

Admitting children to Communion before Confirmation St Peter & St Paul Abington, Northampton

I was very happy when I arrived in Abington nearly three years ago that the practice of admitting children to Holy Communion was well established, having only begun the preparatory work in my previous parish, against some resistance. I think Louise Menzies, Children's Worker at St Peter & St Paul Abington, has said that at first this was the case at Abington, but a clear and logical approach to the PCC and proper preparation was essential and won the argument.

The initial age group was the junior age group, and this has been the regular pattern over the last eleven years. The children needed to be regular attenders on Sunday morning, as Sunday School is very much part of the follow-up and ongoing nurture of the children.

What of confirmation? Only two have been confirmed, but the earlier group are still in their teens and may yet decide to make that decision. Over the years I have found in various churches that the age of 11 or 12 is often not the right time for the kind of commitment that confirmation requires. Admitting children to communion, with proper preparation, makes them feel a full and valued part of the church community at worship.

Various resources have been used over the years, but the experience of meeting as a group, talking about themselves, their family and their experience of God's love for them is the most encouraging part of the whole enterprise. Sometimes this is done over a meal. Parents do take part in some of the sessions, but it is important not to let them take over – so they are usually invited to one of the sessions during the course.

There is not a regular Sunday during the year when the service of admission is held. A new course begins when it is thought there is a group that wants to go forward. None were admitted this year, but in 2010 a course of sessions will probably begin, working up towards the Easter season. After admission, the children's names are entered in a register which is kept in the church safe.

I think admitting children to the Eucharist means that we take them seriously and the way they worship seriously. For me it is a wonderful privilege week by week to administer the Sacrament to our children and families, and would encourage any church community to consider it and begin preliminary discussions around the church – especially with the children – because the early stages may take a bit longer than you think!

Philip Ball, Rector of Abington

Louise Menzies, Children's Worker

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