



ADMISSION OF BAPTISED PERSONS TO HOLY COMMUNION BEFORE CONFIRMATION

PARISH APPLICATION FORM AND POLICY

Parish: St. Wilfrid, Wilford

Deanery: West Bingham

Incumbent: Rev'd. Phil Marsh

Introduction

The PCC began the process of exploring whether or not to admit baptised children to Holy Communion in March 2009. Following extensive consultation a resolution was passed on [INSERT DATE] to adopt this policy subject to the Bishop's approval.

Such a decision is grounded in our beliefs and values as a church.

Firstly:

1. Baptism is full initiation into God's family in the context of personal and family faith
2. Holy Communion is a spiritually nourishing encounter with God
3. Children are to be valued and accepted as full worshipping members of the church

Secondly:

1. Receiving Holy Communion should be on the basis of relationship with Christ
2. Some degree of understanding of it is required in receiving Holy Communion
3. Confirmation should not be seen as a requirement to receive Holy Communion

St. Wilfrid's Church encourages and nurtures children to participate fully in the worship, ministry and mission of the Church in every way possible. In light of this, and the above values and beliefs, the admission of children to Holy Communion is natural and integral to this approach.

In implementing this policy it is intended that it would not be over-enthusiastically promoted such that parents feel that they have no option but to choose to seek admission for their child. It will clearly be each family's decision as and when the time is right for them and their child. We would seek to develop a regular cycle of courses and opportunities to enable families wishing to explore admitting their children to Holy Communion to do so at a time that is right for them. It is anticipated that this regular cycle will create a positive open option for parents such that they feel able to discuss it with the clergy at any time.

The policy is to be reviewed from time to time acknowledging that a change of leadership or the arising of pastoral concerns may necessitate it to be amended or rescinded at the decision of the PCC and Vicar, subject to diocesan guidelines.

A word about Confirmation

Confirmation is not a sacrament in the same way that Baptism and Holy Communion are, in not being biblically prescribed but it clearly stands in the biblical tradition of the 'laying on of hands with prayer'. It does function as a very useful and appropriate 'rite of passage' linked to a public declaration of a mature and outward looking faith. It provides an opportunity for both young people and adults to 'go public' in affirming their faith, and receive confirmation of their faith from the church community standing alongside them. It is a mark of a deeper sense of belonging to the church and being committed to it in service.

A word about Adults

It is recognised that any policy relating to admission to Holy Communion should be consistent in its approach to all people regardless of age or mental capacity. It is therefore recommended that:

1. Any adult wishing to receive Holy Communion prior to Confirmation, and who has not previously been admitted or previously been in the habit of receiving Holy Communion elsewhere, should first discuss the issue with a member of the clergy
2. The rite of Confirmation should be encouraged but recognising that as these services do not happen frequently an individual form of preparation might need to be provided at the earliest convenience

Consultation

Has the PCC discussed this subject in the light of the Regulations?

Yes on 5 occasions between March and November 2009 with a formal resolution taking place on [INSERT DATE]

What was the outcome?

A resolution was passed in favour of admitting children to Holy Communion before Confirmation on the basis of Baptism and following appropriate preparation

Young children may not have the vocabulary or formal concepts to express their understanding, but yet have a deep appreciation of the significance of Holy Communion. Their formal understanding will grow as they partake alongside their parents, other adults and other children. Children learn by doing. The adults may well find that their own 'discerning' is deepened as they receive alongside a child. The ability of different children to appreciate and benefit from receiving Holy Communion varies widely and may not be dependent on age. Rather parents and carers are encouraged to consider this question in relation to their own children and to act accordingly. Ministers in the church will continue to make themselves available to assist adults in considering this issue.

How has the wider congregation been involved in the discussion (including any LEP established under Canon B44, or other participating churches)?

Open consultation evenings, regular verbal / written updates to congregation, invitation to make comments, backed by Sunday teaching series

What was the outcome?

Congregation expressed no significant objection, and understood the situation we are currently in of a mixed economy. The congregation and PCC were happy to proceed though expressed a strong desire to maintain the significance of Confirmation and an expectation of some degree of understanding by communicants. They are keen that we as a church would develop appropriate patterns of preparation and encouragement for both admitting children to Holy Communion and preparing teens and adults for Confirmation.

What other guidance or advice has been sought (if any)?

Past experiences of clergy and laity at St. Wilfrid's Church, plus support from Nick Harding (Diocesan Children's Ministry Adviser)

Preparation

How will the preparation of the children for Holy Communion be organised?

The process begins following an enquiry about admission from a parent and involves an initial conversation with one of the clergy. If deemed appropriate, after a three-way conversation between clergy, parent and child, a process of preparation will begin.

Preparation will take the form of a structured course of 3 sessions on Sunday afternoons at which children and parents will both be expected to attend, growing together as a family in their understanding of Holy Communion. Within these sessions there will be specific teaching for the children on an age-appropriate basis, varying in balance between practical and theological content, and with particular provision made available for those with special needs. Younger children will

undergo 'simpler' preparation but as they grow up it is envisaged that they will receive 'fuller' teaching on Baptism and Communion as part of a regular pattern within either the Children's Ministry programme or the proposed introduction of all-age 'teaching Communions'.

There will be an initial programme of preparation for the first group of candidates, to which children who have already been admitted to Communion before Confirmation will also be encouraged to attend as a refresher, followed by a regular cycle of courses or ad hoc opportunities as numbers and interest require.

The format and content of preparation will be kept under continuous review and may be modified from time to time in the light of experience and feedback.

Who will lead the preparation, and what training will they be given?

The clergy will take the lead role in the preparation, at least initially, but will be supported by members of the Children's Ministry team, or other capable adults. The clergy will be responsible for 'quality control' and training.

What teaching materials will be used?

Different material will be used for different age groups and will be produced in-house drawing on currently available resources. Both the clergy and members of the congregation have extensive experience of producing teaching material for children. Preparation will broadly cover an understanding of Baptism, the significance of Holy Communion (e.g. belonging, remembering, encountering, growing) and the practicalities of 'how we do it'.

How will the children's nurture towards Confirmation continue after they have been admitted to Holy Communion?

It is envisaged that the significance of Confirmation will be strengthened by the admission of children to Communion prior to Confirmation since it will take on a meaning independent of acting as a 'gateway' to Communion. In its own right it will serve as a valuable 'rite of passage' providing opportunity for young people to 'go public' in affirming their faith, and receive confirmation of their faith from the church community standing alongside them. It will continue to form an important focus within the youth programme as a step along the journey of faith, representative of moving from a 'family faith' to a more 'independent' and mature faith. It is hoped that opportunity for Confirmation will be incorporated regularly into the church's programme.

Pastoral Matters

How will parents be involved in the preparation of their children for Holy Communion?

Parents will undertake a significant role in this and will be expected to attend preparation sessions with their children. They will be encouraged to explore the significance of Holy Communion with their children as an outworking of promises made at their children's baptisms and material will be provided in the expectation that there will be further preparation taking place at home. Part of the preparation will therefore involve equipping parents to nurture their children in faith.

What strategy do you have for families who do not wish for their children to be admitted to Holy Communion?

The adoption of this policy will be clearly communicated to the congregation and the offer of on-going conversations with those who do not wish their children to be admitted will be made. We will seek to positively affirm them in such a choice. The value of receiving a blessing at Communion will be stressed whilst encouraging families to set a high value on Holy Communion (before or after Confirmation) as an eventual goal. Regular opportunities for children to be admitted to Holy Communion, as and when they and their family are ready, will be provided for those who wish to wait. It is recognised that for many children coming to terms with different approaches between different families is part of the diversity of life. It is to be remembered that a request to be admitted to Holy Communion is a parent's responsibility not the choice of the child alone.

What strategy do you have for children who come to church without their parents?

Clearly in such circumstances expectations concerning parental involvement in preparation may need to be modified. Initial liaison with the child's parents will be an essential requirement and subject to their agreement the child will not be denied the opportunity to receive preparation for being admitted to Communion. It is likely that the child would have been brought initially by another family and it is envisaged that either they or another responsible adult would serve as a sponsor in the place of the child's own parent (subject to the provisions of the church's Child Protection Policy).

What provision will be made for the nurture of children with learning difficulties who wish to receive Holy Communion?

St. Wilfrid's Church is committed to, and has experience of, welcoming people with learning difficulties as well as with other special needs. In particular there are informed members of the congregation who are able to assist in seeking the most helpful way of welcoming and including children and adults with particular needs. When appropriate, expert help will be sought.

The same principled approach to preparation will be followed in such cases but would be adapted to be appropriate to the individual's specific needs and would be more strongly mediated through the parents.

How will children be involved and affirmed as members of the Christian community within the Eucharist?

When Communion forms part of an all age worship service, children will be in attendance for all parts of the liturgy used. For other services children will be in attendance from The Peace onwards.

The liturgy and prayers will be presented in ways that encourage full participation by people of all ages, seeking to engage with them creatively whilst maintaining the dignity and order of the occasion. Some aspects of the liturgical preparation (e.g. confession) could be done in the Children's Ministry groups.

It is also envisaged that a child's first Communion will be marked publicly.

Whilst there may be some initial concerns within the congregation about the behaviour of children during Communion (although children are already fully present in such services) it is hoped that there would in fact be a greater reverence due to increased understanding and participation.

How will children be involved and affirmed as members of the Christian community in non-Eucharistic worship?

All-age and Parade services form a regular feature of worship at St. Wilfrid's Church and offer opportunities for children to engage actively in worship. Children are typically present with the adults for the first 15 minutes in other services and are acknowledged as a focus in that time.

How will children be involved and affirmed as members of the Christian community in social events?

Both all-age and children-specific social events happen from time to time throughout the church's year. This is an area currently being reviewed as part of a wider review of Children's Ministry.

Practical Arrangements

Will children be given a Certificate of Admission?

Yes and their first Communion will also be marked publicly.

Who will be responsible for maintaining the register of people admitted to Communion before Confirmation?

The register will be kept in the church office and maintained by someone appointed by the Vicar

Signed(Incumbent) Date