

Admission of Baptised Children To Holy Communion before Confirmation



A Step by Step Guide

 THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

Diocese of Leeds

This booklet is a step by step guide to help parishes work through the process of admitting baptised children to Holy Communion.

The decision to admit children to Holy Communion before confirmation is a challenging but exciting step. It is one that should involve not just the PCC but the persons with parental responsibility, the children, and indeed the whole congregation.

Given that the three historic areas had slightly different policies, and the need to have clear guidelines that all parishes can follow, a new Diocesan Policy has been produced.

There is no lower or upper age limit stipulated in the policy as each historic diocese has had slightly different regulations in this respect. This will ensure that no young person is excluded from communion where they have previously been included.

Step by step

The Parish Priest must:

1. Consult PCC, parents, Children's Workers, congregation and ensure enough time is given to make consultation meaningful.
2. Ensure that the PCC must votes on a formal resolution and returns a majority vote.
3. Apply to the Area Bishop for permission. *[The Diocesan Bishop has to give final formal consent].*
4. Communicate the decision to congregation.
5. Obtain the written consent of parents.
6. Ensure the training and preparation of young people.
7. Plan a service of admission.
8. Keep an up to date register of young people admitted to communion.
9. Provide continuing nurture and preparation for confirmation.
10. Review annually the parish procedures and the preparation provided.

Consultation

- Open the discussion with the PCC, having done some initial research (for example reading about theological and historical perspectives). There should be ample time given for the PCC to give careful consideration.
- Ensure the preliminary work and pastoral matters listed in full document are given careful consideration.
- Invite one of the Diocesan Youth & Children's Advisers to facilitate conversation in the parish.
- Give opportunity for the leaders of children's work in the parish to discuss the issue.
- Consult with the congregation. For some members of the congregation this will be considered a very major shift in the church's teaching and so sensitivity and care are very important. Encourage discussion. It is important that the congregation are involved in the process. A parish might consider, for example, a series of sermons, house group studies, articles in the parish magazine or an open meeting
- After this consultation phase, the PCC votes on a formal resolution which must be carried by a substantial majority. If there is not a substantial majority the PCC may decide to carry on with further discussion or decide not to admit children to communion at this time.
- Communicate the decision to the congregation.

Preparatory Work

- The incumbent and PCC will need to do some preliminary work in preparation for a formal decision by the PCC and should give consideration to the following questions:
- How will the preparation of children for admission to Holy Communion be carried out? There is no lower or upper age limit.
- Who will lead the preparation and what training will they be given?
- What teaching materials will be used?
- How will the children's support and nurture continue? How will their understanding of communion be developed as they mature? How will they be encouraged towards Confirmation after they have been admitted to Holy Communion?

Some Pastoral Matters to consider:

- How will those exercising parental responsibility be involved in the process of deciding whether and when individual children are ready to receive communion?
- How will those exercising parental responsibility be involved in the preparation of their children for Holy Communion?
- What will you do for families who do not wish for their children to be admitted to Holy Communion?
- What will you do for children who come to church without their parents?
- What provision will be made for the nurture of children with learning difficulties who wish to receive Holy Communion?
- How will children be involved and affirmed as members of the Christian community:
 - ◇ within the service of Holy Communion?
 - ◇ in non-eucharistic worship?
 - ◇ in other ways?

Getting Going

- Approach the Area Bishop for permission to proceed. Do this in writing accompanied by a copy of the resolution in support of the application passed by the PCC including the voting figures.
- Download and complete the application form which outlines the preparation work done so far and the proposed teaching and continuing nurture that will be followed.

- In consultation with parents and children's leaders, identify children who are desirous of and ready to receive communion - they need to have been baptised.
- Ensure those exercising parental responsibility are in agreement with their child receiving communion. You will need written consent.
- Deliver the course and encourage godparents and parents to be involved.
- Plan the service of admission of Holy Communion which should be a special occasion for the children and their families and marked in an appropriate way.
- A register must be kept of the names of children admitted to communion.
- A certificate of admission is given to each child. This is provided by Hollin House and signed by the Diocesan Bishop.

The Next Steps

- Provide ongoing nurture and support which should, at the appropriate time, lead to confirmation.
- Once a child has received communion in one parish s/he must be allowed to receive communion when visiting other churches. A letter of commendation should be written for any children moving to a new parish.
- Review the procedures and preparation regularly.

“Just as with adults, the spiritual life of baptised children is enriched by the receiving of Holy Communion and their sense of belonging is affirmed and encouraged. This has required churches to engage with the sacrament in new and different ways, to the enrichment of children and adults alike, as they journey in faith together.”

Rowan Williams Archbishop of Canterbury