

CONTENTS

Page Nos

SOME ISSUES TO CONSIDER

2

An introduction to the key points in the discussion about the admission of children to Communion before Confirmation

SOME QUESTIONS PEOPLE ASK

4

Brief responses to some of the most commonly asked questions about admission

HOW DOES IT WORK IN PRACTICE?

6

Some experiences of introducing admission to Communion before Confirmation

GUIDELINES

1 – THE PROCESS

8

A summary of the stages in the process for obtaining permission to admit children to Communion before Confirmation

2 – PARISH POLICY

9

A model embodying the requirements of the Diocesan Regulations and the General Synod Regulations (2006). Your final policy will reflect your own parish thinking and situation, but it should encompass the points in this model

3 – PREPARATION SCHEME

11

Whether your parish decides to use published material, a course you have devised yourselves, or a mixture of resources, the final package should include the elements in this list

RESOURCES

12

HELP!

14

A reminder of the support available from the Diocesan Board of Education

APPENDICES

I MANCHESTER DIOCESAN REGULATIONS

15

II WHAT DOES SCRIPTURE SAY?

16

SOME ISSUES TO CONSIDER

THEOLOGICAL

- Baptism is the undisputed rite of entry into membership of the Body of Christ: “In the one Spirit we were all baptised into one body” (Common Worship p290); and membership of that body is affirmed in the reception of Holy Communion: “we are one body, because we all share in one bread” (Common Worship p179). To deny Holy Communion to any baptised Christian could be seen as denying the full validity of their Baptism.
- If a sacrament is seen as a free, unearned gift of grace expressing God’s unconditional love, to what extent can conditions be imposed regarding admission to the sacrament of Holy Communion?
- Jesus uses children as an example of what ‘the greatest in the kingdom of heaven’ are like. How is this reflected in our practice if we make children the least at the Communion Table by denying their full participation? Some passages of scripture to consider: Matthew 18:1-5; 19:13-14; 21:14-17.
- If Confirmation is made a condition of receiving Holy Communion it could be seen as having a confused significance - vying with Baptism for importance as a rite of entry - rather than having a clear and distinct significance of its own as a rite of adult commitment.

HISTORICAL

- The practice of the earliest Christians with regard to receiving Holy Communion is not clear (see Appendix II), but certainly whole households were baptised and it is assumed that children would have been included. It seems that Communion immediately followed Baptism, and there is no indication that children were excluded. The Eastern Orthodox Churches have always communicated children immediately after Baptism.
- The subsequent ‘divorce’ of Communion from Baptism has been the combined result of the theological preoccupations and practical circumstances of following centuries: e.g. the doctrine of original sin led to the promotion of infant Baptism; church expansion necessitated Baptism by priests rather than bishops, followed by laying on of hands by bishops during periodic tours; the failure of parishioners to present children to the bishop on these occasions contributed to the bishops’ demand that ‘laying on of hands’ precede Communion; the development of ‘laying on of hands’ into a rite involving the confirmation of baptismal vows produced an emphasis on the need for teaching before Confirmation.
- The moves in recent times from afternoon to morning meetings of Sunday School, and towards Parish Communion as the regular Sunday service have led to a new practical situation in which children find themselves regularly in church at a service in which they cannot fully participate.
- The tradition of the church regarding admission of children to Communion is not represented by a static ‘norm’ but is characterised by a continued development in practice in the light of changing situations: in the spirit of this tradition, what developments are appropriate to our situation today?

PASTORAL

- Child psychologists and experts in children's spiritual development alike point to the importance of children taking part in practical activities – learning by doing – and of their natural facility for engaging with symbol and mystery. Full participation in Communion is sometimes claimed to be an erosion of childhood, but instead it could be seen as cherishing and making best use of the very characteristics of childhood.
- One important characteristic of childhood is the need to belong. Partaking in Holy Communion is a powerful indication of belonging – to God, and to one another in the Church. Much is made of what children may or may not understand about the sacrament, but they will certainly understand the rejection implied in being denied food at the Lord's Table.
- If Confirmation is seen as the 'gateway to Communion', there will continue to be pressure for it to occur in the early teens or before. However Confirmation is also held to represent an adult commitment of faith. No other 'adult' decisions or responsibilities are taken on at such an early age – e.g. driving, voting, military service; the major 'life commitment' of marriage is not permitted before 16 - and the 20s are generally thought of as the earliest appropriate age: by confirming at 12 or 13 are we saying that the faith commitment of Confirmation is less important than these other undertakings?
- One of the most marked characteristics of the teens is to question and reject institutions, whilst a characteristic of those in their late 20s is to 'revisit' and engage with them. Thus to require Confirmation of teenagers runs counter to their developmental needs whilst 'using up' a rite which they might value deeply as a public demonstration of their return to the faith at a later stage in their lives.

SOME QUESTIONS PEOPLE ASK

Will the children understand what they are doing when they take Communion?

Children are certainly able to understand the origin and specialness 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

What about children who are not baptised?

No one who is not baptised can be admitted to receive Holy Communion. If an unbaptised child wishes to be prepared for admission then they must be baptised 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.

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.

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.

HOW DOES IT WORK IN PRACTICE?

Revd Andy Lindop recounts the experience of his parish, St Paul's, Astley Bridge:

“As a parish we are currently in the middle of the process of admitting children to Communion before Confirmation. The decision to go ahead focused on two main issues. How best can we both express our inclusion of children and nurture their growth in faith and understanding? How could we give renewed significance to the rite of Confirmation?”

“Having concluded that Confirmation should properly signify the beginning of adult membership of the church rather than the end of childhood membership, our PCC agreed that children in Y5 at school should be invited to consider whether they wished to be admitted.

“About two thirds of eligible children have decided to join the preparation course, and the initial group of 16 children includes some slightly older children as well. We are following the short course outlined in the book 'Children and Holy Communion', (see 'Resources' p12 below). They are excited about the prospect and are looking forward to the special service at which they will be admitted. Their understanding varies but their enthusiasm is contagious and their faith is a reality that needs to be treasured and nurtured.”

(April 2001)

Five months after admission, Andy continues the story:

“How have the children themselves reacted? When asked, the universal sense was one of approval. Nearly all said they felt more included and part of the church family. Some said it made them feel more grown up and inclined to take their faith more seriously. All have continued to worship regularly and come to Communion whenever possible. For all it has been a natural continuation of their Christian development and involvement in the life of the church.

“Secondly, how has the rest of the church family reacted? My observation is that no one has batted an eyelid! Worship has continued as before with not a ripple on the pond.

“The real test, of course, lies ahead. Will these children continue in their faith and involvement in church life? Will Confirmation mean more to them when they seek it as adults - indeed, will clergy point out to them the relevance and importance of Confirmation as an adult act of public commitment when it has lost its significance as the gateway to Communion?”

“It seems these questions surrounding the admission of children to Communion still wait to be answered, but in the meantime, from this corner of Bolton, the question "should we have gone ahead?" is met on all sides by an unequivocal 'Yes!'”

(September 2001)

Revd Lindsay Owens gives us an insight into how the children feel about being admitted to Holy Communion at St Matthew's, Chadderton:

"It is now almost a year since we admitted our first group of youngsters to Holy Communion before Confirmation. I think, looking back on the year, it has been one of the most positive things that we have done as a church.

Preparation classes began with the new school year in September 2001 and the children were admitted to Communion on Advent Sunday that year. The actual day of First Communion was lovely and even the members of the congregation who were not really in favour, admitted that it was very special. The children's faces said so much, there was joy and delight and yet great reverence.

Almost a year on and most of the children attend each Sunday and have become regular communicants. When asked all agreed that it was good to be able to receive Communion. One eight year old said, 'I only did it because my Mum wanted me to, but now I'm really glad I did. It's great.' Another said that it made coming into Church after Sunday School worthwhile as they had something to look forward to. Several agreed that they now felt an important part of the Church, part of the 'Family'. One nine year old girl made the lovely comment, 'It's special and it makes me feel special.' I can resonate with that!"

(October 2002)

Holy Trinity, Horwich was one of the first parishes to receive permission to admit children to Holy Communion before Confirmation. Writing in the light of 15 years experience of the practice, Canon Denis Gatenby shares some thoughts:

"Our first year taught us how important it is that the initiative does not become a 'personality cult' reflecting the enthusiasm of only one individual. The children's leaders need to be on board, and the solid support of the PCC is vital so that the admission of children to Holy Communion before Confirmation is seen as a whole church policy. It should be expressly stated as such when a new incumbent is being sought.

The policy should be clear as to target age, preparation programme and follow up arrangements. A parental request should be required and parents should be involved in the preparation: at Holy Trinity, they were invited to the first and last sessions of the programme. Arrangements for the Admission Service should also be thought through.

Our Admissions Service was an annual event, and children were given status and dignity by sharing readings, writing and leading prayers, and initiating the Peace. They were then welcomed by name at the sacrament. It must be clearly demonstrated that admission is not Confirmation, so the service was conducted by the parish priest. There was no requirement for the children to make a statement of faith but rather an acknowledgement of love for Jesus and a wish to share in the family meal.

Benefits of the practice have included: the spiritual relationship with children and parents; working with the children to a very clear agenda; the involvement of other adult Christians in the preparation; Confirmation taking place at 16+; and the fact that quite a few parents were gained as either new or returning communicants.

Looking to the future, with the emphasis on all-age worship, admission of children to Holy Communion before Confirmation has to be the way forward, not as an attempt to stop the decline in children's attendance, but to make worship more relevant than a slap on the head whilst all the crowd receive bread and wine. Looking back over the years, after the initial trial and error, I do not think I would have done things any differently."

(December 2002)

GUIDELINES (I) : THE PROCESS

Date completed

PHASE ONE

- 1) Hold discussions involving:
*incumbent, PCC, children's leaders,
parents, children and the wider church community,
ecumenical partners (where appropriate),
Diocesan Children's Officer.*

.....

NB: These parties can be involved in discussion in whatever order, whatever combinations, and over however many sessions are appropriate to the situation

- 2) Produce a Policy Statement

.....

- 3) Agree a programme of preparation and continuing nurture

.....

NB: The Diocesan Children's Officer should be consulted before the policy and programme are put to the PCC for final approval

PHASE TWO

- 1) Pass a formal resolution of the PCC requesting permission from the Diocesan Bishop to admit children to Communion before Confirmation. It must be countersigned by the incumbent, and record the voting figures

.....

NB This resolution may be the culmination of a discussion in 'Phase One'

- 2) Send the resolution to the Diocesan Children's Officer, who will forward it to the Diocesan Bishop together with a DBE report on the process.

.....

- 3) Receive the Diocesan Bishop's decision.

.....

- 4) Implement the policy if permission has been given

.....

- 5) Review the procedure annually and report to the appropriate Suffragan Bishop

ongoing

GUIDELINES (2) : PARISH POLICY

THE CHILD

The incumbent must be satisfied that the child has been baptised.

The incumbent must be satisfied that a person having parental responsibility for the child is content that the child be admitted to Communion before Confirmation. A sponsor(s) for the child will be appointed if no adult with parental responsibility attends church. The requirements of the Parish Child Protection Policy will apply in the selection of sponsors.

It must be clear that the child him/herself wishes to receive.

The age for admission will depend on the child's appreciation of the significance of the sacrament. The Bishop has directed that the age for admission should be at the discretion of the parish priest, but advises that in the case of particularly young children, guidance should be sought from the Diocesan Children's Work Officer.

THE PREPARATION

Clear information about the preparation process and the implications of children's admission to Communion will be made available to the child and family before the preparation is entered into.

It will be made clear how many sessions there will be, how long they will be, and where they will be held.

The preparation programme will be

The incumbent will be involved, together with The Parish Child Protection Policy procedure will be followed in selecting those who work with children.

Attempts will be made to involve parents/carers in the preparation, and families will be supported as well as children during this period.

The preparation will usually be separate from any other groups or work with children.

ADMISSION TO COMMUNION

The admission to Communion* will be marked by Where possible the family will be involved.

A register** of all children admitted to Communion will be kept and will be made available to the archdeacon in the course of the quinquennial inspection. Children admitted to Communion will be given certificates recording the date and place of their first admission, and if possible have their Baptism Certificates endorsed with the same information.

During Communion services, child communicants will be expected to be present for at least the eucharistic prayer before they receive.

Families and children will be made aware that they might experience difficulties if they move to another area where children are not admitted to Communion before Confirmation. The incumbent will provide a letter of commendation to the incumbent of a parish to which a family is moving, or is going on holiday asking for the child to be admitted to Communion in accordance with General Synod Regulations (2006).

CONTINUING NURTURE

Continuing nurture and support will be provided for children and families after admission to Communion by

If possible, parents/carers will be involved in the ongoing nurture.

It will be made clear to children and their families that there is an expectation that the child be prepared for Confirmation in due course.

THE POLICY

This policy was approved by the PCC at its meeting on

There will be an annual review of the policy and the materials used, and a report will be made to the appropriate Suffragan Bishop by the incumbent.

WITHDRAWAL

If at any time the parish wishes formally to cease participation in the admission of children to Communion before Confirmation, permission to withdraw from the scheme will be sought from the Diocesan Bishop. The request for this permission will be in the form of a PCC resolution, accompanied by voting figures, and will have been preceded by consultation involving incumbent, PCC, children's leaders, the wider church community, and the Diocesan Children's Officer.

Arrangements will be made for the pastoral support and continuing nurture of any young people who, at the time of withdrawal, have already been admitted to Communion but have not yet been presented for Confirmation.

The above model embodies the requirements of the Diocese of Manchester Regulations (1988, amended 2006) and the General Synod Regulations (2006). Its provisions therefore represent a minimum requirement. Parishes may add to or re-express the points in the model policy, but to remove any of them would mean that the parish policy was not in accordance with Diocesan and/or General Synod Regulations.

NOTES

* A suggested liturgy for 'Admission of the Baptized to Communion' is included in: *Common Worship: Christian Initiation*, The Archbishops' Council, Church House Publishing (2005). It is downloadable at: <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/worship/downloads/pdf/ciritesofaff.pdf>

** The register should be durable and contain the following information: name, address, date of birth, date and place of baptism, date of admission, signature of officiant at admission. Canterbury Press produces an example.

GUIDELINES (3) : PREPARATION PROGRAMME

Features which should be present in the programme:

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 through work to take home: this could be in the form of a workbook to be presented at the admission service.*
- *Creative use of prayer should form part of each session.*

Content

This should 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.*

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.*

RESOURCES

All the resources listed below are available from the Diocesan Resource Centre, 4th Floor, Church House, 90 Deansgate, Manchester (please ring Church House to check availability and access to the Resource Centre).

Material to help develop your preparation programme:

“Bread For All God’s Family”

Leslie Francis & Diane Drayson, Gracewing 1997 ISBN 0 85244 283 1

Thirty one eucharistic themes are explored with an emphasis on a project approach. Each theme is supported by photocopiable material and has readings, hymns and songs, prayers, children’s activities, project ideas, discussion starters, dance/drama suggestions, all-age ideas, and suggestions about how to integrate all of this into the service.

“Celebrating Together: Exploring Holy Communion”

Partners in Learning, NCEC 1999 ISBN 0 7197 0944 X

An ecumenical resource containing four sessions (the last being a Communion service): A special meal, Bread of life, A sign of love, and Celebrating together. It is designed to work on an all-age basis, and the first three sessions are divided into age related sections from under 5s to adult. There are starter activities, Bible work, discussion ideas, other varied activities and suggestions for closing worship.

“Children & Holy Communion”

Diana Murrie & Steve Pearce, Kevin Mayhew 2003 (revised 2006) ISBN 978 1 84417 151 4

A six session course for children between 7 and 11 including a photocopiable pack of take home sheets. The sessions have leaders’ notes, craft and games activities, prayers, stories and song suggestions. There is also an introductory section giving history and background information about admission before Confirmation.

“I Belong”

Aileen Urquhart et al, Redemptorist 2001
ISBN 0 85231 241 5 (Leader); 0 85231 242 3 (Parent); 0 85232 407 3 (Child)

This Catholic resource comprises a Leader’s Guide, a Parent’s Guide and a hardback children’s activity book. The programme encourages adults and children together to find the deeper realities behind everyday experiences whilst looking at themes connected with Eucharist, Church and Bible.

“Meet Christ With Joy”

Joan Brown SND, Kevin Mayhew 1991 ISBN 86209 172 1

This is a Roman Catholic publication and is in the form of a colourful activity book which parents and children can use together.

“One Foot in the Water”

Geoff Treasure, CPAS 2001

A loose-leaf, photocopiable pack of 6 sessions – Remembering, Understanding, Promising, Believing, Celebrating, Sharing - to help children look back to Baptism and forward to Holy Communion. Each session has a Bible focus, opening activity, outline for a talk, a story and a summary activity.

“SHARE”

Nick Harding, Kevin Mayhew 2002 ISBN I 84003 927 2

Five sessions for children (See God’s work; Hear God’s word; Acept God’s way; Receive God’s meal; Enjoy God’s future) plus two sessions for parents, together with suggestions for the first Communion service. Bible readings, activities, prayer and worksheets give a balance of activity, discussion and teaching.

“Welcome to the Lord’s Table” (2nd edition)

Margaret Withers, Bible Reading Fellowship 2006 ISBN I 84101 504 0

Introductory chapters explore the background to preparing children for Holy Communion, and give guidance on preparing the congregation, training leaders, and involving the family. The course is in ten units each comprising two sessions, and is centred on relating stories in scripture to the children’s lives. There are drama, game, and craft activities, and tasks to be done in the children’s activity book which is available separately (ISBN I 84101 044 8).

Material to support your preparation programme:

“Come and Join the Celebration”

John Muir and Betty Pedley, CHP 2001 ISBN 0 7151 4947 4

This book is designed to help adults explore the service of Holy Communion with the children who are sharing the worship with them and is suitable for use in a variety of contexts including preparation for admission to Holy Communion before Confirmation. It focuses on the structure of the liturgy and comprises activities designed for use during a service of Holy Communion, including 50 photocopiable activity sheets.

“My Communion Book: a child’s guide to Holy Communion”

Diana Murrie, CHP 2002 ISBN 0 7151 4946 6

A colourfully illustrated book for children to use before, during and after a service of Holy Communion, with adults or alone. Key words and texts from Common Worship are given in full or in part to encourage children to join in with the rest of the congregation. Commentary and questions are designed to help children understand the function of each part of the liturgy, and to engage with it.

“My Holy Communion Book”

Aileen Urquhart, Redemptorist 2001 ISBN 0 85231 238 5

A brightly illustrated child’s communion book, using Common Worship Order One, including most of the text, apart from the eucharistic prayer, together with brief commentaries. It is produced in a glossy ‘wipe off’ finish so that children can write or draw in response to sections of the service then erase ready for next week.

Notes:

- It is often useful to draw from more than one source in putting together a scheme. (Desktop publishing is a great help in producing material tailored to the needs of the parish.)
- Make sure material is applicable to the eucharistic rite that you currently use.
- Take note of photographs and illustration style as these can quickly ‘date’ material.
- Take account of the reading age of the children.

HELP!

THE DIOCESAN CHILDREN'S OFFICER CAN OFFER SUPPORT BY:

- Preaching, speaking to the PCC or other groups
- Helping in the drafting of a Parish Policy
- Advising on the selection of preparation material
- Supplying model letters - e.g. invitation to parents/carers; parents'/carers' consent
- Providing suggestions for marking admission within the liturgy

The current Diocesan Children's Officer is:

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DIOCESE OF MANCHESTER

ADMISSION OF CHILDREN TO HOLY COMMUNION

Revised Regulations

1. **CONDITIONS OF PERMISSION:** The permission of the Diocesan Bishop must be obtained before any unconfirmed children are admitted by means of a resolution passed by the PCC and endorsed by the incumbent's countersignature.

The Diocesan Bishop will wish to be satisfied that:

- (a) only baptised children are admitted;
 - (b) children are being adequately prepared through a suitable course of preparation which the Diocesan Bishop will approve after consulting the appropriate committee and officers of the Diocesan Board of Education;
 - (c) once admitted, children and their families are being adequately supported and encouraged in the years before they are ready to be confirmed;
 - (d) the consent of parents has been obtained, and they, with their children, have been warned that they might experience difficulties if they move to an area where this permission does not exist or has not been taken up;
 - (e) where parents are not churchgoers, a sponsor had been appointed by the incumbent to support children in their practice of worship and the Christian life;
 - (f) the procedure is reviewed annually and a report made to the appropriate Suffragan Bishop by the incumbent.
2. **AGE LIMIT:** The age for admission will be at the discretion of the parish priest, but in the case of particularly young children it is advised that guidance be sought from the Diocesan Children's Work Officer.
3. **CONFIRMATION:** It should be explained to children and parents that the Church expects baptised children to offer themselves for Confirmation, so that their Christian initiation into Church membership may be completed. Although the minimum age for Confirmation remains 11, it should take place when they are old enough to make a thoughtful commitment to adult responsibility in the Church of Christ.
4. **WHEN CHILDREN MOVE:** If children who have been admitted to Holy Communion in accordance with the procedures outlined above move to another parish, incumbents of the Diocese will be encouraged to allow them to receive the elements in their new congregation. Refusal at this point would cause offence and misunderstanding.

Incumbents are asked to provide families with letters of commendation to the new incumbent. The same procedure should apply to holiday visits.

Appendix II

WHAT DOES SCRIPTURE SAY?

Scripture does not give a clear picture of the beliefs and practices of the first Christians concerning the grounds for admission to the Lord's Supper. There are, however, hints and allusions which can contribute to our consideration of this matter today.

QUESTION I: IS BAPTISM A COMPLETE CHRISTIAN INITIATION?

There are indications in Acts 8 and 19 that some who had been baptised had their initiation 'completed' by the laying on of hands so that they could receive the Holy Spirit.

"When the Apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptised into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit."

(Acts 8:14-17)

"While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?'

They answered, 'No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.'

So Paul asked, 'Then what baptism did you receive?'

'John's baptism,' they replied.

Paul said, 'John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.' On hearing this, they were baptised into the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied."

(Acts 19:1-6)

This laying on of hands finds an echo at Confirmation, which can lead to a belief that Confirmation is a 'completion' of the initiation begun at Baptism. However, The laying on of hands at Confirmation is accompanied by the prayer that the candidate be *confirmed with*, rather than that they *receive* the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, Acts 10 indicates that the Holy Spirit can be received *before* Baptism:

"Then Peter said, 'Can anyone keep these people from being baptised with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.' So he ordered that they be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ."

(Acts 10: 46b-48a)

This account makes no mention of the laying on of hands, nor do the majority of initiations described in Acts:

"Those who accepted his message were baptised, and about three thousand were added to their number that day."

(Acts 2:41)

"But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptised, both men and women. Simon himself believed and was baptised."

(Acts 8:12-13)

“He ordered the chariot to stop. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptised him.”

(Acts 8:38)

“Immediately something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptised.”

(Acts 9:18)

“And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptised and wash your sins away, calling on his name.”

(Acts 22:16)

(See also Acts 10:46b-48 (above) and Acts 16:33 & 18:8 (below))

Indeed, in Acts 2 Peter is reported as saying that the gift of the Holy Spirit is a *consequence* of Baptism:

“Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”

(Acts 2:38)

QUESTION 2: BUT WERE CHILDREN BAPTIZED?

If we accept Baptism as a complete initiation, the question remains as to whether *children* were baptised in the first Christian communities. Acts 2 may be of relevance again here. The passage quoted immediately above continues as follows:

“The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

(Acts 2:39)

In addition there are references to the Baptism of households with no indication that these did *not* include the children. Paul states:

“I also baptised the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don’t remember if I baptised anyone else.”

(1 Corinthians 1:16)

“When (Lydia) and the members of her household were baptised, she invited us to her home”.

(Acts 16:15)

“At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptised.”

(Acts 16:33)

“Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptised.”

(Acts 18:8)

The situation described at length in Acts 10:23b-48 is also that of a ‘household Baptism’.

QUESTION 3: DID BAPTISM LEAD ON TO COMMUNION?

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 10, indicates that the link between Baptism and the sharing of spiritual food and drink is something which, in essence, goes back to the time of Moses:

“I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea and all were baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ.”

(1 Corinthians 10:1-4 - NRSV)

The text in 1 Corinthians 12 which forms the basis of one of the most common introductions to the Peace (Common Worship p290) also hints at shared spiritual nourishment for those baptised into ‘one body’:

“For we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.”

(1 Corinthians 12:13)

The link between sharing the bread and wine and unity in one ‘body’ is made explicit in 1 Corinthians 10 – a text that has provided one of the forms of words at the Breaking of the Bread (Common Worship p179):

“Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.”

(1 Corinthians 10:16-17)

Acts 2 indicates that breaking of bread immediately became a regular feature of the life of the newly baptised:

“Those who accepted his message were baptised, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

(Acts 2:41-42)

QUESTION 4: WERE ANY EXCLUDED FROM COMMUNION?

Having established that the baptised broke bread together, Acts 2 goes on to emphasise the regularity of the practice, thus indicating its importance to the community:

“Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people.”

(Acts 2: 46-47a)

Paul’s criticism of division when speaking of the Lord’s Supper also indicates the importance of unity in the community when taking the sacrament:

“In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it.”

(1 Corinthians 11:17-18)

The Gospel of John reminds us of another, powerful motivation for including all in sharing the Lord's Supper:

“Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day”.

(John 6:53-54 - NRSV)

However, rights entail responsibilities and Paul's words below give a reminder that whatever our 'policy' on admission, those who take Communion are not to take it lightly:

“Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgement against themselves.”

(1 Cor 11:28-29 – NRSV)

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NB: A thorough examination of the beliefs and practices of the first Christians, together with later developments, is to be found in 'Communion Before Confirmation?', the Report of the Bishop of Knaresborough (CIO Publishing, 1985), from which many of the above scriptural references are taken.

All Biblical quotations are from the New International Version unless otherwise stated.