



We Welcome You



The Admission of Children to Holy Communion before Confirmation

Guidelines for Parishes in
The Diocese of Chichester

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Theological and Educational Issues

The Diocese

The attitude to children's work in the Diocese and the Parish Church context has changed quite considerably in recent years. Only a few years ago any change in the way that children were nurtured in the life of the parish would have been seen as impossible. Today there is considerable amount of openness to the possibility of change.

A Sense of Belonging

A greater openness to different methods of working with children and young people has developed. Indeed for many parishes today the concept of a Sunday School of the old model is no longer part of their agenda. Children are no longer seen as a separate group from the worshipping community to be "entertained" during the time of the main Sunday worship. Children belong: they belong as part of the Christian community of the parish; they belong as part of the community in general. Children have a much greater place in society as a whole today than they had before. The sense of belonging that has begun to permeate society needs to continue to find its way into the Church so that children grow into feeling a part of the body of Christ and not excluded.

A major change in thinking has occurred in the past ten years about the nature of belief. It is widely accepted today that believing follows from belonging and not, as was the accepted norm of, first believe then you may belong. Jesus' model was inclusive of all ages (Mt. 19. 14).

Educational Issues

Educational issues are part of the process of change too. Children are used to a variety of ways of working in the classroom; they are encouraged by teachers to work things out for themselves and think through issues. On the whole the Church is more aware of the way that children grow and develop in their faith and has adapted the teaching methods used to reflect this. The question that is asked is "What does the gospel mean for me?" The concept is much more in the Emmaus Road than the Damascus Road model for work both with children and with adults.

Parishes are much more open to seeing that children may be ready for Confirmation [and therefore potentially for Holy Communion] at different ages within the same group. The process is seen as an ongoing one that is geared to the individual within the group.

The Bishop

The role of the Bishop in the life of each parish in admitting to Communion, in Confirmation and in his pastoral care is one of prime importance and must not be allowed to diminish. Every parish is required to seek permission from the Bishop before they initiate any changes to their current practice concerning the order in which the initiation rites are administered.

The Nature of the Church

In the Church (Latin *ecclesia*, from the Greek *ek-kalein*, "to call out of") God is calling together his people to be followers of his Son Jesus Christ. The word "Church" is applied to the universal community of believers and also to the local community. God calls his people together for salvation,

so the Church by its very nature is missionary, sent by Christ to spread the Gospel and to make and nurture new disciples (Mt 28.19-20).

Out of God's love for all (1 Tim 2.4) the Church receives its missionary commission (2 Cor 5.14) to be concerned for the salvation of all. The way to salvation involves Christian nurture and growth within the Body of Christ. This begins with the proclamation of the Gospel and continues with admission and welcome, nurture and growth within the worshipping Christian community. Stages in this process have traditionally been marked by celebratory rites/sacraments.

Proclamation, admission, welcome, nurture and growth are the responsibility and the ministry of the whole people of God. It is the proper exercise of the dignity and function of all the baptised. Traditionally, the Bishop (or Priest or Deacon by delegation) presides at the sacramental celebrations and staging posts in the process. Other aspects, equally important as the staging posts such as proclamation, welcome, nurture, are shared by the laity. Nurture aims at leading a Christian towards a more intimate union with Christ and awakening a heightened sense of belonging to Christ.

Admission to the Church

An individual becomes a member of the Church by regeneration through water and the Spirit (John 3.3-5) i.e. by repentance and faith in Jesus Christ and by baptism.

In the early Christian centuries initiation generally comprised of one single celebration with Baptism and Confirmation taking place together. The Bishop was the minister. But the trend towards Baptism at an earlier age, greater demand for Infant Baptism throughout the year, and the growth in the number of parishes prevented the Bishop from being present at all baptismal celebrations.

The Eastern Church maintained primitive practice and kept Baptism and Confirmation united as one rite, the priest conferring Confirmation at the time of Baptism by anointing (using oil blessed by the Bishop).

The Western Church reserved Confirmation by the laying on of hands and anointing, to the Bishop and a temporal separation of the two rites evolved. At first admission to Holy Communion was still associated with Baptism, but the growing tradition of Eucharistic theology and practice meant that Holy Communion was gradually withdrawn from unconfirmed adults and children and was abolished at the Council of Trent 1562.

Although the Reformers required Confirmation for admission to Communion, this was so that the more ancient sequence of Baptism - Confirmation - Communion was retained.

Admission to Communion has traditionally come to Anglicans through Confirmation. The rubrics in the books of Common Prayer emphasised understanding which followed from learning. The age of Confirmation has generally been an age of discretion normally considered at about 13 years of age.

Communion and Nurture in the Church

Earlier discussion in the Church of England about the admission of children to Communion before Confirmation has revolved around the link between Baptism, the laying on of hands and the Holy Spirit, and what constitutes membership.

It is clear that children were present in the earliest Christian communities and were initiated into the faith along with adults. If Baptism is full membership of the Church, then some ask, "What are the theological grounds for refusing children admission to Communion?"

The Boston Statement called for the admission of all the baptised to Communion, without their having first to cross what were called "other thresholds" (one of these was Confirmation). The House of Bishops has stated, "The entire profession of the Christian life..... is represented in the action of Baptism" [*Report of the House of Bishops 1996 GS1212*]. If it is on the basis of Baptism that we express our membership of the Church in the receiving of Communion, excluding children from Communion denies their Baptism.

So we might ask, "Is *sacrament* - understanding, gift, or both?"

Does it devalue a child, to interpret the child's spiritual nurture, in the light of a corpus of knowledge?

Our needs as we make decisions

Any departure from the traditional norm of Baptism - Confirmation - First Communion should perhaps be reviewed against the following needs:

- The need to take children's nurture more seriously and theologically.
- The need to include and safeguard the riches of Episcopal ministry in initiation rites and nurture. The Church of England is an Episcopal church and any change in practice must involve the ministry of the Bishop.
- The need to accept the different levels of understanding and discernment of the sacraments at different ages.
- The need to acknowledge that we are living in an exceedingly mobile society and therefore most parishes are, sooner or later, going to be presented with people who have been admitted to Communion prior to their Confirmation.
- The need to accept that some change may be inevitable. But any change proposed could be viewed as providing new missionary opportunities for every parish in the diocese.

Regulations and Implementation

The Implementation of the Admission of Baptised Children to Holy Communion Regulations by General Synod came into force on 15 June 2006.

Every parish is required to seek permission from the Bishop before they initiate any changes to their current practice. No child can be admitted to Holy Communion earlier than the age of 7 and not normally earlier than the age of 13 for Confirmation.

In the Diocese of Chichester there are the following options for parishes:

1. Admission to receiving Holy Communion, later followed by Confirmation

Parishes which wish to develop Confirmation in the direction of a profession of adult faith might adopt this option. Parishes would have the advantage of being able to communicate younger children, thus contributing to their formation and nurture. (It would have the added benefit of putting a stop to the growing practice of adults breaking the host and communicating their own children). This option is one with potential for marginalising the Bishop as the minister of initiation in that it is almost inevitable that some will never be presented for Confirmation. Whether it would be possible to involve the Bishop in some way in the admission to Communion is a question to which further consideration must be given.

2. Admission to receiving Holy Communion, as part of preparation for Confirmation

This option would be useful to parishes which have a long preparation process for Confirmation and wish to admit baptised persons to Holy Communion at an early stage in this process. Parishes would be encouraging the view that nurture is ongoing throughout the Christian life and that Holy Communion and Eucharist are essential to nurture. This option would require a parish to have an ongoing nurture programme. It has the advantage of moving away from the view of confirmation as a "passing out parade". The role of the Bishop would be clear since First Communion would be associated with Episcopal confirmation, even if somewhat distanced from it chronologically.

3. To continue with the inherited norm (*Baptism → Confirmation → Communion*)

Within this option, parishes would remain free to ask permission of the Bishop to present children for Confirmation before the age of 13. This would maintain the traditional order for the initiation rites, ensure the role of the Bishop in initiation, and not present too many difficulties when people move from parish to parish or diocese to diocese.

Procedure for Admitting Children to Holy Communion

Every parish is required to seek permission from the Bishop before they initiate any changes to their current practice concerning the order in which the initiation rites are administered.

Procedure for options 1 and 2:

1. Incumbent/Priest-in-Charge explores options with the PCC and any parish children's leaders. Theological, pastoral and practical issues must be considered.
2. The PCC must pass a resolution in support of the application.
3. A letter of request should be sent to the Bishop, accompanied by a copy of the supporting PCC resolution with voting figures. Contents of the letter should include:

- A request for permission to adopt either option 1 or 2 and reasons for the preferred option.
 - An outline of communication plans within the parish
 - An outline of a programme of preparation for those being admitted to Holy Communion.
 - An outline of a continuing nurture and teaching programme for those being admitted to Holy Communion. This may be related to Sunday nurture groups, monthly meetings or periodical all-day events.
 - In addition, for option 1, proposals for encouraging confirmation.
4. The Bishop will respond, either giving permission or refusing permission. Clear reasons will be given if he decides to refuse permission.

If the Bishop has given permission, the following additional procedure takes place:

5. Hold a parish meeting (particularly for parents and carers) to explain things and answer questions.
6. Prepare all ages in the congregation for the consequences of the decision.
7. Explain the situation to the parish (e.g. letter to parents; explanation to children's groups; magazine/newssheet articles; sermon on the subject).

If children are going to be admitted to Holy Communion before Confirmation, the following steps also apply:

- Arrange preparation for the children and perhaps for parents/guardians and possibly godparents;
- Ensure that all the children concerned have been baptised prior to the service of Admission.
- Hold an 'Admission' as part of a main Sunday service.
- Fix up an appraisal for your system in the light of experience, the results of which should be reported to the Bishop.

The incumbent must maintain a register of all children admitted to Holy Communion. This can be included in the baptism register or we recommend keeping a separate Register for Admission to Communion. Children should be given a certificate recording the details, but this should also be recorded on their baptism certificate. Numbers of children admitted should be submitted annually to the Palace by the end of November.

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 must 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 the incumbent, PCC, children's leaders, the wider church community, and the Diocesan Children and Families Officer. The letter must clearly explain the consultation process and arrangements 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.

If a child who has been admitted to communion moves to another parish, (s)he will be able to receive communion, even if this is not the church's policy or practice. The child will need to show their baptism certificate on which the date they were admitted to communion will have been recorded.

Preparation for Admitting the Baptised to Holy Communion

Practical issues to attend to:

- Verification of the Baptism certificate
- Registration of children and adults to be admitted
- Certificate of admission and endorsement of Baptism certificate

Practical issues which need to be considered.

a) **What is the nurture plan for your parish for all ages from infants to the elderly and what role does admission to Holy Communion play within it?**

- Baptism – preparation of parents and godparents for a child's baptism; teaching for the whole community on the meaning of baptism.
- Post baptism – the role of the worshipping community in following-up the newly baptised; encouraging and guiding parents and godparents in their promise to bring the child up in the Christian faith.
- Parent and toddler groups – directly linked with the post-baptism nurture; supporting the families and teaching the children.
- Children's work – encouraging a sense of belonging for the children; making links with the liturgy of the word and sacrament to encourage a sense of belonging and awareness; through teaching and leading to develop a growth in understanding of the Christian faith; encouraging a desire to serve God and their brothers and sisters; willingness to learn from children's expression of their Christian walk of faith.
- Youth work – continuing the encouragement of a sense of belonging; helping them to discern their gifts and encouraging the use of them in the wider community; deepening of Christian discipleship; deepening awareness of the ministry of the church through worship, teaching and sacrament.
- Confirmation preparation – directly linked with on going nurture of the young people
- Post confirmation nurture – helping young people see that their confirmation is part of the journey not the end.
- The church school – where there is a Eucharistic tradition in a school consideration needs to be given to who is able to receive Holy Communion; does consideration need to be given to whether it is important to introduce the Eucharist into the worship of the school; teaching on the sacraments of the church.
- Uniformed groups – to be seen as an integral part of the life of the community; to be encouraged by involvement of the worshipping community; helping fulfil the obligation to nurture in faith.
- Nurture groups – are they just for Lent and Advent? Helping adults grow in their walk of faith; helping them to understand the life of the church through the word and the sacrament; developing an understanding of mission and outreach; helping the people to understand their individual role in serving God and their brothers and sisters.

It is vital that the parish considers all aspects of nurture before deciding on the most appropriate option regarding Communion before Confirmation. Admitting baptised persons to Holy Communion before their Confirmation will undoubtedly have an impact on all members of the worshipping community.

b) What is our understanding of faith development and growth and how does admission to Holy Communion enable faith to flourish?

- Look at some of the theories regarding faith development – encourage an understanding of the stages of faith development.
- Belonging comes before believing – the importance of being part of the faith community, loved, welcomed and valued; experiencing the life and worship of the community.
- What are we doing to enable faith to grow and flourish? – this is directly linked with the response to question a).

c) How do we decide when someone is ready to receive Holy Communion? Is it different for children? How do we discern their readiness and who is involved in deciding?

- Is sacrament a gift or understanding? – If we believe that the sacraments are a gift from God is it true to say that understanding will grow from receiving the gift?
- What conditions are necessary for someone to receive Holy Communion? – to love the Lord.
- Do we listen to the child? – This will involve listening with our ears and our eyes; do we provide opportunities where this can take place?
- Are parents likely to put pressure on the child? This can happen, parents will need guidance in how they help their child make a decision; child, parent and clergy must be jointly involved in the decision making.

d) What involvement do the children and young people have within the liturgy and how would receiving Holy Communion enhance that? You may wish to consider aspects i.e.:

- Welcome
- Reading
- Intercessions
- Serving
- Choir
- Hospitality

If children and young people are encouraged to participate and serve within the worship then this will develop the sense of belonging.

e) What difference would admission to Holy Communion make to the ongoing work of the children's liturgy?

- Material used for teaching the word – is the whole worshipping community following the same lectionary.
- Contents of the session – building bridges between the liturgical worship of the church and the children's ministry is vital; introducing various aspects of liturgy, i.e. confession, affirmation of faith, the Peace, the Eucharistic Prayer. The Church of England now has Eucharistic Prayers for use specifically when there are a significant number of children present.
- Working with different ages – encouraging the children and young people to share together and grow through listening to each other.

- Being present at the Eucharist – bringing the children and young people to share in the worship of the community from the Peace rather than at the point of receiving Holy Communion or a blessing.

f) Who will have to be consulted when you consider the three options presented in the Diocesan policy?

- PCC
- Children's leaders
- Youth leaders
- Children and young people
- Parents

It is vital that all these groups are consulted but it needs to be understood that in many cases teaching relating to some of the issues will need to be given in order for an informed decision to be reached.

g) What considerations need to be made for children whose parents are members of the worshipping community?

- How will you inform, consult and acquire the permission of the parents?
- Will you expect the parents to participate in the children's preparation?
- Will you want the children to have sponsors from the worshipping community?

It might be appropriate to meet with the children on their own, the parents on their own and then have a joint meeting. Whether or not the parents are involved directly in the preparation sessions needs to be decided on by parents and clergy, however it is essential that a level of involvement is encouraged in the home. Giving the children an opportunity to choose a sponsor from within the worshipping community encourages a sense of involvement with everyone.

h) What considerations need to be made for children whose parents are not members of the worshipping community?

- How will you inform, consult and acquire the permission of the parents?
- Will you expect the parents to participate in children's preparation?
- Will you want the children to have sponsors from the worshipping community? You will need specific permission from parents if the children are to have sponsors from the worshipping community.
- It will be necessary to write to the parents initially informing them that preparation to receive Holy Communion before Confirmation will be taking place and asking whether they would be interested in hearing more about the process. It would be more appropriate, in this instance, to meet with the parents on their own first and then the children before having a joint meeting. Whether or not the parents are involved directly in the preparation sessions needs to be decided on by parents and clergy, however it is essential that a level of involvement is encouraged in the home. It is more important, in this case, for children to have a sponsor from within the worshipping community, as this person will have the role of praying for and encouraging the child. However, it must be noted that parents must give their permission for the child to have a sponsor and agree on the sponsor.

i) How will the children be prepared to receive Holy Communion?

- What resources are to be used? The Apostolic Life Department has acquired a number of resources that are available for parishes to view and discuss with the team.
- Will the preparation be part of the children's liturgy on a Sunday? Part of the preparation needs to be incorporated into the Sunday children's liturgy. However, it might be appropriate to have some of the sessions during the week.

j) Who will be involved in the preparation?

- The incumbent
- Members of the PCC
- Children and youth leaders
- Parents

Not all of these people need to be involved in the preparation at the same time. However, it is important that once the resource material has been chosen consideration is given to the most appropriate people to lead each of the sessions. Often the leaders of the children's and youth groups have a very close relationship with the children and young people so it is important that they are involved. This will offer the children a sense of continuity and confidence.

Ideas for preparation material and resources

Important aspects to include in preparing children both in their individual spiritual journey and in understanding.

- **Belonging**
 - Baptism
 - Being a member of God's family
- **Knowing Jesus**
 - God's Son
 - His life, teaching and ministry
 - His death, resurrection and ascension
 - His words of institution at the Last Supper
 - He died for me
- **Acknowledging**
 - Need for repentance
 - Need for forgiveness
 - Need for action
- **Participating**
 - In the Body of Christ
 - In the special Meal
 - In God's gifts to us

- **Understanding the liturgy of Holy Communion**

- Introductory rite

- Confession

- Affirmation of faith

- The Word

- Peace

- Eucharistic prayer

- Dismissal

- **Living the life of Christ**

- Prayer

- God's Word

- Serving

It is also essential that children are taught to receive communion appropriately.

Continuing Nurture After Admission

Those being admitted to Holy Communion need to be aware of the importance of commitment to Sunday worship and the receiving of Holy Communion.

Consider the changes that may need to take place within the ongoing ministry amongst children, for example, Sunday School/Club, Junior Church.

Consider ways of ensuring that their continuing nurture is seen as an integral part of the life of worship.

Consider whether it is appropriate to have special meetings once a month, looking at specific issues relating to the Christian life, for example, our commitment to prayer, to reading the Bible and to the life of the church.

Consider ways of building into the parish programme opportunities to celebrate major feast days in the church calendar.

Consider ways of enabling the worshipping community to be supportive and encouraging to those admitted to Holy Communion.

Stepping Stones to Confirmation - It is vital that:

- Those who have been admitted to Holy Communion before Confirmation see this act as a stepping stone in their life of faith.
- Those who have been involved in preparing children to receive Holy Communion encourage them in their growth and commitment to the life of faith, and to help them look forward to the next stepping stone.
- The members of the worshipping community continue to pray, support and encourage those newly admitted to receiving Holy Communion as they continue on their journey in the life of faith
- There is an expectancy by those recently admitted to receiving Holy Communion to look forward to preparing for Confirmation and receiving the gift and seal of the Holy Spirit to enable them in their apostolic ministry.

Integration into the worship of the community

Once children are admitted to receiving Holy Communion prior to Confirmation it is inevitable that there will be issues to consider relating to the integration of the children into the worship of the community.

There will be an expectation that the children participate in the Eucharist from the Peace. This will change the dynamics of the children's ministry of the Word.

When the children are not present for the opening liturgy of the Eucharist it will be important for children's leaders to introduce a short liturgy in the groups which will include an act of confession.

As the children continue in their journey of faith they will need to be integrated into participating in the whole of the liturgy. Consideration will need to be given to how they can be encouraged to offer and use their gifts within the worship. For example, reading the lessons, helping with the intercessions, serving, welcome team, choir and so forth.

The process of integration could be done in stages:

-joining the worship at the Peace

-joining the worship at the beginning and leaving for the liturgy of the word and returning at the Peace

-being present for the whole of the liturgy.

This will of course have implications for the leaders of the children's work.

Appendix I

ADMISSION OF BAPTISED CHILDREN TO HOLY COMMUNION REGULATIONS 2006

(Please see Canon B 15A paragraph 1(a), page 34) Regulations made by the General Synod on 8 February 2006 which came into force on 15 June 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 the fifteenth day of June 2006 as appointed by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York
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 a 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 licence from the bishop, that vicar; and
 - (b) references to paragraph numbers are to the relevant paragraph or paragraphs in these Regulations.

Appendix 2

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Will the children understand what they are doing when they take Communion?

Children are certainly able to understand the special nature of sharing the bread and wine. A deeper understanding of the mystery of the sacrament is a lifetime's work for *all* of us, and one that will never be complete however old we are. The important point to consider is whether we ought to view taking Communion as a 'prize' which we win by passing tests, or whether we should see it as a free, gracious and unconditional gift from God.

2. Will they take it seriously?

Children respond to the mood and atmosphere around them. The vast majority of children will take their lead from the way the adult members of the congregation behave as they receive the bread and wine. Receiving Communion is a very powerful moment, and the power is certainly not lost on children – in fact they have an openness to the Holy which many adults find it hard to recapture.

3. How will the Parish Priest know who can receive?

A record must be kept of all the children who have been admitted to Communion before Confirmation, and the parish clergy will have been involved in preparing the children for admission. There should not, therefore, be a difficulty in knowing which children should receive. Children should be encouraged to give a clear signal, such as raising their hands, to show that they receive Communion.

4. What happens if a family moves to a parish which doesn't admit?

When the admission of children to Communion before Confirmation began to be introduced, a major concern was that there would be problems if child who had been admitted moved to a parish that didn't admit. In practice, this has not proved to be a difficulty: the incumbent of the parish in which the child has been admitted simply provides a letter to their new incumbent requesting that they continue to receive Communion. The principle, supported by the House of Bishops, is that no one who has been admitted to receiving the sacrament should ever subsequently be denied it.

5. What about Confirmation?

Confirmation has traditionally been given two meanings: as a 'gateway' to receiving Communion: and as an act of adult commitment to the faith. For those confirmed at 11, 12 or 13, the second of these meanings has rarely worked. After all, there are no other 'adult' responsibilities, such as voting, driving, getting married, which can be taken up at such an early age. But if it is no longer linked to receiving Communion, Confirmation can take place much later, at a time which is far more appropriate for an adult act of commitment.

6. What about children who are not baptized?

Anyone who is not baptized cannot receive Holy Communion. If an unbaptized child wishes to be prepared for admission then they must be baptized before they are admitted. Their

Baptism could form part of the preparation programme. However, it is important to consult fully with the family beforehand to make sure that they are willing for the Baptism to take place.

7. What if children do not want to be admitted to Communion before they are confirmed?

Consent is vital at all levels in admitting children to Communion. No one must feel that they are being forced into the practice. The parish as a whole must be supportive, and so must any family whose children are going to be involved. But most important, the individual children must make a free choice to be admitted. It may well be that some children in a particular church ask to be prepared for admission, and some do not. However, if a parish has decided to admit children to Communion before Confirmation, it should not continue to prepare candidates for Confirmation at an early age, other than for a brief transitional period.

8. 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 3

Bibliography for Children and Holy Communion in the Diocese of Chichester

About To Receive - Resources for Exploring the Eucharist by Diane Craven & Mark Stratford
Published by Diocese of Southwark

Bread for All God's Family: Projects for Communion by Leslie J Francis & Dianne Drayson
Published by Gracewing

Children and Holy Communion by Steve Pearce & Dianna Murrie
Church House Publishing

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

Common Worship I Belong (Leaders Guide) by Aileen Urquhart
Redemptorist Publications

Common Worship I Belong (Children's Book) by Aileen Urquhart
Redemptorist Publications

I Can Join In Common Worship - A Children's Communion Book by Tony Kershaw
Published by SPCK

Liturgy for Admission See Common Worship - Initiation Services

My Holy Communion Book by Aileen Urquhart
Redemptorist Publications

My Communion Book - A Guide To Holy Communion by Dianna Murrie
The National Society / Church House Publishing

The Lord Is Here - An Illustrated Communion Book for Common Worship by Leslie Francis
Published by Kevin Mayhew

Welcome to the Lord's Table by Margaret Withers
Bible Reading Fellowship

Further Reading:

All God's Children: Children's Evangelism in Crisis: A Report from General Synod
Church House Publishing

Bread and Wine People by Susan Sayers

Called to His Supper: A Preparation for First Eucharist by Jeannine Timko Lechner
Our Sunday Visitor Inc.

Celebrate with Children : Liturgical celebrations by Joan Brown
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Children and Communion: A Practical Guide for Interested Churches by Peter Reis
Grove Books Ltd

Children Finding Faith: Exploring A Child's Response to God by Francis Bridger
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Church House Publishing

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Let the Children Come to Communion by Stephen Lake
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Mission-Shaped Children by Margaret Withers
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My Book About First Holy Communion: A Child's Workbook by J Harry Stratton
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Ave Maria Press

We Share in the Eucharist: Preparation for First Communion by Francoise Darcy-Berube
Novalis Press

Will Our Children have Faith by John H. Westerhoff
Morehouse Publishing

Your Child's First Communion by Rosemary Gallagher
Redemptorist Press