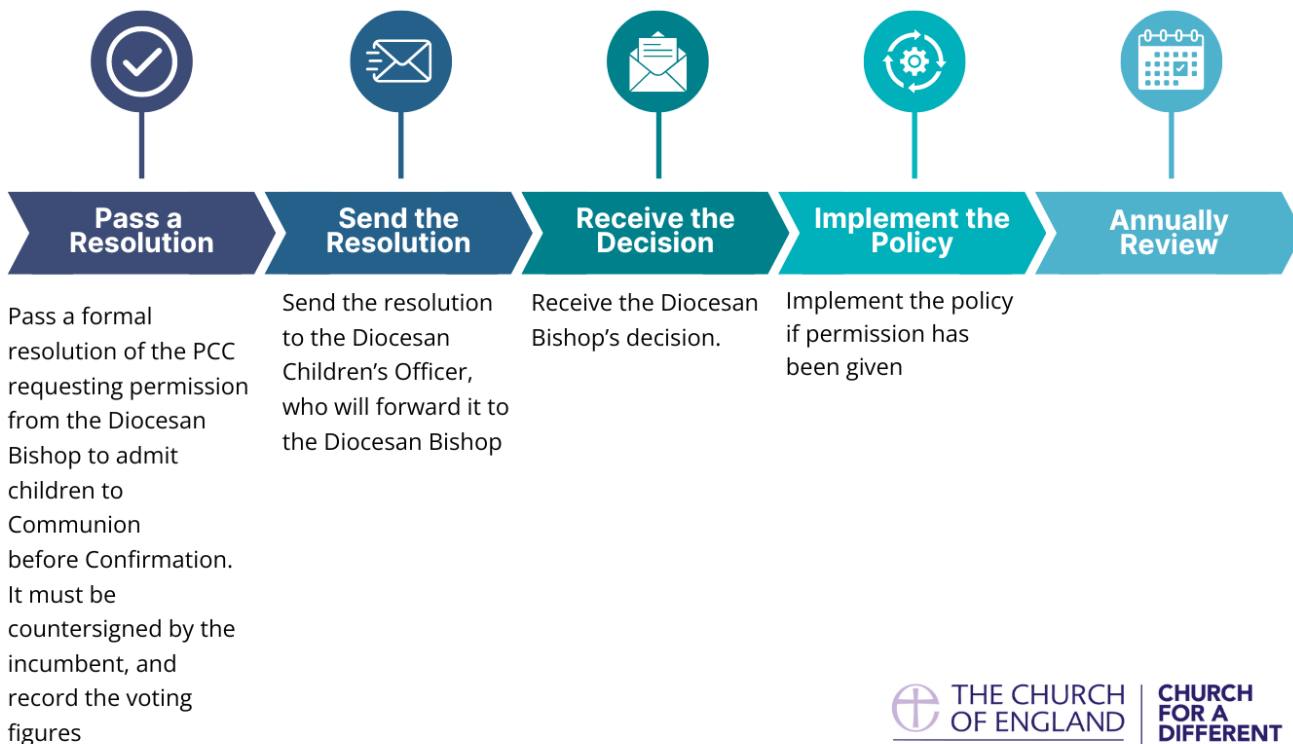
Anecdotal evidence suggests that admitting baptised children to Holy Communion before Confirmation does not affect the take-up of Confirmation at a later point. Confirmation marks the important moment when baptised members of the Church take public responsibility for their Baptismal status. It is important that admission to Holy Communion before Confirmation is seen as a stage of Christian nurture which leads later to Confirmation. Preparation for admitting children to Holy Communion before Confirmation should not be seen as a 'Confirmation lite' course, but as a unique opportunity to explore the wonder of Holy Communion. Confirmation preparation offers a different opportunity to think about the wider Christian life, the role of the Holy Spirit and the impact faith has on everyday life.

# Admission to Communion : the Process

## Phase One



## Phase Two





## Frequently Asked Questions

- Will children of this age really understand what Holy Communion is about?

It is important that children's participation in Holy Communion is seen in the context of their growing and developing faith. Very young children are able to understand something of the meaning of Holy Communion in a way appropriate to their development. At the same time, none of us can claim full understanding.

As children grow, they should be learning about God's grace and being given opportunities to respond, whether through their families, children's groups or elsewhere in the life of the church, at home or at school. As part of this, joining in Holy Communion can be an opportunity for them, along with others of all ages, to hear repeated the story of God's grace and to join in responding to it.

Those leading services will need to think and consult about how to do this in a way which will be meaningful for adults and children together.

- Will the children take it seriously and reverently?

The experience of churches which have admitted children to Holy Communion has been that children do take it seriously, and that they have made a very positive contribution to their church's services of Holy Communion.

Children will focus more if they sit with their families or in small groups with an adult, with the adults providing appropriate role models.

Ensure that children are seated where they can see and feel part of what is happening. You could also provide material which will help them to follow the service in a way that meets their needs.

Some parents, who are themselves very committed to their faith, have chosen not to have their children baptised, preferring that to be a decision the child makes for themselves. If children have to be baptised before they can be admitted to Holy Communion, this would exclude such children. How do we respond to them?

The Regulations clearly state that Baptism is a pre-requisite for admission to Holy Communion. Discussion should therefore take place between the incumbent, parents, and the child. As the child wants to be admitted to Holy Communion, this might reflect a step in their personal journey of faith and commitment. This might be an appropriate time for the child to be baptised.

- Will Confirmation seem less important to young people if we make this change?

It will always be our prayerful hope that baptised children who have been admitted to Holy Communion will go forward to make an act of personal commitment and commissioning in

Confirmation. The reality that some do not, or 'have not yet' does not necessarily, of itself, negate the value of admitting those children to Holy Communion in their younger years. However, this does call for churches to reflect on the significance of Baptism, Holy Communion and Confirmation as part of their discussions around admitting baptised children to Holy Communion before Confirmation, and to set this within the wider context of how you nurture children and young people in the Christian faith from birth to adulthood.

- Should this be something we consider when we have so few children in our congregation?

The Annual Mission Statistics for this Diocese do show that a significant number of parishes have few or no children regularly attending Sunday worship, but the low number of children in any one parish should not be a disincentive for parishes to admit baptised children to Holy Communion before Confirmation. After all, we would willingly baptise just one child, so numbers should not put parishes off admitting small numbers of baptised children to Holy Communion.

Within the children in our church, we have some children whose parents would agree to them being admitted to Holy Communion and some who wouldn't. We are concerned that those who are not admitted may feel 'second class'.

There are a number of reasons why a child might not be admitted to Communion at the same time as others of the same age: it might be their own or their parent's/caregiver's wishes; they might not be baptised; or they might be new to the church. It is important to talk openly with children about the reasons. Children do live with difference as part of their lives and difference need not correspond with worth. There should be many other ways in which all children experience that they are valued members of the group and church.

- What happens if everyone doesn't agree to the change?

It is rare to have complete agreement on any development in the Church – or any other large organisation for that matter. It is not necessary to have 100% agreement in the parish for admission to go ahead; however, there should be substantial support.

Admission

should not be a practice that disappears from the life of a parish if the vicar or a few enthusiastic families move elsewhere. For this reason the Bishop will want to see the voting figures when a PCC agrees to go forward with admission, and will want to see a reasonable majority in favour before granting permission.

## APPENDIX



## Appendix A: General Synod Regulations 2006

The General Synod hereby makes the following Regulations under paragraph 1(c) of Canon B15A :-

1. These Regulations may be cited as the Admission of Baptised Children to Holy Communion Regulations 2006 and shall come into force on such day as the Archbishops of Canterbury and York may jointly appoint.

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.

3. Every diocesan bishop may at any time make a direction to the effect that applications from parishes under these Regulations may be made in his diocese. The bishop's discretion in this respect shall be absolute, and he may at any time revoke such a direction (without prejudice to the validity of any permissions already granted thereunder).

4. Where a direction under paragraph 3 is in force in a diocese, an incumbent may apply to the bishop for permission that children falling within the definition in paragraph 2 may be admitted to Holy Communion in one or more of the parishes in the incumbent's charge. Such application must be made in writing and must be accompanied by a copy of a resolution in support of the application passed by the parochial church council of each parish in respect of which the application is made.

5. Before granting any permission under paragraph 4, the bishop must first satisfy himself (a) that the parish concerned has made adequate provision for preparation and continuing nurture in the Christian life and will encourage any child admitted to Holy Communion under these Regulations to be confirmed at the appropriate time and (b) where the parish concerned is within the area of a local ecumenical project established under Canon B 44, that the other participating Churches have been consulted.

6. The bishop's decision in relation to any application under paragraph 4 shall be final, but a refusal shall not prevent a further application being made on behalf of the parish concerned, provided that at least one year has elapsed since the most recent previous application was refused.

7. Any permission granted under paragraph 4 shall remain in force unless and until revoked by the bishop. The bishop must revoke such permission upon receipt of an application for the purpose made by the incumbent. Such application must be made in writing and accompanied by a copy of a resolution in support of the application passed by the parochial church council of each parish in respect of which the application is made. Otherwise, the bishop may only revoke a permission granted under paragraph 4 if he considers that the conditions specified in paragraph 5 are no longer being satisfactorily discharged. Before revoking any permission on these grounds, the bishop shall first notify the incumbent of his concerns in writing and shall afford the incumbent a reasonable time to respond and, where appropriate, to take remedial action.

8. Where permission granted under paragraph 4 is in force, the incumbent shall not admit any child to Holy Communion unless he or she is satisfied that (a) the child has been baptised and (b) a person having parental responsibility for the child is content that the child should be so admitted. Otherwise, subject to any direction of the bishop, it is within the incumbent's absolute discretion to decide whether, and if so when, any child should first be admitted to Holy Communion.

9. The incumbent shall maintain a register of all children admitted to Holy Communion under these Regulations, and where practicable will record on the child's Baptismal certificate the date and place of the child's first admission. If the Baptismal certificate is not available, the incumbent shall present the child with a separate certificate recording the same details.

10. A child who presents evidence in the form stipulated in paragraph 9 that he or she has been admitted to Holy Communion under these Regulations shall be so admitted at any service of Holy Communion conducted according to the rites of the Church of England in any place, regardless of whether or not any permission under paragraph 4 is in force in that place or was in force in that place until revoked.

11. These Regulations shall apply to a cathedral as if it were a parish, with the modifications that:

(a) any application under paragraphs 3 or 7 must be made by the dean of the cathedral concerned, accompanied by a copy of a resolution in support of the application passed by the chapter of the cathedral concerned;

(b) the obligations imposed on the incumbent under paragraphs 8 and 9 shall be imposed on the dean of the cathedral concerned.

12. A diocesan bishop may delegate any of his functions under these Regulations (except his functions under paragraph 3) to a person appointed by him for the purpose, being a suffragan or assistant bishop or archdeacon of the diocese.

13. In these Regulations:

(a) 'incumbent', in relation to a parish, includes:

(i) in a case where the benefice concerned is vacant (and paragraph (ii) below does not apply), the rural dean;

(ii) in a case where a suspension period (within the meaning of the Pastoral Measure 1983) applies to the benefice concerned, the priest in-charge; and

(iii) in a case where a special cure of souls in respect of the parish has been assigned to a vicar in a team ministry by a Scheme under the Pastoral Measure 1983 or by license from the bishop, that vicar; and

(b) references to paragraph numbers are to the relevant paragraph or paragraphs in these Regulations.

## Appendix B: Diocese of Manchester Regulations

### **ADMISSION OF CHILDREN TO HOLY COMMUNION**

#### *Revised Regulations*

- 1. CONDITIONS OF PERMISSION:** The permission of the Diocesan Bishop must be obtained before any unconfirmed children are admitted by means of a resolution passed by the PCC and endorsed by the incumbent's countersignature.

The Diocesan Bishop will wish to be satisfied that:

- (a)** only baptised children are admitted;
  - (b)** children are being adequately prepared through a suitable course of preparation which the Diocesan Bishop will approve after consulting the appropriate committee and officers of the Diocesan Board of Education;
  - (c)** once admitted, children and their families are being adequately supported and encouraged in the years before they are ready to be confirmed;
  - (d)** the consent of parents has been obtained, and they, with their children, have been warned that they might experience difficulties if they move to an area where this permission does not exist or has not been taken up;
  - (e)** where parents are not churchgoers, a sponsor had been appointed by the incumbent to support children in their practice of worship and the Christian life;
- 2. AGE LIMIT:** The age for admission will be at the discretion of the parish priest, but in the case of particularly young children it is advised that guidance be sought from the Diocesan Children's Work Officer.
  - 3. CONFIRMATION:** It should be explained to children and parents that the Church expects baptised children to offer themselves for Confirmation, so that they may make a mature commitment to Christian discipleship. Although usually the minimum age for Confirmation is 11, it should take place when they are old enough to make a thoughtful commitment to adult responsibility in the Church of Christ. If there is a wish to present children younger than 11, the clergy concerned should discuss this with the confirming bishop.
  - 4. WHEN CHILDREN MOVE:** If children who have been admitted to Holy Communion in accordance with the procedures outlined above move to another parish, incumbents of the Diocese will be encouraged to allow them to receive the elements in their new congregation. Refusal at this point would cause offence and misunderstanding.

Incumbents are asked to provide families with letters of commendation to the new incumbent. The same procedure should apply to holiday visits.

February 1988 (amended September 2006 and May 2012)



## **Appendix C – The Policy**

### **THE CHILD**

The incumbent must be satisfied that the child has been baptised.

The incumbent must be satisfied that a person having parental responsibility for the child is content that the child be admitted to Communion before Confirmation. A sponsor(s) for the child will be appointed if no adult with parental responsibility attends church. The requirements of the Parish Child Protection Policy will apply in the selection of sponsors.

It must be clear that the child him/herself wishes to receive.

The age for admission will depend on the child's appreciation of the significance of the sacrament. The Bishop has directed that the age for admission should be at the discretion of the parish priest, but advises that in the case of particularly young children, guidance should be sought from the Diocesan Children's Work Officer.

### **THE PREPARATION**

Clear information about the preparation process and the implications of children's admission to Communion will be made available to the child and family before the preparation is entered into.

It will be made clear how many sessions there will be, how long they will be, and where they will be held.

The preparation programme will be .....

The incumbent will be involved, together with ..... The Parish Child Protection Policy procedure will be followed in selecting those who work with children and the conduct of sessions.

Attempts will be made to involve parents/carers in the preparation, and families will be supported as well as children during this period.

The preparation will usually be separate from any other groups or work with children.

### **ADMISSION TO COMMUNION**

The admission to Communion\* will be marked by ..... Where possible the family will be involved.

A register\*\* of all children admitted to Communion will be kept and will be made available to the archdeacon in the course of the quinquennial inspection. Children admitted to

Communion will be given certificates recording the date and place of their first admission, and if possible have their Baptism Certificates endorsed with the same information. During Communion services, child communicants will be expected to be present for at least the eucharistic prayer before they receive.

Families and children will be made aware that they might experience difficulties if they move to another area where children are not admitted to Communion before Confirmation. The incumbent will provide a letter of commendation to the incumbent of a parish to which a family is moving, or is going on holiday asking for the child to be admitted to Communion in accordance with General Synod Regulations (2006).

## **CONTINUING NURTURE**

Continuing nurture and support will be provided for children and families after admission to Communion by .....

If possible, parents/carers will be involved in the ongoing nurture.

It will be made clear to children and their families that there is an expectation that the child be prepared for Confirmation in due course.

## **THE POLICY**

This policy was approved by the PCC at its meeting on .....

There will be an annual review of the policy and the materials used, and a report will be made to the PCC by the incumbent with recommendations for the following year.

## **WITHDRAWAL**

If at any time the parish wishes formally to cease participation in the admission of children to Communion before Confirmation, permission to withdraw from the scheme will be sought from the Diocesan Bishop. The request for this permission will be in the form of a PCC resolution, accompanied by voting figures, and will have been preceded by consultation involving incumbent, PCC, children's leaders, the wider church community, and the Diocesan Children's Officer. Use the form to formally request

Arrangements will be made for the pastoral support and continuing nurture of any young people who, at the time of withdrawal, have already been admitted to Communion but have not yet been presented for Confirmation.

*The above model embodies the requirements of the Diocese of Manchester Regulations (1988, amended 2006 and 2012) and the General Synod Regulations (2006). Its provisions therefore*

*represent a minimum requirement. Parishes may add to or re-express the points in the model policy, but to remove any of them would mean that the parish policy was not in accordance with Diocesan and/or General Synod Regulations.*

## NOTES

\*A suggested liturgy for 'Admission of the Baptised to Communion' is included in: *Common Worship: Christian Initiation*, The Archbishops' Council, Church House Publishing (2005). It is downloadable at:

<http://www.cofe.anglican.org/worship/downloads/pdf/ciritesofaff.pdf>

\*\* The register should be durable and contain the following information: name, address, date of birth, date and place of baptism, date of admission, and signature of officiant at admission. Canterbury Press produces an example.

## **Appendix D: Some Issues to Consider**

### ***THEOLOGICAL***

Baptism is the undisputed rite of entry into membership of the Body of Christ: "In the one Spirit we were all baptised into one body" (Common Worship p290); and membership of that body is affirmed in the reception of Holy Communion: "we are one body, because we all share in one bread" (Common Worship p179). To deny Holy Communion to any baptised Christian could be seen as denying the full validity of their Baptism.

If a sacrament is seen as a free, unearned gift of grace expressing God's unconditional love, to what extent can conditions be imposed regarding admission to the sacrament of Holy Communion?

Jesus uses children as an example of what 'the greatest in the kingdom of heaven' are like. How is this reflected in our practice if we make children the least at the Communion Table by denying their full participation? Some passages of scripture to consider: Matthew 18:1-5; 19:13-14; 21:14-17.

If Confirmation is made a condition of receiving Holy Communion it could be seen as having a confused significance - vying with Baptism for importance as a rite of entry - rather than having a clear and distinct significance of its own as a rite of adult commitment.

### ***HISTORICAL***

The practice of the earliest Christians with regard to receiving Holy Communion is not clear (see Appendix II), but certainly whole households were baptised and it is assumed that children would have been included. It seems that Communion immediately followed Baptism, and there is no indication that children were excluded. The Eastern Orthodox Churches have always communicated children immediately after Baptism.

The subsequent 'divorce' of Communion from Baptism has been the combined result of the theological preoccupations and practical circumstances of following centuries: e.g. the doctrine of original sin led to the promotion of infant Baptism; church expansion necessitated Baptism by priests rather than bishops, followed by laying on of hands by bishops during periodic tours; the failure of parishioners to present children to the bishop on these occasions contributed to the bishops' demand that 'laying on of hands' precede Communion; the development of 'laying on of hands' into a rite involving the Confirmation of Baptismal vows produced an emphasis on the need for teaching before Confirmation.

The moves in recent times from afternoon to morning meetings of Sunday School, and towards Parish Communion as the regular Sunday service have led to a new practical

situation in which children find themselves regularly in church at a service in which they cannot fully participate.

The tradition of the church regarding admission of children to Communion is not represented by a static 'norm' but is characterised by a continued development in practice in the light of changing situations: in the spirit of this tradition, what developments are appropriate to our situation today?

## **PASTORAL**

Child psychologists and experts in children's spiritual development alike point to the importance of children taking part in practical activities – learning by doing – and of their natural facility for engaging with symbol and mystery. Full participation in Communion is sometimes claimed to be an erosion of childhood, but instead it could be seen as cherishing and making best use of the very characteristics of childhood.

One important characteristic of childhood is the need to belong. Partaking in Holy Communion is a powerful indication of belonging – to God, and to one another in the Church. Much is made of what children may or may not understand about the sacrament, but they will certainly understand the rejection implied in being denied food at the Lord's Table.

If Confirmation is seen as the 'gateway to Communion', there will continue to be pressure for it to occur in the early teens or before. However Confirmation is also held to represent an adult commitment of faith. No other 'adult' decisions or responsibilities are taken on at such an early age – e.g. driving, voting, military service; the major 'life commitment' of marriage is not permitted before 16 - and the 20s are generally thought of as the earliest appropriate age: by confirming at 12 or 13 are we saying that the faith commitment of Confirmation is less important than these other undertakings?

One of the most marked characteristics of the teens is to question and reject institutions, whilst a characteristic of those in their late 20s is to 'revisit' and engage with them. Thus to require Confirmation of teenagers runs counter to their developmental needs whilst 'using up' a rite which they might value deeply as a public demonstration of their return to the faith at a later stage in their lives.

## Appendix E: A Guide to Additional Resources

### *Resources for Background Reading*

***Let the Children Come to Communion*** by Stephen Lake. SPCK. First published 2006.

This book encourages the admission of baptised children to Holy Communion and gives information about theology and practice, along with experiences of churches that have already taken this step.

***The Spirit of the Child*** by David Hay and Rebecca Nye. Jessica Kingsley Publishers. Revised edition 2006.

***Children's Spirituality: What it is and why it matters*** by Rebecca Nye. Church House

Publishing. 2009.

Important reading for understanding how children's spirituality and faith grow and are nurtured.

***Ready to Share One Bread: Preparing Children for Holy Communion*** by Nick Harding and Sandra Millar. SPCK. 2015. Particularly helpful for this stage is Part 1: The story so far and Part 2: Preparing the Ground.

### *Resources to help with preparation*

***Ready to Share One Bread*** by Nick Harding and Sandra Miller, SPCK, 2015.

Includes resources for exploring the issue of children and Holy Communion with the whole congregation, case studies from real-life churches, a preparation course, (includes an easy to run 2 session programme for all the family) and advice on including and involving children in Eucharistic worship. Also includes theological reflection on children and the Eucharist from Michael Perham and considers the impact of receiving Holy Communion on children's discipleship.

***Children and Holy Communion*** by Diana Murrie and Steve Pearce, Kevin Mayhew, Revised 2007

Includes background information and advice on planning for change; six session outlines with photocopiable take-home sheets, which follow the theme of 'belonging to God' with Holy Communion as the 'food of belonging'.

***Welcome to the Lord's Table*** by Margaret Withers, Bible Reading Fellowship, New Edition 2017

Intended for preparing 7-9 year olds for admission to Holy Communion. Introductory chapters explore background to the question of preparing children for Holy Communion, give guidance on preparing the congregation, training leaders and involving the family. The programme comprises 11 flexible units and is designed to last approximately 3 months before the children are admitted to Holy Communion.

***His Spirit is With Us*** by Leslie Francis and Diane Drayson, Kevin Mayhew, 2003

A project-based approach to the Eucharist, with readings, hymns and songs, prayers, children's activities, project ideas, discussion starters, dance/drama suggestions about how to integrate all this into the service. This could be a useful resource for those parishes wanting to devise their own preparation programme.

#### ***Using Godly Play to help prepare children to receive Holy Communion:***

If your church uses Godly Play as the basis for their children's ministry, you will find there are sessions which can be used in preparing children to receive Holy Communion. The shape of a Godly Play session is "eucharistic" in its structure! In a regular Godly Play session, children gather, hear and respond to the Word, pray, share food with thanksgiving and leave with a blessing.

There are also specific Godly Play stories that can be used when preparing children for Holy Communion.

For example....

*Baptism* in *The Complete Guide to Godly Play*, Volume 3, page 70

*The Faces of Easter V11* in *The Complete Guide to Godly Play*, Volume 4, page 63

*The Circle of The Holy Eucharist* in *The Complete Guide to Godly Play*, Volume 4, page 106

*The Good Shepherd* in *The Complete Guide to Godly Play*, Volume 3, page 77

*The Good Shepherd and the World Communion* in *Godly Play*, Volume 4, page 91

#### ***Helping children to be more involved in services of Holy Communion***

- Keep the service relatively short and move through at a steady pace.
- Consider which Eucharistic Prayer you will use. Two additional Eucharistic Prayers for when children are present have been authorised. You could also use Eucharistic Prayer D (the repetition in the responses can be very helpful for children) or Prayer H (which is shorter).
- You could use the authorised “Additional Collects” (which are shorter) and material from “Patterns for worship”.
- Include simple illustrations and brief explanatory phrases in the service books or on screen to help guide everyone through the service.
- In planning the service, think how to encourage the use of different senses, symbolic actions, space for mystery and wonder, simple activities – but fewer have more impact than too many!
- Choose hymns that are shorter and/or with a chorus. Repetition makes it easier for everyone to join in. Offer instruments to those who would like them for use with appropriate hymns/songs.
- Help and encourage parents/caregivers to be “co-worship leaders” for their children by e.g. showing their children their place in the service, encouraging them to join in, quietly explaining things about the service. Ask parents not to bring toys, ipads or books from home “to keep them quiet” but to use the resources the church provides.
- Involve children and young people in planning the service and in visible roles within the service. Many children are used to organizing and leading worship in schools, so they bring experience and ideas.
- Create *treasure baskets/ worship boxes* with items that relate to the service to help children follow the service.

### ***Resources for planning services of Holy Communion to include children***

***Common worship: Additional Eucharistic Prayers.*** Church House Publishing, 2012.

Also includes guidance on celebrating Holy Communion with children. Copies of these prayers are also available on the Church House Publishing website.



[www.churchofengland.org/](http://www.churchofengland.org/)

***Common Worship: Additional Collects.*** Church House Publishing. 2004.

***New Patterns for Worship.*** Church House Publishing. 2002

***Children at Communion: How to involve Children in the Eucharist*** by Trevor Lloyd. Grove Booklet W205. 2010.

***Come and Join the Celebration*** by John Muir and Betty Pedley, National Society/Church House Publishing, 2001

Advice and ideas on helping adults and children to experience Holy Communion together.

***Bread and Wine People*** by Susan Sayers, Kevin Mayhew, 2001

Ideas for 12 teaching Eucharists for all ages – each including explorations of the Bible readings in separate age groups. Also includes a fellowship meal, Passover celebration and Emmaus meal.

### ***Resources to help children follow the service of Holy Communion***

***My Communion Book*** and ***The Communion Cube*** by Diana Murrie, National Society/Church House Publishing, 2002/2003

Resources taking children through the Common worship Communion service.

***I Can Join in Common Worship***, SPCK, 2003 A children's Communion service book.

For ideas on creating worship boxes for children to use during the service, see ***We All Share: Introducing Holy Communion to Under 5s Through Play, Exploration and Creativity.*** Mina Munns. 2018. pp26. Also go to [www.spiritualchild.co.uk](http://www.spiritualchild.co.uk)

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Common worship Communion service.

***I Can Join in Common Worship***, SPCK, 2003 A children's Communion service book.

*Resources for use with babies and pre-school children*

***We All Share: Introducing Holy Communion to Under 5s through Play, Exploration and Creativity***. Mina Munns. Kevin Mayhew. 2018: *Includes background and a variety of church's experiences of ministering among under-5s, plus ideas for 3 practical sessions for children 0-2 in a church creche setting and 4 practical sessions for children aged 3-5 within a junior church setting.*

***General Resources for All Age worship which could be adapted for use with services of Holy Communion***

***Beyond the Children's Corner: Creating a Culture of Welcome For All Ages*** by Margaret Pritchard Houston, Church House Publishing, 2020. *This is a practical handbook to help churches be more welcoming to children and their families. It encourages PCCs and ministry teams to reflect on the spiritual needs of children, the pastoral needs of families, and how to remove barriers and manage change effectively.*

***All-sorts worship***. Claire Benton-Evans. Kevin Mayhew. 2010. These books follow the Common worship Lectionary, and there are separate books for Years A, B and C. They are intended as services of the Word but could easily be adapted to incorporate the ideas into Communion Service.

***Worship Together***. Sandra Millar. SPCK. 2012. Includes guidance on the key-components of all-age worship (shape, structure, making use of space, multi-sensory elements, allowing room for mystery and wonder) and ideas for 12 service outlines, one for each month of the year.

***Festivals Together***. Sandra Millar. SPCK. 2012: 15 service outlines for key feasts and festivals of the Christian year.

***Some useful websites***

[Faith at Home | The Church of England](#)

[Church Support Hub http://spiritualchildnetwork.co.uk](http://spiritualchildnetwork.co.uk)

<http://flamecreativekids.blogspot.co.uk/p/exploring-holy-communion.html> Margaret Pritchard Houston (margaret\_pritch) - Profile | Pinterest

[Going 4 Growth](#)

***Suggestions for Bible passages that could be used in teaching children***

***about Holy Communion*** From: <https://www.messychurch.org.uk/resource/holy-communion-messy-church>

- The last supper (Matthew 26:17–30; Mark 14:12–26; Luke 22:7–23)
- The feeding of the 5,000 (Matthew 14:13–21; Mark 6:30–44; Luke 9:10–17; John 6:1–14)
- The wedding at Cana (John 2:1–11)
- The supper at Emmaus (Luke 24:13–35)
- ‘I am the bread of life’ and ‘I am the true vine’ (John 6; John 15)
- The parts of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12)
- The barbeque on the beach (John 21:1–14)
- The hospitality of Abraham (Genesis 18:1–15)
- The Passover (Exodus 12:1–30)
- The manna in the wilderness (Exodus 16; see John 6)
- The woman with the costly ointment (Matthew 26:6–13; Mark 14:3–9; Luke 7:36–50)
- The great banquet (Luke 14:15–24)
- The prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32)
- The healing of Jairus’ daughter (Matthew 9:18–26; Mark 5:21–43)
- The birth of Jesus (Matthew 1:18–25; Luke 2:1–20)
- The crumbs that fall from the table (Mark 7:24–30)

## Appendix F: Rite to Admission

Those who are to be admitted to Holy Communion shall stand before the minister.

Minister: In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are now to admit these children to Holy Communion.

Churchwarden: We present to you (*the candidates are named*) who wish to be admitted to  
or other Holy Communion.  
suitable person

The Minister addresses the children

Minister: When you were baptised you were welcomed into the Church. Today we continue to celebrate God's love for you in Jesus Christ, to whom you belong. You are now to be admitted to Holy Communion. You will be able to share in the special meal given to us by Jesus as a sign of his living presence among us. It is our prayer that in the future you will be confirmed by the Bishop and will promise, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to go on following Jesus for the rest of your lives.

Minister: Do you wish to be admitted to Holy Communion?

Children: I do.

Minister: Will you do your best to follow our Lord Jesus Christ?

Children: I will.

Minister: Will you do your best to grow in the Christian faith?

Children: I will.

Minister (*to each child*) N, I admit you to Holy Communion in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. May you discover and rediscover the love and presence of God in your life.

The Minister addresses the congregation; children turn to face the congregation)

Minister: Will you as God's people here do everything you can to support and nurture these children in their journey of faith?

Congregation: We will.

(*Here a suitable gift may be presented to each child on behalf of the congregation*).

## Appendix G: Certificate of Admission

*Certificate of Admission to Holy Communion (for children who have not got their Baptism certificates)*

*You might like to print this on card and cut it out, or design your own with the church logo*

*Certificate of Admission to Holy Communion*

Parish of .....

By permission of the Bishop of Manchester and in accordance with the Holy Communion Regulations

.....

(Name of communicant)

is admitted to Holy Communion before Confirmation.

.....

(Minister's signature)

.....

(Name of minister)

.....

(Date)

# Appendix H: A Longer Note about Theological and Historical Considerations

## ***Background***

### ***What did early Christians do?***

The New Testament gives instructions about the Lord's Supper (I Corinthians 11). These biblical instructions do not tell us directly who received Holy Communion.

However, we do know that people often joined the church as a family unit or 'household'. We know too that the Passover was the model for the Communion Feast, and children took a full part in Passover celebrations.

Most scholars today believe, for these and other reasons, that children received Holy Communion alongside their parents in the New Testament period. However, we cannot be certain that this is true.

We do know, however, that baptised children received Holy Communion throughout much of the 'early church' period. Cyprian of Carthage (d.258) and Augustine of Hippo (d.430) tell us that baptised infants receive Holy Communion. In the fourth century, there is record of the order for receiving Holy Communion: ministers, followed by children, and then the main body of the congregation.

### ***The Middle Ages and the Reformation***

The eastern Churches have continued to follow this practice of the early church. In the east, infants and children have always received Holy Communion alongside adult members of the church.

In the western Church, a different pattern emerged. During the High Middle Ages, the western Church became increasingly anxious about lay people 'eating and drinking unworthily' (I Corinthians 11:29). As part of this general concern, medieval western Christians worried that young children don't understand what is happening at Holy Communion – and so can't 'discern the body' of Christ.

For this reason, children in the medieval western Church did not receive Holy Communion until around the beginning of puberty. The idea was that, at that point, young people could understand Holy Communion and (more generally) could understand the Christian faith.

By the fourteenth century, parish clergy were arranging preparation classes before children received Holy Communion. Often, this took place through hearing confession, which involved instruction on faith and morals.

Around the time of the Reformation, Confirmation replaced confession as the focus for instructing those preparing for admission to Holy Communion. In this way, Confirmation became the 'gateway' to Holy Communion. This is the pattern we see in the Book of Common Prayer (BCP).

None [shall] be admitted to the holy Communion, until such time as he be confirmed, or be ready and desirous to be confirmed.

*The Order of Confirmation, BCP, 1662; cf. Canon B15 A*

However, in recent decades, the Church of England has loosened the requirement that only those who are confirmed may be admitted to Holy Communion. General Synod changed the rules in 2006.

Parishes are now permitted to admit younger children to Holy Communion. This can happen only if the Parochial Church Council (PCC), the incumbent, and the bishop all agree. Children may be admitted only with parental consent. Also, parishes who make this change must arrange age-appropriate preparation for admission to Holy Communion and must also provide continuing Christian nurture of children admitted to Holy Communion, which will encourage them to be confirmed at the appropriate time.

## **Theological questions for discussion**

Some parishes in our diocese currently admit younger children to Holy Communion. Other

parishes wait until children are confirmed before admitting them to Holy Communion.

If your parish community wishes to review its current practice, there are theological and practical questions to be explored and discussed.

Questions around the theology of children receiving Holy Communion most often focus on two topics:

- what does the Bible mean when it speaks of 'eating and drinking unworthily' and 'discerning the body' of Christ?
- what significance do you attach to Baptism and Confirmation?

Different parishes will come to different conclusions about these questions.

The comments and questions below are offered as a resource for PCCs and parish leadership teams as they discuss these issues. Some parishes may wish to use all of the material below. Other parishes will wish to use just part of this material – for instance, either using just some sections, or using shortened versions of all the sections.

Before discussing sections 1 or 2, we recommend that participants spend some time

prayerfully reading and considering I Corinthians 11: 17-34.

### **1: Proclaiming the death of Christ**

The Apostle Paul writes:

For whenever you [plural] eat this bread and drink this cup, you [plural] proclaim the

Lord's death until he comes. So then, whoever [singular] eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.

*1 Corinthians 11: 26-27*

Paul is teaching here that the Lord's Supper is a proclamation of the Lord's saving death – it is a sort of 'preaching-in-action'.

But what does this mean? Is the act of receiving Holy Communion a way of testifying to the world that I believe the Gospel? Or is the act of receiving Holy Communion something that forms us as Christians and speaks to us of God's saving love? Or are both true? How might these options affect who can receive the sacrament?

*Some resources for consideration of this question.*

- For some Christians, the act of receiving the sacrament is an important way of testifying to the world that they believe the Good News. If this is central to the way you see the Lord's Supper, then it might seem right to exclude younger children from receiving Holy Communion. Only those who understand the Christian faith and who confess Christ as their Lord and Saviour should receive.

For those who are attracted by this view, key questions are: Can any of us be said to 'understand' the ways of God (see Romans 11:33-34)? What level of understanding and what depth of faith are required for worthy reception of the sacrament? What are adequate preparation and follow-up for those children or adults who are to be admitted to Holy Communion?

- Other Christians read Paul's words in another way. When they receive Holy Communion, the experience speaks to them of God's love for them in Christ. (In this view, too, the Eucharist is a proclamation of the Gospel – but in a different way. It 'speaks' the Gospel message to each person who receives.)

If that is right, then bringing our children to receive Holy Communion could be an important way that we form them in the faith. Perhaps, even, we are missing an important opportunity to proclaim the Gospel to our children when we exclude them from the Lord's Table.

For those who are persuaded by this reading of Paul, a key question is what level of awareness or understanding is necessary before one can 'hear' the message of the Eucharist? Does it make sense to say that the act of eating and drinking at the Eucharist is forming infants or very young



children in the Christian faith? Some people will answer yes, others will answer no. What do you think?

***As a PCC or parish leadership team, you may wish to spend time alone with the text and then discuss your thoughts together. Or you may prefer to discuss this text in small groups and then come together for a plenary conversation.***

***Which interpretation of the biblical text seems to you more convincing? Or perhaps both interpretations speak to you. Having reflected on both options, what do you feel that the biblical text is saying?***

## ***2: Discerning the body of Christ***

Paul continues:

Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves.

*1 Corinthians 11: 28-29*

As we have seen, the medieval western church became anxious that younger children receiving Holy Communion might fall foul of these words. The concern is that younger children do not have a well-developed understanding and faith, and so cannot 'discern the body' of Christ. They therefore risk eating and drinking their own damnation.

Today, some Christians share this concern. Others feel that the concern is misplaced. What do you think?

*Some resources for consideration of this question.*

- Some Christians believe that this text means that younger children should not receive Holy Communion. This reading has the authority of history and tradition in the Anglican tradition and more generally in the western Church.

In this way of reading, the key point is that, in Chapter 11, Paul is excluding from Holy Communion those who are failing to distinguish this sacred meal from other meals (see verses 21-22). When we treat the sacrament as though it were just 'any other meal', we eat and drink unworthily.

But surely this applies to young children, who are too young to understand the difference between receiving Holy Communion and having a snack. So, we

should wait till children are older before we admit them to the sacrament.

- On the other hand, some Christians suggest that, although this is a traditional Anglican reading of the biblical text, nonetheless it is a misreading of I Corinthians Chapter 11. It misses the point that Paul is making.

They argue that Paul is condemning factional, riotous behaviour at the Lord's Supper. This sort of behaviour is the problem – and Paul is excluding from the sacrament those who promote factionalism and getting drunk at the Communion Feast (see verses 20- 21). Paul does not intend to exclude children. Therefore, we do not need to exclude children either.

***As a PCC or parish leadership team, you may wish to spend time alone with the text and then discuss your thoughts together. Or you may prefer to discuss this text in small groups and then come together for a plenary conversation.***

***Which interpretation of the biblical text seems to you more convincing? Having reflected on both options, what do you feel that the biblical text is saying?***

### ***3: The significance of Baptism and Confirmation***

Another way to approach the question of children and Holy Communion is by thinking about the significance of Baptism and Confirmation.

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptised by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

*I Corinthians 12: 12-13*

This biblical text speaks of the unity and equality of all the baptised. The Spirit makes us all members of Christ's body, the Church. The Common Worship Baptism service takes up this theme: 'We welcome you, we are children of the same heavenly father.'

Some Christians ask: when we baptise children but refuse them a share in the Eucharist, have we fully appreciated and accepted the consequence of Baptism? This is the position of the eastern Church. In the orthodox churches, a baptised infant requires no understanding and faith to receive Communion. Holy Communion is God's food for all members of the Church.

On the other hand, in the western Church, there has always been a particular emphasis on the truth that children (and adults) need to respond in faith in order to receive fully the gifts offered in Baptism. As we have seen, this emphasis has led to anxiety about baptised children receiving Holy Communion before they have declared their own faith and been confirmed. How do you feel about all of this?

*Some resources for consideration of this question.*

'I have always felt that Confirmation sort-of 'completes' Baptism, and that baptised children are "probationary" Christians until they have declared their own faith and have been confirmed.'

"For me, it's really important to remember that Jesus teaches that 'anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it' (Luke 18:17). I feel that Jesus is pointing to the importance of children as people who belong to God's kingdom now. He is also teaching us that faith is, fundamentally, something quite simple: it is trust in God. Even very little children can trust God."

***As a PCC or parish leadership team, you may wish to spend time alone with the text and then discuss your thoughts together. Or you may prefer to discuss this text in small groups and then come together for a plenary conversation.***

***How do you feel about these quotes? If you find yourself more drawn to one, rather than the other, what does that say to you about the admission of younger children to Holy Communion?***

#### ***4: Some practical questions***

Another way to approach the question of children and Holy Communion is by thinking about the topic from a more practical perspective. The four questions below are intended to be open-ended. Their purpose is simply to stimulate discussion.

- The Church of England report, 'Rooted in the Church' [CofE Education Office. 2016] reported frequent frustration among children who were unable to receive Communion. It even pointed to a link between children receiving Communion and those young people who remained part of the church into adulthood. What is the experience of children in your church when they receive / do not receive the sacrament? How might you find out?
- In parishes which decide that they prefer to admit children to Holy

Communion at Confirmation, is there a case for ensuring that children can regularly attend services which are non-Eucharistic?

- In research published in 2017 [ComRes. Mapping Practising Christians], 40% of Christians said they came to faith before the age of 5. A further 16% said they came to faith before the age of 10. In the contemporary church, there is a rise in the awareness of the spirituality of children. This rise in awareness has undoubtedly contributed to the fact that admission of children to the Lord's Table is now a matter of debate and discussion within the church. How does it affect how you view the discussion in your context?
- In contemporary society, there has been a significant rise in the influence of learning- by-doing. This might suggest that the active participation of children in worship could increase the number of children who keep attending into teenage years and adulthood. What does this look like in your context? In your view, should this affect how we feel about children receiving Holy Communion?