# The Admission of Baptised Children to

# Holy Communion

A Handbook for Parishes

in the Diocese of Peterborough

2018

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The Gen2 Team are available to answer questions and assist with the process of admission in your parish. Please contact Pete White, Becky Wills or Chad Chadwick at Bouverie Court

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A Letter from Bishop Donald

I spend most Sundays visiting parish churches in the diocese, usually presiding as well as preaching (and sometimes confirming). Almost immediately after my arrival in Peterborough, I realised that there was something very special about the parishes where children had been admitted to receive Communion. There were very few such parishes then. I am glad to say that the number has steadily risen, but this still represents only a minority of our parishes.

What was so special? What difference does admitting children to Communion make? I suggest three answers.

Most obviously, the combination of joy, excitement, and seriousness which I see on the children's faces as they receive, is wonderful, delightful, and encouraging to me. It is rare to see adults enjoying their Communion so much, but common to see this in children.

Second, the whole service, not least the ministry of the sacrament, feels different. Somehow, the children's presence, participation, and (invariably good) behaviour changes everything. Many of the adults are in some way affected by the joy. Somehow the simple childlike faith is infectious. I'm well aware that these are both subjective arguments, based on what I feel, but I’m telling it as I see it.

Third, admitting children to Communion is right and good theologically. If we believe in and practice infant baptism, the sacrament of initiation, how can we deny baptised children the sacrament of continuation?

My views on this have changed over the years. When the admission of children to Communion before Confirmation was first discussed in synods twenty and more years ago, I opposed it, fearing that it would both weaken Confirmation, and trivialize Communion. Over the years since then I have discovered that I was wrong on both counts. If you still have those doubts, I invite you to join me on that journey of joyful discovery.

+Donald

The Rt Revd Donald Allister

Bishop of Peterborough

|  |
| --- |
| **Consult and discuss**Raise the issue in the general congregation, children and youth leaders and then with the PCC.Approach the Diocese Gen2 Children and Youth Team for advice and support; they will come and speak to your PCC if that is helpful. Read the background material on the history and theology so you are well-informed.  |
| **Decide**PCC makes decision, you will need a 2/3 majority. Feedback to the congregation. |
| **Plan**You will need to plan for how you will prepare children for admission, the date when you will admit the first children and consider how you will continue to nurture their faith towards confirmation.  |
| **Apply to the Bishop**For approval of your decision, giving details of the decision-making process, and your plans for preparation and admission. Please use the form provided in this pack. |
| **Prepare**For your service of admission. Invite children (and their parents) who wish to be admitted to come to preparation sessions. Inform them of the date for the admission service and plan the service as a significant celebration. |
| **Celebrate**Hold the service, admit the children and make it a special occasion for them and the church that is including them at the Lord’s table. Give out certificates to the children. (see Appendix for template)  |
| **Record**Keep a register of the names of those admitted, with the date.  |

The Process

Raising the issue of admitting children to communion before Confirmation gives you a good opportunity to explore and discuss wider issues around the place of children in the church and how they are nurtured and encouraged in the Christian faith. It also represents an opportunity to refresh understanding of the eucharist for the whole congregation.

# **Diocese of Peterborough**

# **Guidelines for the Admission of Baptised Children to Holy Communion before Confirmation**

# Planning

1. The Bishop has agreed that permission may be sought from him for the admission of children to Communion before Confirmation. It is important that such a step forward in the life of the Church should be taken prayerfully and carefully.
2. Incumbents, PCC’s, congregations, parents and children must have some understanding of what is being proposed, and of the significance of the Eucharist within the life of the Church.
3. Applications for permission should be accompanied by a resolution of the PCC supporting this policy.
4. Children to be admitted to Communion should already be part of the worshipping community. They should themselves express a wish to receive the Sacrament. The age at which they may be admitted should be at the discretion of the Incumbent provided that the appropriate criteria are fulfilled.

# Preparation and Implementation

1. A Course of preparation for the children should stress the theme of ‘Belonging to the Body of Christ’. Their reception at Communion is a sign that they are already members of Christ’s Body. Value each child equally; adaptations for the inclusion of children with learning difficulties should apply where appropriate.
2. Parents and carers should give their permission for their children’s participation, and be encouraged to support them. They should be fully informed about the preparation and admission procedure and should be invited to share positively with clergy and leaders in the preparation.
3. As baptism is the rite of initiation for all Church members, it follows that those who become communicants must be baptised. If a child has not been baptised already, this should be arranged before the beginning of the course of preparation.

Continued…

# Admission and Evaluation

1. A simple act of admission during the Eucharist should be arranged. The families of children to be admitted to Communion should be asked to participate. Certificates should be given to the children, and their names entered in a register kept for this purpose.

2. The priest must decide exactly how much of the liturgy the communicant children will attend. Even if there is a separate ‘Ministry of the Word’ for children, anyone who is to receive Holy Communion should be present in the main assembly at least for the Eucharistic prayer.

3. When communicant children move to another parish it is expected that they should continue their Sacramental life. They must be commended to the receiving Incumbent.

4. It is assumed that Confirmation will be offered by the time the young person is eighteen years old. Pressure should not be put on young people to be confirmed too quickly.

Presenting to your PCC – notes on history and theology

## A Short History

## The Early Church

## The New Testament describes the life of the early church that included the ‘breaking of bread’ (Acts 2:42) and instructions about the Lord’s supper (I Corinthians 11). There are no specific instructions about who is included at the table. It is safe to assume from the culture of the time that children and young people were part of the family or household and would have been included in most household activities.

We know that the communion feast was modelled on the Passover and children were always a part of this occasion. There is no reason to expect the Early Church to exclude children.

There was a link between baptism and communion, so that those baptised received communion and no distinction was made on any grounds including that of age. The Ely Report, published in 1971, concluded that ‘Baptism is the full and complete rite of initiation’. In other words, we do not need to wait for confirmation, to be fully a part of the Body of Christ.

As we will see, the exclusion of children from the eucharist is a late development in church history.

## Church History

It is apparent that children continued to receive communion after the New Testament period.

We read that Cyprian of Carthage (d259) describes infants receiving bread and wine from birth.

In the 4th Century, there is record of the order for receiving communion which includes children after clergy, widows and deaconesses followed by the main body of the congregation.

Augustine, commenting on John 6:53, wrote that unless you participate in the bread and wine you are denied a place in heavenly peace.

As the church grew, it became harder for bishops to be present at baptisms and so the rite of confirmation developed at a separate time. New Christians would be baptised and then receive the laying on of hands from the Bishop when he next visited.

In the Eastern Orthodox Church children continue to receive communion after baptism.

However, in the Western church, it was not until 1281 when Archbishop Peckham barred those who were not confirmed from receiving communion which led to the Council of Trent abolishing communion before confirmation.

This was further emphasised during the reformation period when the emphasis on knowledge and understanding came to the fore. The importance of catechism and knowledge of doctrine was seen as more important than experiential faith.

This was overturned after long discussions and debates over a considerable period at General Synod leading to the new regulations in 2006.

## Theology

Questions around the theology of children being admitted hinge around the significance attached to baptism and confirmation. Baptism understood as one complete rite of initiation means that the baptised are all wholly part of the Body of Christ. The baptism liturgy proclaims our equality and unity in Christ - ‘we welcome you, we are children of the same heavenly father’

 When Jesus placed a child in the midst of the disciples, he was pointing out the importance of children as people who belong to the kingdom of God but also pointing to the way that children remind us that faith has to be child-like. Children help us to remember that faith is simple and not meant to be over-complicated by understanding doctrine.

The communion meal is about meeting with Jesus and we can all do that whatever our age.

## Practical Reasons for Admitting children

In recent research[[1]](#footnote-1), 40% of Christians said they came to faith before the age of 5 and a further 16% before the age of 10. It is important for us to recognise that children are able to respond to God and need to be encouraged as they grow and learn how to be disciples of Christ from an early age.

The Church of England report, ‘Rooted in the Church’[[2]](#footnote-2) highlighted a clear link between children receiving communion and those young people who remained part of the church into adulthood. It was mentioned in every interview as a source of frustration for those who were not allowed to receive communion.

Children and young people need to be part of the whole church community in order to grow into a mature faith. “The experience of belonging is the basis for nurture and growth in the Christian life” (On the Way 1995) Joining with others in the congregation as equals around the eucharist table is a hugely important symbol and practical sign that we are all equally part of the body of Christ and children will see and hear that,

*‘You are welcome here’*

## Video Resource

In 2016, children and young people from Living Brook benefice, Northampton made a short film for their PCC explaining why they wanted to be included in the Eucharist. Entitled, ‘One Bread, One Body’ you can find it on youtube here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pKXxXOHexTw&t=9s>

# Resources for Preparation

The following books and course materials are recommended for use as preparation material with children and their parents. It is advised that material is adapted for use in your own context.

All of these are available to view or borrow from the diocesan Resource Library at Bouverie Court, Northampton.



Ready to Share One Bread: Preparing Children for Holy Communion. Nick Harding and Sandra Millar. 2015

A 'one-stop shop' for churches considering the admission of children to Holy Communion This book contains all a church would need to do to explore admitting children, including resources for exploring the issue with a whole congregation, case studies from real-life churches, a preparation course, an admission liturgy and advice on including and involving children in Eucharistic worship. The book also includes theological reflection on children and the Eucharist from Michael Perham and considers the impact of receiving Holy Communion on children's discipleship.



Children and Holy Communion A Creative Preparation Programme. Diana Murrie and Steve Pearce. 2003

Children and Holy Communion presents many convincing reasons for the admission of children to Holy Communion, based on the actual experiences of churches. It offers an invaluable practical aid to preparation for Holy Communion in the form of a six-session course with notes for leaders and photocopiable ‘Talkabout’ take-home sheets.



My Communion Book 2nd ed: A Child's Guide to Holy Communion

This resource for children and families is primarily aimed at 4 to 8 year olds. It can be used initially as a sharing book, adult and child reading together, but children may use it at times on their own. Taking the child through the service, the book explains key words and asks questions that relate directly to the child, helping them to engage with the service of Holy Communion in a fun, interesting and meaningful way.



Welcome to the Lord's Table activity book

Every page in this book has been designed to help you mark a very important journey. Step by step it will help you to learn all about belonging to God's family. So it's about you and God. You can fill in the pages by yourself, or with the help of a grown-up. If you are using this activity book as part of your church's Welcome to the Lord's Table programme you will have the opportunity to offer it at your first Holy Communion as a sign that you belong to God and are part of his family.

Welcome to the Lord's Table: A practical programme for children on Holy Communion by Margaret Withers. 2017

A fully revised edition of a highly successful programme, used in many churches throughout the UK. It has been brought up to date, fully reflecting changes in both church process and church culture over recent years. Aimed to enable children aged 7 - 9 to participate fully in eucharistic worship, the introductory chapters explore the background to the question of preparing young children for Holy Communion, give guidance on preparing the congregation, training leaders and involving the family, and include a guide to using the programme. The programme itself comprises eleven flexible teaching units and is designed to last approximately three months overall, with the children receiving Holy Communion towards the end of the programme.





Come and Join the Celebration: A Resource Book to Help Adults and Children Experience Holy Communion Together John Muir & Betty Pedley

Not preparation material but resources for including children in the Eucharist service.

This photocopiable resource contains guidance on how to help children understand the liturgy and structure of Holy Communion; activities for use in church with 2-6 year olds; resource sheets for 7-11 year olds; and ideas for additional uses including Communion before confirmation, workshops and school Eucharists. The book aims to help adults share worship with children, thus enabling everyone to participate more fully.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## Will children understand what they are doing when taking Communion?

Children are certainly able to understand that sharing the bread and wine is special. A deeper understanding of the mystery of the sacrament is a lifetime’s work for all of us and one that will never be fully complete however old we are. It is important that we do not view taking Holy Communion as a prize which we win by passing tests but as a free, gracious and unconditional gift from God.

## 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 spiritual matters which some adults may find it hard to recapture.

Is there an age limit?

No, the regulations do not stipulate a minimum age for children to receive. Some parishes adopt their own policy - usually based on requiring a level of understanding especially when delivering preparation courses.

## How will the vicar know who can receive?

A record must be kept of all the children who have been admitted to Communion before Confirmation and clergy will have been involved in preparing the children for admission. Should a new family with children admitted to Holy Communion join a parish, the vicar of the sending church should write a letter of recommendation to the new parish. In our experience, children know if they have been through a Holy Communion preparation course and will be able to articulate this to the vicar. It is good practice for a vicar to outline the parish position on the admission to Holy Communion prior to the administration of the elements.

## What happens if a family moves to a parish which doesn’t admit?

When the admission of children to Communion before Confirmation was first introduced there were concerns surrounding a situation where a child who had been admitted in one parish moved to a parish that did not admit children. 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 Holy 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.

## What about children who are not baptised?

Those who are not baptised may not be admitted to receive Holy Communion. If an unbaptised child wishes to be prepared for admission then they must be baptised 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.

## What if children do not want to be admitted to Holy Communion

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 importantly, the individual children must make a free choice to be admitted.

## What happens if not all 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. The PCC decision needs to be of 2/3 majority in favour. Admission to Holy Communion does not disappear from the life of the parish should the vicar or families with children who have permission move elsewhere.

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

It can be an opportunity for you to make clear the value and seriousness of Confirmation as a personal affirmation of faith. Take the opportunity to revisit your Confirmation preparation and to think again about the best ways for the wider church to support young people and adults as they take this step. The Gen2 Team can advise on confirmation resources and preparation.

## Can children be chalice assistants?

## Yes! You may not want to do this straight away but Bishop Donald has agreed that children can help to serve at communion and should be encouraged to do so. You should offer them appropriate training as with adult servers but this is another great way to share responsibility with young people and encourage them to feel part of the church.

Admission of baptized children to Holy Communion Regulations 2006

Regulations made by General Synod on 8 February 2006 and came into force on 15 June 2006

The General Synod hereby makes the following Regulations under paragraph 1(c) of Canon B 15A:

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

2. Children who have been baptized 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 B 15A 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 baptized 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 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.



Admission of Children to Holy Communion before Confirmation

Parish Application Form

Parish(es) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Deanery \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Priest \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Checklist – please indicate you have taken the following steps

|  |
| --- |
| 1. Consultation
 |
|  |
| □ | with the PCC |
| □ | with the wider church congregation |
| □ | With people from other parishes who have already been through this process and/or with the Diocesan Children & Youth Team |
| □ | The PCC has passed a resolution to apply to the Bishop of Peterborough for permission to admit children to communion under the Admission of baptised Children to Holy Communion Regulations 2006.  |
| □ | The decision to proceed has been communicated with children and their families and the wider parish community |
| 1. Practical Arrangements
 |
|  |  |
| □ | We have organised the preparation materials of children for Holy Communion |
| □ | We have arranged leaders for the preparation course |
| □ | We have made provision for children with learning difficulties who wish to receive Holy Communion |
| □ | We have taken into consideration children’s nurture towards Confirmation |
| □ | We have discussed how parents will be involved in the preparation of their children for Holy Communion |
| □ | We have prepared Certificates of Admission to Holy Communion |
| □ | We have a Register for those to be admitted to Holy Communion |
| □ | We have organised a special service/time when children will be admitted |

1. Application

This parish has agreed, in accordance with the Admission of Baptised Children to Holy Communion Regulations 2006, to offer Holy Communion to children who have not yet been Confirmed, provided that;

* the child has been baptised
* a person having parental responsibility for the child is content that the child should be so admitted
* children to be admitted will take part in a suitable preparation course. This should be part of a continuing programme for the nurture of children and their families from baptism, through the welcoming of children to Holy Communion and on to Confirmation and beyond.

We will maintain a register of all children admitted to Holy Communion under these Regulations.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Signed (Incumbent) : |  | Date : |  |

Please return this form to

The Bishop of Peterborough, Bishop’s Lodging, The Palace, Peterborough, PE1 1YA

Thank you



Diocese of Peterborough

Certificate of

Admission to Holy Communion

before Confirmation

**This is to certify that**

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (name)

**Has been admitted to Holy Communion**

**in the parish of**

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**on** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_(date)

**Date of Birth:** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Date of Baptism** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Place of Baptism:** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Incumbent** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Signed** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. ComRes. 2017. Mapping Practising Christians [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. CofE Education Office. 2016. Rooted in the Church [↑](#footnote-ref-2)