

Guidance for parishes wanting to admit  
baptised children to communion before  
confirmation



## INTRODUCTION

Our Diocesan vision for ministries with children, young people and families '[Disciples Together](#)', challenges us to consider how we are 'putting children, young people and families at the centre of a more Christ-like Church'.

It sets out 5 cultural shifts that enable us to examine where we are now, focus where changes might be needed and help us know when change is happening.

1. Viewing children as active participants and pilgrims.
2. Engaging with children, young people and families including intergenerationally.
3. Being intentional disciple makers.
4. Enabling those engaging with children, young people and families to be 'called', 'formed' and 'equipped' ministers.
5. Being the change we want to see.

In engaging congregations and PCC's in the matter of baptised children receiving communion before confirmation, you are taking steps on the Disciples Together journey – and taking seriously the spiritual nurture, faith formation and discipleship of children.

The Discipleship Enabler Team is here to help with any aspect of parish ministry with children, young people, families and schools.

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## PROCESS

### Introduction

The admission of baptised children to Holy Communion before confirmation is governed by regulations published in 2006 under paragraph 1(c) of Canon B15A. You can see the full version further down this document.

There are four basic elements to this as a process for parishes;

1. Preparation – what are the responsibilities of the incumbent, the PCC, the congregation, children and families and Diocesan staff?
2. Policy- developing and adopting a policy
3. Practice- implementing the policy
4. Review – appraising worship and experience for the whole congregation including the children.

#### 1. Preparation.

Preparing the PCC and the parish to adopt a policy is a process. A period of education, consultation and feedback must be appropriate to enable all concerned to give due consideration to the issue. Timescale will differ in each parish. For some, where the desire is great and discussion has already the timeframe can be a matter of weeks. For others where there are more complex issues to start with, to take six months to a year may be reasonable.

### The Incumbent

The incumbent has responsibility for leading the process and should involve the Discipleship Enabler (children, young people & families) with Children and Families Specialism (DE) at the earliest opportunity. The DE is a valuable resource in terms of sharing experience and practice from across the Diocese and should be invited to attend a PCC meeting and/or talk to congregation members. Draught policy should be sent to the DE prior to the final PCC vote and submission to the Area Bishop.

Other ways the incumbent looks after the process -

- work with the PCC to agree a methodology and timeline for the process.
- ensure adequate learning and discussion opportunities for the whole congregation.
- help parents and children talk together on this issue.
- ensure any changes that need to be made to make worship more accessible to children are planned and managed.

### The PCC

In this process the PCC should have the opportunity to hear the views of the congregation and give prayerful consideration to the decision they will make. This should be reflective of the views of that *whole* congregation, including children.

With the incumbent the PCC should oversee a review of the welcome, spiritual nurture, faith formation, discipleship and worship for the congregation, including children, and be prepared to make and lead changes. They should prayerfully, practically and financially support ministry with children, young people and families.

### **The Congregation**

Congregation members should be encouraged to actively participate in listening, learning and debate with humility and openness. We hope they are (but should be encouraged to be) pro-active in welcoming children and families and as part of this be committed to and changes that will support and promote the spiritual nurture, faith formation and discipleship of children and young people.

### **Children, young people and their families**

Should be encouraged and enabled to be active participants in this process. Parents will have made decisions about infant baptism, dedication or thanksgiving from their belief, understanding and integrity, which needs respect and pastoral sensitivity.

Should the parish decide to adopt a policy, children and their families should be committed to preparation session and enabled to nurture each other day by day in a life of faith.

### **We, 'the Diocese'**

Will help and support you in this process by providing relevant and up to date information, experience and advice that will support and potentially challenge your parish through the process. We can help you word your policy and enable your practice to enhance the spiritual nurture and faith formation of congregants of all ages.

We will inform you of any national policy changes that impact on your policy or practice. We remind you that Bishops reserve the right to ask you to reword or rework your policy if they are unhappy about the theology or the practical outworking of it.

### **Things we've learnt along the way - Common Concerns.**

Although titled 'A Policy on the Admission of Baptised Children to Communion before Confirmation', it is frequently found that in engaging with the issues and questions in relation to children, broader questions arise about the welcome, inclusiveness, and accessibility to others in particular contexts, including (but not confined to) children and adults with additional and special needs, vulnerable adults with mental health issues or recovering from alcoholism, older members with dementia or other degenerative diseases. Where these issues are at the foreground in parishes, sensitivity and pastoral care need thought.

#### Multi-parish situations

Where multi-parish benefices, groups and teams are exploring this, it is the heart of the Bishops' that wherever possible all the churches in the group speak with one mind. This may

at times make the process very complex. Ultimately the policy is adopted by the PCC - whomsoever that PCC governs.

- Where multi-parish benefices have different PCCs, each PCC must adopt its own policy.
- Where parishes have separate DCCs (or equivalent) and one over-arching PCC, the policy adopted by that one PCC covers practice in all the churches.

#### Dedicated Children.

Where families have deliberately chosen dedication or services of Thanksgiving over baptism for particular reasons, care will be necessary to help them think through the implications for their whole family. In particular parents may feel hurt over the suggestion that their children are not 'full-members' of the church when they are very regular attenders. Parents may not have given any thought to the question of *when* they think or feel their children are 'ready' to make their own decision about baptism, support may be needed in this regard.

#### Confirmation.

Many adult congregants worry about what will become of confirmation if baptised children are admitted to communion. Particular care should be taken within the process that such worries are heard, received and not dismissed. It is important to reassure that the Bishops' desire is that children admitted to communion will in due course also be confirmed. It can be argued that by removing the link between confirmation and communion, the significance of confirmation is strengthened because it is no longer a 'hoop' to jump through to 'get' communion. It can therefore be an equally meaningful rite of passage or commissioning into a more adult life of discipleship.

#### Can we give children alcohol?

It is illegal to give alcohol to children under five years of age, except under particular medical conditions and supervision. In relation to very small children receiving communion there is no exception to or exemption from the law for religious purposes.

That said, there is a specification under the 'Children and Young Persons Act 1933' that states that giving alcohol not exceeding 0.5% volume at the time of sale or supply would not be criminal offence.

Therefore, regarding Holy Communion:

- Receive bread only as receiving one kind equals receiving in full.
- Ensure that wine is watered down to a strength of 0.5% or less.
- Provide a non-alcoholic cup

#### What age should the children be?

There are no formal lower age restrictions, the only 'normal' prerequisite to any person receiving communion is that they are baptised.

It is our experience that children are themselves excellent at self-selection when it comes to receiving communion, feeling themselves ready or not. Adults often fear that peer pressure will play a part, but anecdotally, we know this is not the norm. It is important to highlight that just because a parish adopts a policy whereby children *can* receive communion it does not mean that all children will choose to do so.

Preparing Children – Things to remember;

- Receiving communion is a part of an ongoing lifelong spiritual and faith journey, not an end event.
- Knowledge about the bible is important but is not the only kind of knowing. Reflect this in your preparation and practice.
- You know your children and families. Do what is most appropriate for them in your setting.

## DEVELOPING AND ADOPTING A POLICY

Following the period of learning, discussion and feedback a draught policy is prepared and should be sent to the Discipleship Enabler (children, young people & families) with Children and Families Specialism, for feedback prior to the final vote.

A sample policy can be found below to get you started. Please form the wording so that the policy best serves the children and families, and the Church in your local situation.

When the PCC vote the motion must carry a two-thirds majority of those present at the vote to be passed. The result of the vote must be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

The PCC can then submit their application, including the relevant minute and policy to their Area Bishop who, in consultation with the DE, affirms the application or asks for reworking if deemed necessary.

The Bishop will sign the application and communicate this to you.

## IN PRACTICE - IMPLEMENTING THE POLICY

There are two distinct areas here, firstly around getting started and admitting your first group of children. The second is about ongoing parish worshipping life so that policy becomes embedded practice.

Having received permission from the Area Bishop the parish agrees and undertakes process and timescale to enable candidates to be welcomed to receive communion. This will include a period of preparation for the children and their parents or carers. The DE can talk through resources to help with this.

Things to remember:

- Parental consent must be sought and given.
- Where children attend worship without their parents, permission must still be sought. Thought should be given as to how this is best received in dialogue with the family. A parish should also consider offering particular support to lone children in worship, perhaps with 'sponsors'.
- Seek evidence of Baptism and update or renew the child's certificate to reflect their communicant status.
- Hold a Eucharistic Service at which the children will be formally welcomed and receive communion for the first time.
- Keep a record of the children admitted to communion. Keep this somewhere safe! The Bishop, Archdeacon or DE may ask you to show them the register.
- Be prepared that the Diocese will occasionally ask for evidence that your policy has been reviewed and data relating to the policy.

### **Ongoing life: policy to embedded practice.**

- Regularly offer new children the opportunity to be admitted.
- Annually review the policy and practice at PCC. (Updates or changes should be submitted to the DEand Area Bishop.)
- Regularly appraise worship and experience for the whole congregation including the children.
- **Don't forget you have the policy! If the parish goes into vacancy include the existence of the policy in your parish profile.**

### Children Administering the Chalice.

In November 2012 General Synod passed a motion that enabled an amendment to Canon Law so that under certain conditions children may assist with the administration of Communion. The conditions of that amendment can be found below.

This is another scenario where children *could* be ministrants but many will not want to be and some perhaps should not be. It is not a 'must' but a 'could' after careful thought and prayer by all concerned.

### Additional Eucharistic Prayers.

In 2012 the Church of England published two new liturgies intended for use when a significant number of children will be present. The book containing the prayers along with '*Guidance on Celebrating the Eucharist with Children*' is a very useful resource to aid thinking about and planning a service. It was not the original intention that these prayers be used as a matter of course at the parish 'Family' or 'All-Age' Eucharist, but on occasion it may be appropriate to use one of them.



## GENERAL SYNOD ADMISSION OF BAPTISED CHILDREN TO HOLY COMMUNION 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 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 incumbents 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 modification 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 obligation 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 function under paragraph 3) to a person appointed by him for this 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.

## AMENDMENT TO THE CANON REGARDING CHILDREN ASSISTING WITH THE ADMINISTRATION OF COMMUNION.

### **Canon B 12 and the Regulations (GS 1881A and GS 1881B)**

- (a) the Holy Sacrament may be distributed by any authorized regular communicant (including children admitted to the Holy Communion under the Admission of Baptised Children to Holy Communion Regulations 2006);
- (b) if the diocesan bishop agrees, the necessary authorization may be given in relation to any parish by the incumbent, priest in charge or (during a vacancy) rural dean; and
- (c) no person shall be authorized to distribute the Holy Sacrament without the support of the parochial church council of the parish or, where the Holy Communion is celebrated in a school and the person concerned is a child, of the head teacher of the school.
- (d) the authorization given in relation to any parish is required to be kept under regular review in accordance with guidelines issued by the diocesan bishop

November 2012

## SAMPLE POLICY

### **Admission to Holy Communion: Parish Policy of St \_\_\_\_\_.**

Affirming that baptism is the sacrament of initiation into Christ and his church, we believe that it is therefore desirable for all the baptised, including children, to be admitted to receive Holy Communion before Confirmation.

Christians discern the significance of the Sacrament of Holy Communion at greatly varying levels. With their capacity for awe and mystery, children can have a profound understanding of what happens at Holy Communion equal to or surpassing that of many adults. Admission to the Holy Communion should arise out of a person's own faith development and not be a response to parental or peer pressure. In considering a person's admission the following guidelines will be observed.

#### **Admission**

- The appropriate age at which children are admitted will be a matter for discernment, prayer and discussion between individual families and the Vicar or Vicar's representatives.
- The person must be baptised.
- In the case of a child parent/carer consent must be obtained.
- Normally at least one of the child's parents should be a regular communicant. However, if neither is, a child who attends church regularly may be admitted if a suitable sponsor is found; parental consent to this arrangement is required.
- The admission of a child to Holy Communion will be marked at a Parish Holy Communion service. A register of those children admitted will be kept.
- The decision to admit a person to Holy Communion will rest with the Vicar, after consultation with those responsible for preparation and, where applicable, their parents.
- Those admitted to the Holy Communion must not be excluded from it anywhere in the Church of England. Therefore, when a family moves to another area the Vicar will advise their new parish of the child(ren)'s communicant status.

#### **Preparation**

Those wishing to receive Holy Communion will receive preparation in a form approved by the Vicar but which includes teaching on Holy Communion and belonging to the Church. Ideally it should happen with parental involvement and encouragement, although for children who attend without their parents, sponsors from within the church who share responsibility for their spiritual nurture will be sought.

Those with Additional Needs or learning difficulties will not be excluded from receiving Holy Communion. Their preparation will be undertaken in consultation with those responsible for their care, education and support and with regard to their individual capacity to appreciate the significance of Holy Communion.

### **Ongoing Nurture**

The spiritual nurture of all children will be fostered through the activities of the churches teaching groups as well as regular participation in worship, prayer and teaching with the whole church family. It is expected that children admitted to receive Holy Communion will continue to take part in the church's programme of teaching and nurture.

### **Implications for Worship**

- It will be made clear to the Parish that children are welcome to receive Holy Communion when it is celebrated.
- Children will normally receive Holy Communion with their families.
- Use of liturgy and song will be regularly reviewed in order that Worship is accessible and appropriate in the widest sense to all.
- Non-Alcoholic cup will be available.

### **Confirmation**

Members of the Church are witnesses for Christ. Confirmation at an appropriate stage in life will provide them with the opportunity to make their own public profession of faith, and to receive the gifts of grace needed for a life of adult discipleship. Confirmation will be encouraged for all teenage and adult communicants, affirming that God's Spirit moves in God's time for each individual's journey.

*This policy was ratified and adopted at the Parochial Church Council meeting of DD/MM/YY pending approval by the Bishop of XXXXX.*

## Parish Application Form

Admission of Baptised Persons to Holy Communion before Confirmation

Parish .....

Deanery .....

Incumbent .....

### Consultation

1. Has the PCC discussed this subject in the light of the Diocesan Regulations? Yes/No
2. What was the outcome?
  
3. How has the wider congregation (including children) been involved in the discussion?
  
4. What was the outcome?
  
5. What other guidance or advice has been sought (if any)?

### Preparation

1. How will the preparation of the children for Holy Communion be organised?
  
2. Who will lead the preparation, and what training will they be given?
  
3. What preparation materials will be used?
  
4. How will the children's nurture towards Confirmation continue after they have been admitted to Holy Communion?

### **Pastoral Matters**

1. How will parents be involved in the preparation of their children for Holy Communion?
2. What strategy do you have for families who do not wish for their children to be admitted to Holy Communion?
3. What strategy do you have for children who come to church without their parents?
4. What provision will be made for the nurture of children with learning difficulties who wish to receive Holy Communion?
5. How will children be involved and affirmed as members of the Christian community:
  - \* within the Eucharist?
  - \* in non-Eucharistic worship?
  - \* in social events?

### **Practical Arrangements**

1. When and how will the children first be admitted to Holy Communion?
2. Will children be given a Certificate of Admission?

**NOTE: A Register must be kept and made available for inspection.**

Signed: ..... (Incumbent) Date.....



**Please return this form to your Area Bishop.**

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**Area Bishop Section**

I confirm that the parish of .....  
may admit baptised persons to Holy Communion before Confirmation.

Signed ..... Area Bishop

Date .....

## A BRIEF HISTORY.

### **Bible.**

The Bible does not offer definitive description or guidance on the matter of children receiving communion however certain assumptions tend to be made.

1. Baptism is the entry point - Whole households were baptised & shared in the celebration of bread & wine.
2. Jewish culture suggests children would have been valued participants (the role of children at the Passover is one example)
3. Jesus did not use understanding, knowledge or spiritual well-being as a pre-requisite for receiving communion.
4. Jesus gives stark warnings about hindering children from coming to him.
5. Paul rebukes adults for not assisting those in need 1 Corinthians 11:27 (Note this verse is not a statement on children being 'unworthy' as is sometimes argued)

### **Early History.**

Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage in North Africa in AD249, describes infants receiving bread and wine from birth so it is clear that infant baptism and communion were well established. (Cyprian was martyred in AD258).

### **4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> Centuries.**

The *Apostolic Constitutions* dating from 4<sup>th</sup> Century Syria, clearly state the order in which the community should receive communion - clergy, widows, deaconesses, *children* then other adults.

Augustine of Hippo was the first to make the link between baptism and participation in heaven through his doctrine of original sin. 'Unless you eat of the flesh and of the Son of Man you have no life in you' (John 6:53) was a key text for Augustine. He believed that to deny children baptism because their age or ability to 'understand' was to deny them Christ himself in the form of bread and wine, which in turn denies them a place in heaven. He was a strong advocate for infant baptism as soon as possible after birth, and that children should receive the signs of membership and participation in Christ (that is baptism and communion).

### **The Middle Ages.**

Developments and changes came as the church grew in size and complexity. The role of Bishops had always been central to Christian initiation, serving as President at the unified rite of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. As Dioceses grew geographically and numerically, it became harder for Bishops to cover the distances and numbers of candidates involved, so the water rite and the signing of the cross was delegated to local presbyters

with the laying on of hands reserved for now less frequent visit of the Bishop. Thus begins the 'confirmation' we recognise but admission to communion still occurred at Baptism.

In 1281 Archbishop Peckham at the Council of Lambeth issued the regulation that those not confirmed, without good reason, should be barred from communion. This was in response to parents who had not brought their children for the confirmation of their baptism, a practice Peckham believed to be the 'damnable negligence' of parents. Even though the origin was genuine concern this regulation became bar to children receiving communion.

### **The Reformation.**

Throughout the reformation period two key things happened that influenced the exclusion of children from communion.

Firstly, conflict in the Church and the divergence of Catholic and Protestant views had a subtle yet profound effect on the place of children.

Secondly and still deeply embedded in our culture today, is that through this period teaching, instruction, knowledge, and understanding were given high priority and high value. Receiving instruction and memorising the catechism became a prerequisite to receiving communion and the practise became enshrined in the 1662 prayer book.

### **The Enlightenment - The 1900's**

The late 1700's saw the rise of the Sunday Schools and the subsequent provision of weekday schooling. The formation of the National Society in 1811 gave further impetus to the opportunity of learning which became consolidated into universal school provision in 1870. During this period the practice of 'confirmation' following a period of instruction became the norm and by the 1900's the communion equation is now familiar;  
Baptism + later Confirmation = Communion

### **The Twentieth Century.**

The so called 'Parish Communion Movement' sought to recover the importance of children participating in the Eucharistic celebration. Throughout the century fresh understanding of how and why children learn has led to competing theories. Ideas derived from developmental psychology led to 'stage' theories which on one hand revealed helpful insights about ways of approaching teaching, on the other it led to the imposition of almost arbitrary limits on children's understanding based solely on age. These ideas have since been challenged and a more flexible relationship between learning and the individual has been envisaged so that now children are encouraged to be more active in their own learning both being aware of and challenging their limits. A methodology the church has been slow to work with.

The twentieth century was also a time when the theology of baptism was re-examined. It is now understood that baptism is the whole & complete entry point to membership of the Body of Christ.

Between 1967 and 1997 a series Synod debates, reports, experiments, votes and amendments kept the issue alive yet frustrated in progressing. In March 1997 the House of Bishops Guidelines, setting out policy, procedure and practice were finally published.

On June 15<sup>th</sup> 2006 the Guidelines become Regulations under paragraph 1(c) of Canon B15A.

### **Into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.**

From the 2018 Articles of Enquiry we know that 35% of parishes in Oxford Diocese have policy that enables baptised children to be admitted to communion before confirmation. We also know that a further 10% of parishes are in the practice of allowing children to receive communion.

	CofE National Average	Oxford Diocese		
		With Policy	Without Policy	Total
2009	15%	16%	No data	16%
2013	20%	27%	9%	36%
2018	20%	35%	10%	45%