

The Bishop of Durham

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CHILDREN AND COMMUNION IN SCHOOLS

Ad Clerum and Advice to Headteachers of Anglican Schools

There is some concern about a growing disparity of practice around children and communion in our church schools.

This relates to whether children are admitted to communion before confirmation or are confirmed. It relates to when this happens, how the children are prepared and what thought is being given to follow up, particularly when children move on to secondary schools, especially when these are not church schools.

I have long been an advocate of children being admitted to communion before confirmation. In this I abide by the [Bishops' Regulations](#) which need to be followed in both church and school. I am also a supporter of school Eucharists where it is judged these are appropriate by the headteacher and parish priest. There are excellent examples of these taking place around the diocese.

KEY GUIDELINES

- 1) Admission to communion before confirmation is strongly preferred to confirmation. Confirmation makes more sense as an adolescent / young adult rite of passage expressing an 'owned faith'. It is therefore better I believe for confirmation to happen during teenage years.
- 2) Admission to communion however relates to being a baptized member of Christ's church. Logically therefore, as the Orthodox churches practice, all the baptized should be able to receive communion regardless of age. However currently that is not where the C of E stands (see Bishops' Regulations). Where we stand is that a child should want to be admitted to communion, have the support of their parent(s) and the local church, and be prepared through some instruction. There is no specific age guidance although generally this is pitched at around school year 2 or 3 in most parishes that have moved in this direction.
- 3) The situation for schools should be no different from that of parish churches except that the headteacher must liaise with the relevant parish priest.

- 4) Admission to communion is the preferred route rather than confirmation in Primary Schools.
- 5) This should be open to children from Year 3 onwards.
- 6) It must be the child's choice not something that a whole class is simply put through together. Care must be taken that no child is pressured to undertake this step by their peers. Equally any child not choosing to make this step must be fully respected for their choice.
- 7) Parental permission must be obtained. This would include some engagement of the parent(s) in the preparation.
- 8) A period of preparation must be undertaken. This should follow the Diocesan agreed guidelines for admission to communion. Consultation with the Diocesan Children's Adviser should take place.
- 9) In considering admission to communion, or indeed confirmation, thought should be given to ongoing involvement with a worshipping community once the child moves to Secondary School, given that a high percentage of pupils leaving C of E Primary Schools do not enter a church secondary school, or they might enter a Roman Catholic one where they are not permitted to receive. This aspect is actually at its strongest if the proposal is to admit to communion, or even confirm, in Year 6.
- 10) A clear record should be made of all children admitted to communion both by the school and the relevant parish church. All children so admitted should be given a certificate stating that they have been so admitted, by which parish priest and on what date. This is important as once a child is admitted they may take communion in any church regardless of whether or not that particular church usually admits children to communion.
- 11) Admission to communion is undertaken in a formal way by the parish priest, not normally by a bishop.

Where further guidance is needed then consultation with the Diocesan Children's or Youth Adviser is the best first port of call. If necessary further conversation with the bishop could take place.

It is expected that this guidance will be followed from the time of publication.

Bishop Paul

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