# 1408 Diocese of Rochester

## Children and Holy Communion: Preparing your parish

### Telling the next Generation

Nurturing our children is about handing down the faith of the Church to its children by experience and example from their families and the church community as much as through direct teaching. ‘*Things we have heard and known; things our ancestors told us. We will not keep them from our children; we will tell the next generation.’ (Ps 78:3-4).*

Every member of the congregation is involved in the nurture of the children. Children learn from the example of others and will copy what they see. They will learn more about being a Christian by the way they see adults worship God and behave towards other people than from teaching courses, but nurture is also part of their spiritual development. This may be through teaching sessions on Sunday mornings, attending a good Church school, going to Family Services or to midweek activities such as ‘*Messy Church’* or an after-school club.

### Preparation and Meetings

If a parish decides to discuss admitting children to Holy Communion it will want to give an opportunity for the whole congregation, including the children, to hear and be heard in that discussion. Sermons, discussion groups, and some kind of open meeting are ways of keeping people informed and allowing each person to take part.

You will find that paper 1407, ‘*Children and Holy Communion; the Background’,* on the website gives a brief historical background and provides answers to some of the most common questions. It is designed to give you some basic information before any discussion takes place.

If you want to read further, paper 1410, ‘*Children and Holy Communion; Suggested Resources* on the website will give a list of books to help you in your thinking and discussion.

Whatever kind of discussion takes place it will be an emotive occasion:

1. Some people will rejoice but others will be deeply opposed for a variety of reasons.
2. Many will feel that the usual practice should continue and are afraid of the disappearance of familiar patterns.
3. Some people will worry about the presence of children at the Eucharist. Others will be excited and want to know more about it.
4. People will ask questions about baptism that they have never thought about before.

Some people’s views will be deeply held, and it is important that each comment is treated with respect. It is advisable to invite someone from outside the parish to present the subject and answer questions. This allows the clergy to remain ‘neutral’ and gives the meeting the benefit of information and experience from the wider Church.

 **Possible subjects for Discussion Groups / preaching:**

* Baptism
* Being part of the Church family
* God’s generosity to all his people
* Review of the Eucharist / Holy Communion service
* Supporting Christian children and their families

**The big Question with 3 possible answers:**

Q. Is this is the right move for your parish at this time?

A1. *‘Yes’.* You may need to do further work but the congregation wants to move forward.

A2. *‘Not yet’.* The PCC needs to plan how to discuss it further or when to re-visit the subject.

A3. *‘No’.* Even if your parish decides that this is not for them, it is important that it realises that a communicant child will probably attend your church at some time in the near future so will receive Holy Communion.

 Clergy and Eucharistic ministers need to be ready for any children who are communicants to receive as, *‘A child who … has been admitted to Holy Communion ... shall be so admitted at any service of Holy Communion conducted according to the rites of the Church of England in any place...’* People also need to know that, having a communicant child in its congregation does not mean that the parish’s policy will automatically be changed.

### Pastoral Situations

### As with any other matter, each situation is unique and should be handled accordingly.

Sensitivity needs to be shown to families who have decided that their children should not be baptised as infants. It could be said that children who wish to be followers of Jesus Christ and meet him in Holy Communion could be prepared for baptism at the same time and be baptised at the same service or a few days before it.

Children from single parent families or with home difficulties may miss classes because they are visiting the other parent or need practical support. Help with transport, programme planning or offering an extra session might make a great deal of difference.

If a child has special educational needs or emotional difficulties it is vital that they are given any help that is needed. Ask the parents for advice and, if necessary, arrange for the child to have an adult to provide individual support and to liaise with the parents.

Many children who are ‘difficult’ are carrying burdens ranging from personal illness to serious abuse and neglect. Such youngsters can become excluded for all sorts of reasons but they may be those who are most in need of signs of God’s love for them. Every practical effort should be made to include them and affirm them as valued members of the Christian family.

**Ask …**

* Does our church provide a welcoming environment for children to grow in faith?
* Does the congregation support its children through prayer, example and teaching?
* Are we providing effective support to all our young people and their families?
* Are our children’s leaders adequately supported and trained?
* If any of the answers is ‘No’, how can we start to bring about change?

# Further help:

The bishop’s advisory group is happy to provide help and advice on any stage in the preparation process. This can include leading a meeting or talking through specific issues.
To arrange a conversation or meeting, please contact Bishopscourt in the first instance.
T: 01634 842721, E: bishopscourt@rochester.anglican.org.

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