



DIOCESE OF YORK

Diocesan Guidelines on:

**Admission of
Baptized Children
to Communion
before Confirmation**

CONTENTS	Page
Introduction	3
Christian Nurture	4
Age of Admission to Communion	4
Register Requirements	4
Permanent Communicant Status of Children	4
The process	5
The preparation programme	7
Criteria for approval of parish policy	7
Process checklist for parishes	8
FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions)	10
General Synod Regulations 2006	12

ALSO AVAILABLE

from the diocesan website (www.dioceseofyork.org.uk), the XL youth & children website (www.xl-york.org.uk) and from the Children & Youth Team:

- Resources list for Communion before Confirmation
- Discussion documents for Communion before Confirmation

Acknowledgements:

“The preparation programme” and “FAQs” are used with the permission of Manchester diocese
“Checklist for parishes” is used with the permission of Southwell diocese

INTRODUCTION

Archbishop Sentamu has given permission under the *Admission of Baptized Children to Holy Communion Regulations 2006* for parishes within York diocese, who wish to do so, to admit baptized persons to communion before confirmation subject to his approval. This approval may only be given when the suffragan bishop is satisfied that appropriate agreements and provisions are in place, especially for the support and nurture of young communicants.

This decision does not *require* parishes to proceed with the admission of children to communion before confirmation – although Archbishop Sentamu wishes to encourage all parishes to consider adopting this practice.

These guidelines and supporting documents are designed to help those parishes wishing to explore this issue and, particularly, to support those parishes which are considering admitting children to communion before confirmation.

The decision to admit children to communion is a challenging but exciting step. It is important that the subject is discussed widely and at a number of levels – theologically, historically, pastorally and educationally.

Whilst it is the PCC's responsibility to develop and implement the overall policy, this should be done with reference to the diocesan procedures and may be done in consultation with the diocesan Children's and Youth Work Advisory Team. A specially appointed working group may be set up to manage and implement the scheme on the PCC's behalf. In all instances the permission must be sought from the suffragan bishop before any policy is implemented.

The PCC will need to consider the nurture and care of all members of the congregation. Issues of faith development and implications for rites of passage as well as patterns of worship will all need to be considered. It is therefore not a decision which should be taken lightly. Considerable time and commitment will be needed for its proper implementation

It is hoped that these guidelines and supporting materials will provide a clear guide to the diocesan procedures, as well as background information and details of further resources. These guidelines are designed to be flexible – the circumstances of individual parishes vary enormously and the processes of consultation, decision-making and implementation will be different in different parishes. Not all of the material will be relevant in every parish. However, the process outlined should be followed, and the Bishops' criteria for approval of any proposed parish policy will, with due regard to the parish circumstances, be consistently applied.

Christian Nurture

The House of Bishops Guidelines on the admission of baptized persons to communion before confirmation is very clear that any such decision should not be considered in isolation but as part of a broader context of Christian nurture. Discussion of admission to communion before confirmation should ideally be carried out within the framework of a review of parish policies on Christian nurture – this could include baptism policy, baptism preparation, Sunday School, Children’s and Youth work, nurture of adult Christians, mission and evangelism, and the whole culture of lifelong learning. Such a review is just as important in parishes which decide not to proceed with admission to communion before confirmation as it is in parishes that wish to introduce the changes.

Age of Admission to Communion

In this diocese, there is no prescribed minimum age limit for the admission of children to communion. However, the usual expectation is that children to be admitted to communion should themselves be desirous of receiving it. The likelihood, therefore, is that children will be admitted at around the age of six or seven years. In some circumstances, though, it may be appropriate for younger children to be admitted – it may be appropriate for the “preparation” of such children to follow their admission to communion so that their understanding of the sacrament develops alongside their actual experience. (However, admission to communion should, in all cases, be marked liturgically. Children should not simply ‘drift’ into receiving communion.) PCCs are free to include a recommended minimum age in their parish policy. They should be aware that such recommendations are often weakened or eroded over time and so need to be clear about how they will handle requests from younger children. In all cases the PCC needs to ensure that children receive appropriate preparation or instruction.

Register Requirements

Parishes **must** maintain a register of all children admitted to Holy Communion under these Regulations – this register is an **official parish record** and should be stored with the other parish registers. Where practicable, the incumbent should 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 child should be provided with a separate certificate recording the same details.

Permanent Communicant Status Of Children

The House of Bishops guidelines clearly state that no baptized person, child or adult, who has once been admitted to Holy Communion and remains in good standing with the Church, should be anywhere deprived of it. When, for example, a family moves to another area, the incumbent of the parish they are leaving should contact their new incumbent to ensure that there is no confusion regarding the communicant status of children.

THE PROCESS

1. **Notify** the suffragan bishop that the parish is actively exploring the issue of admission of children to communion before confirmation.
2. Agree a **process** within the parish and **develop** a provisional Parish Policy. This should address the following questions:
 - Which children will be eligible for admission to communion?
 - At what age will children be admitted?
 - What form of preparation/instruction will be used?
 - Who will be responsible for this preparation?
 - How will parents be involved in the preparation of their children for Holy Communion?
 - What strategy do you have for families who do not wish their children to be admitted to Holy Communion?
 - What strategy do you have 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 does admission to communion fit in with the parish policy on (and preparation for) baptism?
 - How will the children's nurture towards Confirmation continue after they have been admitted to Holy Communion?
 - How does admission to communion fit in with the overall parish policy on Christian nurture for the whole congregation?
 - How will admission to communion be marked liturgically? (See Common Worship - Initiation Services and diocesan resources list.)
 - How will children be involved and affirmed as members of the Christian community:
 - within the Eucharist?
 - in non-Eucharistic worship?
 - in social events?
 - How will the annual review of the parish procedures be conducted?

3. **Consult** widely within the parish. The issue should be fully discussed with all interested parties. These may include:
 - Children
 - Parents
 - Staff Clergy
 - Readers
 - Youth workers
 - Sunday School teachers
 - Youth Group leaders
 - Standing Committee
 - PCC
 - Congregation
 - Neighbouring parishes
 - Church Schools
 - Uniformed organisations
 - Ecumenical Partners
 - Others....
4. Finalise **parish policy**.
5. Pass a formal **resolution at the PCC** requesting permission from your suffragan bishop to admit children to communion before confirmation.
6. **Submit** a completed application form, together with the Parish Policy and a copy of the PCC resolution (indicating voting figures) to the suffragan bishop. (Copies of the application form will be sent to Bishopthorpe Palace and to the diocesan Children's & Youth Work Advisory Team.)
7. **Implement** the policy if permission is granted
8. **Review** procedures annually and ensure that the register is properly completed.

THE PREPARATION PROGRAMME

Please see the list of resources. A number of suggested programmes have been published. It would be wise to look at several and then adopt (or adapt) the one that is most suited to the parish circumstances. You may wish to consider the following:

Method

- Current 'best practice' in teaching methods should be used.
- Children should be fully engaged in the sessions.
- There should be clear links to their own life experience.
- Material should be appropriate to the age of the children, and should take account of any special needs.
- There should be plenty of variety within sessions, including practical activities and opportunities for discussion.
- Parents/carers should be encouraged to be involved
- Creative use of prayer should form part of each session.

Content might include:

- life's journey and the journey of faith
- links with Baptism
- identity and belonging
- the structure of the Eucharistic/Holy Communion
- the varied facets of the sacrament
- the Bible
- living the Christian life
- Confirmation

Congregational involvement

Adults from the congregation, other than the course leaders should be involved. There should be provision for marking progress through the course during Sunday services, including the encouragement of prayerful support.

CRITERIA FOR APPROVAL OF PARISH POLICY

Before granting permission to admit children to communion before confirmation the suffragan bishops will wish to be satisfied:

- that there has been wide consultation within the parish
- that the policy has been discussed and agreed by the PCC and incumbent
- that appropriate preparation and instruction will be provided for children admitted to communion
- that, where appropriate, ecumenical partners have been consulted
- that, where appropriate, church schools have been consulted
- that there is provision for an annual review of the parish procedures
- that consideration has been given to the programme of Christian nurture in the parish

PROCESS CHECKLIST FOR PARISHES

1. PCC Meeting and Resolution

- Has the issue been fully discussed by the PCC and a formal resolution passed and minuted?
- Does the PCC know the feelings of the congregation?
- Where appropriate, have ecumenical partners been consulted?

2. Prayer, reflection and discussion

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- Has there been a period of preparation and discussion with the congregation?
- Has there been adequate time and opportunity for questions, concerns and pastoral issues to be addressed?

3. Parish policy on Christian nurture

- How does admission to Communion fit in with the overall parish policy on the nurture of children within the framework of Baptism, Communion and Confirmation? (*Note: Evidence of baptism must always be sought before a child is admitted to communion.*)
- What is the earliest age deemed appropriate by the parish for admission to Communion, and for Confirmation?

4. Implications for worship

- How have the implications for worship been addressed?
- How much of the liturgy will communicant children attend, how will they be involved, and how often will they receive Communion?
- Are problems with worship patterns hindering the process?

5. Parents and guardians

- How will parents/carers or other responsible adults be involved in the process of deciding whether and when individual children are ready to receive Communion? (*Note: Parental consent should always be obtained in writing before admitting children to communion.*)
- Are these adults also receiving a session or period of preparation?
- How will the circumstances of families where the parents do not normally attend church be addressed?

6. Special needs

- How will the needs of children (or adults) with learning difficulties be catered for?

7. Preparing the children

- What provision will be made for the preparation of children to receive Communion?
- Who will be responsible for the preparation and what materials will be used?

8. Keeping records and follow-up

- Who will be responsible for maintaining the register of people admitted to communion before confirmation?
- Who is pastorally responsible for care, nurture and faith development of the children who receive communion?

9. Review

- Who will be responsible for undertaking the annual review?
- Any proposed changes to the policy should be notified to the suffragan bishop

Advice and help is available from a number of clergy and lay leaders who have helped parishes work through this process. The Children's & Youth Work Advisory Team is available for consultation during the period of discussion and decision-making and during implementation of a parish policy.

FAQs - (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 Vicar 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 a 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 be admitted to 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.

GENERAL SYNOD - ADMISSION OF BAPTIZED 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 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 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 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 (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.