**Admission to communion before confirmation a proposal from the Clergy team.**

 He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these…”

Mark 10: 13-16

**Introduction:**

The clergy team have been thinking and praying about how we as a parish can help and guide our children and young people in their acquisition of the faith and help them to grow into mature, lifelong disciples of Christ. We know from our own experience as a parish that it is not automatic that children who are raised in the faith will continue with that faith into adult life. So, it is important that we think seriously about how to support our young people in their journey.

We recognise that within our parish there are many different ways of thinking about these issues and we want, as far as possible, to support parents (and young people) in making the right decisions for them. We are not trying to impose any particular path. But we are keen to ensure that young people can take the next step in their faith when they are ready, and that we do not put unnecessary barriers in their way. As part of thinking about these pathways we have been thinking again about whether it is appropriate to offer admission to communion before confirmation to those who feel ready to take that step.

**What we do now:**

At the moment, there is a mixture of practice. In our regular congregation we have children and young people who were:

* **not baptised as infants:** We offer regular opportunities for these children and young people to prepare for baptism as they grow up and feel ready to make the baptismal commitments themselves. Most, but not all, who go forward for baptism are confirmed at the same time and can then be admitted to communion.
* **baptised as infants and have grown up in the parish who will be admitted to communion at confirmation:** We offer regular opportunities to prepare for confirmation. Some young people are prepared and confirmed through their schools.
* **baptised and then admitted to communion in another parish prior to confirmation:** These children and young people continue to receive communion here because it is Church of England guidance that once someone has been admitted to communion in one church they should not be denied access in another place, even where policies are different.

**What happens in the Diocese:**

Southwark Diocese was actually one of the pioneers of the practice of admission prior to confirmation within the CofE. It has been a part of the practice here since 1974. In 2006, when General Synod passed a resolution formalising admission to communion prior to confirmation, the Bishop specifically invited PCCs to consider admitting children and young people prior to confirmation.

Currently about two thirds of parishes in the Woolwich Episcopal area admit children and young people to communion prior to confirmation[[1]](#footnote-1)

**What we are proposing:**

We are proposing that we introduce the option of admission to communion prior to confirmation. Admission would be restricted to children and young people in year three or above who are baptised and are regular members of our congregation. Before admission they would need to complete a course of preparation. We envisage offering the course once a year with the candidates all being admitted to communion on the same Sunday.

The CofE requires that children and young people are prepared prior to admission to communion and that they are formally admitted. We are suggesting that we offer this option from year three or above because this is the practice at the cathedral, which has been commended to parishes by the Bishop.

**Why we think this is important:**

There are two main reasons why we are suggesting this change, both of which we consider to be important:

1. **Theological:**

In the Parish of Herne Hill we do not think of our children and young people as the future of the church - they are the church, along with the rest of us. ‘We are all one body’. One way we demonstrate that is by inviting them to participate fully in other aspects of the worshipping life of the church. They play and sing in our bands, they read the scripture, lead the prayers and even lead whole services. If we invite children and young people to serve our worshipping community in this way, it seems right that we would also invite them to eat with us too. As we say, ‘We are all one body and so we all share in one bread.’

Of course, there can be the concern that they may not fully understand what they are doing when they take Holy Communion. At its most extreme end, that they may receive in an unworthy manner (1 Cor. 11.28). This raises the question of whether any of us can ever fully understand what we are doing in Holy Communion. It is possible that the annual admission of children and young people to communion could be a helpful opportunity for us all to reflect on the holy mystery of communion. But just as baptism is the outward symbol of God’s act of grace towards us, so communion is another act of grace from God, to us, this time to sustain us in our faith and to bind us together as the church. We do not have to fully understand God’s gifts to receive them. Our task is to be obedient to Christ’s call and to come, for baptism or communion and to receive with thankfulness. Everything else is God’s work. As Orthodox Priest Fr. John Hainsworth puts it, we do not wait until our own children truly understand what it means to be a part of our family before we allow them to eat the food at the family dinner table. We bring them to the table because they are family and they learn what being family means, in part, by participating in family meals.

1. **Practical:**

The Christian faith is both ‘caught and taught’ - in other words we come to faith, and our faith is sustained, through a mixture of belief and practice. So how can we help our children and young people have the fullest opportunity to catch a faith of their own that will sustain them through their lives?

We see value in providing our children and young people with a series of ‘decision points’ throughout their lives, where they are invited to think more seriously and directly about faith and what it means for them. Preparation for admission to communion can be an important additional opportunity to work with them in this way. It is a signal to children and young people that we take them and their faith in God seriously, that what we do in church each week matters.

Nationally young people are drifting away from church in increasing numbers. We need to look at all the means at our disposal to embed them into the life of the church and to help them to acquire the practices that will deepen their faith and help them to sustain it through their teenage years and into adulthood. We believe that Holy Communion was Christ’s gift to the church to sustain us in our faith by deepening our experience of him and to bind us together as a worshiping community. We would like the CYP of our church to have the opportunity to receive these benefits directly while they are still young.

**How does confirmation fit in?**

We remain committed to confirmation and recognise it is an important milestone in our lives as Anglicans. We want to see our CYP grow up to be ready to affirm their faith for themselves and for the Church to affirm them as members. When we prepare CYP for Holy Communion we will do so in the context of expecting them to go on to be confirmed. We will continue to offer confirmation preparation and opportunities to be confirmed.

Admission to communion has been an important part of confirmation, but it is not the only reason to be confirmed. For CYP who were baptised as infants or young children, it is an important opportunity to publicly affirm their faith as their own. It is another opportunity for them to think seriously about their faith, another ‘decision point’.

**Next Steps:**

Just as we as a clergy team have thought and prayed about this proposal before bringing it to the PCC for consideration, we now invite you to think and pray about what we are proposing. We are available for discussions and welcome input on our proposal. We can then have a full discussion at our next PCC meeting.

Susan Wright

On behalf of Clergy Team

May 2022.

1. Source Diocesan Children & Youth with Mission Action Planning team [↑](#footnote-ref-1)