

Help and Resources

The following resources are available from the Diocesan Website, www.trurodiocese.org.uk

- A booklist of publications that could be useful to help explore the issues raised and for preparing children for communion.
- The 2006 Regulations from the House of Bishops
- The Diocesan Framework for Admission of Children to Communion before Confirmation
- Procedure for parishes
- Parish Application Form
- Example of text to be used in Service of Admission
- 'Eucharists in Schools– Some Questions and Some Answers' booklet
- Eucharistic prayers that can be used when children are present

Help and advice on exploring the issues raised in this booklet, resources and applying for the Bishop's permission can be obtained from:

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Advice on confirmation resources and young people from:

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DIOCESE OF TRURO

DISCOVERING GOD'S KINGDOM
GROWING THE CHURCH

Diocese of Truro

Children, Communion
and Confirmation

A Resource for Parishes



Contents:

1. Children and the Community of the Christian Church
2. Baptism, Confirmation and Communion from the time of the early Church to today
3. Belonging and Believing
4. Patterns of initiation and inclusion
5. How might parishes respond?
6. Guidance for parishes with Church schools

1. Children and the Community of the Christian Church

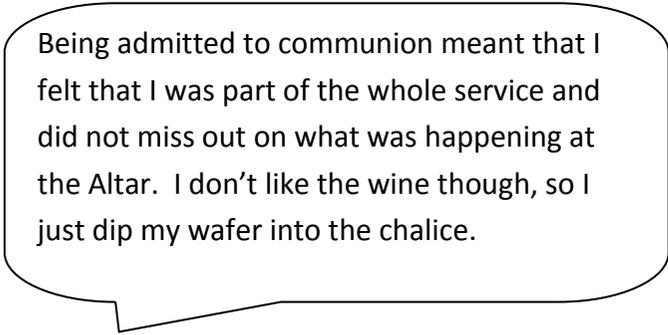
The Church of England has long played a significant part in the nurture of children through its day and Sunday schools and informal work through uniformed organizations and many other voluntary activities. In the parishes across our diocese many adults meet with children on Sundays and in after-school clubs and weekday groups. Despite downward trends in Sunday attendance, nevertheless in *2009 across the whole of the Church of England 223,000 children and young people attended church each week and monthly attendance stood at 436,000.*

This booklet aims to help you reflect upon how children experience the local church when it meets for Sunday worship and in particular their place in the Eucharistic fellowship. PCCs might want to discuss and discover how children and parents feel about these matters. Patterns of initiation have been inherited from the past— baptism, confirmation, the receiving of holy communion—and there have been many published reports about how the Christian church can best nurture and engage with children in God’s mission.

The questions below might serve to stimulate your church/PCC in looking afresh at this subject:

1. ***How does our Sunday worship try to reach out to people of all ages and could we do this better?***
2. ***In what ways does the service of Holy Communion include and exclude people?***
3. ***How do children and young people become disciples of Jesus? How does the Church help them?***
4. ***What part does baptism and confirmation play in the nurture of children and young people?***
5. ***How does the present pattern of baptism/confirmation/communion in our church serve the needs of the children who attend? How might a different pattern help?***

What the children say....



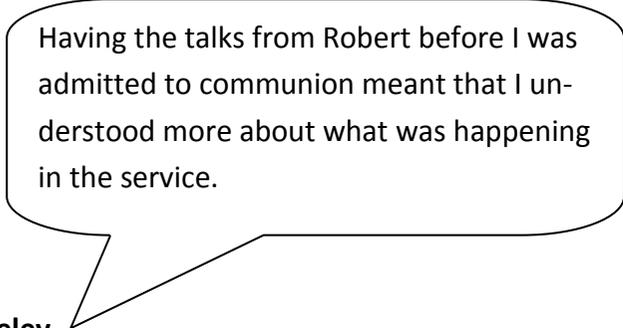
Being admitted to communion meant that I felt that I was part of the whole service and did not miss out on what was happening at the Altar. I don't like the wine though, so I just dip my wafer into the chalice.

Matthew



It made me feel as though I belonged!

Rebecca



Having the talks from Robert before I was admitted to communion meant that I understood more about what was happening in the service.

Keeley

A parish experience.....

The main reason for introducing Admission to Communion before Confirmation to my parishes was that my two children had already been admitted in Manchester and therefore had to be allowed to receive here in Cornwall. The PCC's agreed to this as they had no choice but I know they had reservations about it. Therefore the parishes were familiar with children taking communion.

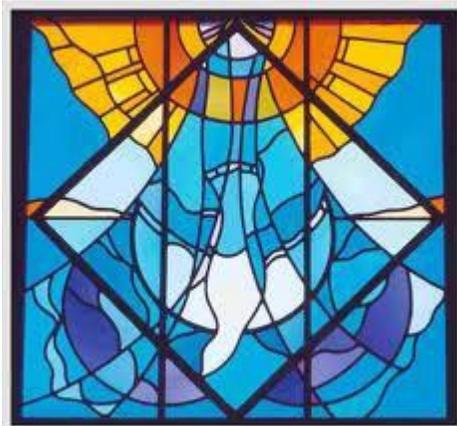
When it came to my children being confirmed it became obvious that there was an 7 year old who really wanted to receive on a regular basis.

An interesting debate then took place in the PCC's and there were, and still are, two couples who are really opposed to Admission to Communion as 'it was good enough for my children to be confirmed at 14 and that is what needs to happen today, and that the children really do not know what it is that they are doing!!!!'

However, after many discussions and the fact that the congregations knew the girl in question, who really does put many of the adults to shame with her knowledge of Christianity, it was agreed that we would make a formal application to the Bishop, to Admit children to Communion but only for a specific age group, and that confirmation would be offered at about 14 years old. However, they already knew that Rebecca and her friends who were 12 were going to be confirmed in a few months time.....

Some of the positive comments were that having children admitted to communion allowed the whole family of God to gather around his table and that this was a really great opportunity to teach the younger children about the Eucharist so that they had a much better understanding on a Sunday as to what was going on.

The young girl concerned does really feel part of the wider church and now that adults have seen children receive for over 4 years there is more of an acceptance of this practise.



Revd Robert Thewsey

Boscastle Group

2. Baptism, Confirmation and Communion from the time of the early Church to today.

- In Judaism children play an important part in religious meals as members of the family. All share in Passover meals and other ceremonies. Jesus would have been familiar with this situation, both as a child and as an adult. What of the practice of infant baptism and infant communion in the development of Christianity? The New Testament has references to the first Christians breaking bread (Acts 2:4-6) and there are Pauline descriptions of the Last Supper meals, but no assumptions can be made in regard to the inclusion of infants. For adults there has never been a separation between baptism and being a communicant. The act of baptism is the clear first step to the meal sharing practices of the early Christians, and we see the development of an organized preparation for baptism (the catechumenate) coming into being in the second century. There is also scriptural evidence (Acts 8:17) to the laying on of hands and the invocation of the Holy Spirit. By the second century the practice of infant baptism was common, and there is also weighty evidence for infant communion. It was the recognized practice of the African Church in the time of Cyprian, and it was also the custom in the east. The modern practice of treating confirmation as the personal acceptance by an adult of what had been promised in infancy was foreign to the life of the ancient church.
- In these early centuries of Christianity, the child of Christian parents would be taught to make the sign of the cross, the story of the Gospels would be told, and the Lord's Prayer and Creed learnt for daily use. It would appear that it was the Augustinian doctrine of original sin and high infant mortality which led to a growing number of infant baptisms. During the 13th Century a new regulation barring those not confirmed from communion, came into being as part of measures to do with ecclesiastical reform.

- During the Reformation it was stressed that only after coming to ‘discretion and being examined in understanding’, would a person be confirmed and admitted to communion. The catechism appeared in the Prayer Book and the emphasis was on learning and understanding which was not possible for children.
- From then onwards through to the 1950’s the common pattern of worship in the Church of England was for an early morning celebration of communion and major services of the Word; Morning and Evening Prayer. Children were encouraged to attend Sunday Schools and so were not present at the celebrations of communion. Confirmation was the gateway to communion, and grew increasingly important as the way to mature membership of the Body of Christ.

Changes and Developments in the 20th Century

From the 1960s onwards Holy Communion became much more the central service of the Church and this in turn raised questions about the place of children and their partaking of communion. Sunday schools began to switch from afternoons to mornings and that meant the presence of children in church much more than in the past.

Moves in the Church of England

Since the 1970’s the question about whether all baptised people should be admitted to communion has increasingly been asked. These issues have also been raised in churches of other denominations. The Methodist Church in 1987 approved proposals for the admission of children to communion. In 1997 the House of Bishops issued Guidelines on the admission of baptized persons to communion, and finally in 2006 the General Synod approved the regulations made through canon B15A. These regulations allow for the admission of baptised children to communion, but retain confirmation as a separate rite. (See Appendix A)

A parish that is considering admitting children to communion before confirmation should fully consult with the Headteacher, staff, parents and children of the Church School at all stages of the process.



A church school that expresses interest in admitting children to communion before confirmation within the school context will need to consult with the incumbent and PCC and go through the process of applying for permission from the Bishop through parish procedures (Canon Law does not allow for applications directly from a Church school). Parishes in this situation will need to consider carefully the benefits of working closely with the church school in enabling accessible worship and in the preparation of children. The wishes of the children and their parents should also be carefully considered especially where a child or their parents do not wish to receive communion or are not baptised.

The introductory material to the new Eucharistic prayers has some good guidance about making Holy Communion in schools accessible and inclusive of all.

Please consult the separate booklet ‘Eucharists in school: Some Questions and Answers’ for information on introducing and developing Eucharist services in church schools.

for the help of the Discipleship Project Officer, Shelley Porter, or perhaps other clergy and lay people from parishes where changes have taken place.

- c) Whether or not you wish to make any changes in the admission of children to communion, you may want advice and resources to consider the format of Eucharistic services when children are present. There are new prayers and liturgies to help you with this available from Church of England websites such as www.churchofengland.org/prayer-worship or www.going4growth.org.
- d) You may wish to consider separately the place of confirmation, and any policy which you wish to adopt as a parish in terms of the age of confirmation and the content of confirmation preparation. Again there are resources and advice on hand from Sarah Welply (Project Officer responsible for mission and outreach of young people) or from Shelley Porter (Discipleship Project Officer with responsibility for children).

6. Implications for parishes with Church schools

It is recognised that 'The Church of England clearly reaffirms that Church Schools stand at the centre of its mission' (Chadwick Report) and that the 'Church as a whole is called to recognise the forthcoming challenges and opportunities fully to meet the needs and expectations of all children in the Church school system.' The relationship between the incumbent and the church school is of critical importance.

In some church primary schools there is a tradition of 'school Eucharists' in which those who have been confirmed, children and adults, receive Communion. In such a parish, changes to the pattern of admitting children to Communion will have implications for the schools.

3. Belonging and Believing

This historical perspective is useful in reminding us how opinions have differed over time regarding the nature of the church and the place of children. Important questions are raised and you may want to tackle these:

- **When we gather to celebrate the Lord's Supper, what should be the appropriate conditions by which people receive the sacrament?**
- The Church of England until recently expected members who were baptized to also be confirmed or desirous of confirmation before receiving communion. However, since 2006 a parish may follow a procedure which would result in children receiving communion before confirmation, provided that such children will be encouraged to be confirmed at the appropriate time in the future. **If (in question 1) you agreed that children should be partakers of communion through their baptism, should there be a minimum age? What part does confirmation play, and at what stage in a child's life should this rite generally be administered?**
- The Reformers laid great stress on our 'understanding' of the communion before receiving it and there have been many different learning courses for children and adults as part of their confirmation. **What part does understanding of the meaning of the sacrament play in our receiving it? Might this develop over time and how would your church encourage such learning? Do you think there should be any kind of minimum understanding of communion before one could receive it?**
- Children have been confirmed at different ages, some as young as 9 or 10, some later. The rite of confirmation has provided a significant occasion in the life of those being confirmed and in the life of the local church. Central to the rite as it developed in

the West has been the individual's own affirmation of their Christian faith and seeing confirmation as a gift, through the bestowal of the Holy Spirit. **Do you consider this to be of importance and should there be a minimum age of mature understanding for confirmation? Might confirmation serve as a kind of adult membership rite? Would this deepen the sense of belonging as well as believing?**

These are just some questions which could be explored.

4. Patterns of Initiation and Inclusion

Assuming that we want children to feel welcomed when we gather for worship, you may want to reflect upon the different approaches which churches adopt. There may be differing patterns in your neighbouring parishes. Below are 3 'scenarios' to consider. All would fall within the regulations set down by the General Synod.

CHURCH A: *Children receive a blessing at communion. There is a confirmation group for those who have begun secondary school, a confirmation service happens every other year. Adults have a separate confirmation group. This traditional practice is working well for this church and no change is planned.*

CHURCH B: *Children who have been baptized and prepared are welcome to receive communion from the age at which they appear ready. A child's First Communion, is marked in a special way. This is all subject to parental agreement. Confirmation continues to be offered at the beginning of secondary school.*

CHURCH C: *All baptized people of any age are welcome to receive communion, including infants, (whose parents may delay the reception of wine until a little later). Confirmation is offered to young people of secondary school age, but generally takes place around the age of 15 or 16. The church offers young people from the age of 16 the opportunity for formal service in the councils of the Church.*

The 'scenarios' above are examples of different practices which are

currently happening in the dioceses of the Church of England. And there are variations to all of these. Alongside such patterns there are also all sorts of nurture groups for children and young people.

What feels the right pattern for your church community?

Consider some of these questions:

- **What do the children and young people in your community have to say about all of this? Will you ask them?**
- **If we see faith as a journey, what are the significant markers on the way for children and young people?**
- **What might we be afraid of in making changes to admitting children to communion?**
- **What are the advantages and disadvantages in making children wait until they are older before they receive communion?**
- **How could we best prepare children to receive communion, and continue to teach them its meaning?**
- **What are the best patterns to help children and young people feel that they both belong and are growing in their faith?**
- **What about adults who have not been confirmed but have been baptized and have never felt 'able' to receive communion?**

And no doubt there are many other questions to ask!

5. How might parishes respond?

- a) If you as a parish wish to consider admitting children to communion before confirmation there is a procedure to follow by your PCC. **(Please see the Diocesan Framework and Parish Application Pack)**
- b) You may want to invite people into your parish to lead a discussion and help you think through the issues. You can ask