

CHILDREN AND COMMUNION: A POLICY FOR ST MATTHEW AND ST NATHANAEEL BRISTOL

The Policy in the Church of England

In 1996 the House of Bishops of the Church of England produced guidelines on the subject of children and communion, giving permission for parishes to adopt a policy of admitting children to communion before confirmation with the Bishop's permission. There was a favourable debate in the General Synod on this issue.

The Policy at St. Matthew and St Nathanael, Bristol.

St Matthew and St Nathanael, Bristol seeks to be a worshipping community in which everyone has a place. As part of the inclusion of children into the family of faith we believe that every baptised member of the church should be able to receive communion, regardless of age. We believe that participation in this sacrament will enable baptised children to take their full place within the body of Christ and will thereby draw them into a closer growing relationship with God.

In line with the wider church only those who have been baptised will be admitted to communion.

Those children who do not receive communion may come for a blessing.

Any child new to the St Matthew's community who has been receiving communion in their previous church will continue to receive in St Matthew's in line with the current position in the Church of England. The Bishops' Guidelines state: "*No baptised person, child or adult, who has once been admitted to Holy Communion and remains in good standing with the Church, should anywhere be deprived of it*".

At St Matthew's, children will be admitted to communion in line with the guidelines produced by the House of Bishops:

- The child must be baptised and regularly attend church;
- The child should themselves wish to receive communion;
- There must be some parental and adult support;
- There must be some preparation before admission to communion.

St Matthew's, in welcoming children into the fellowship of the Eucharistic meal, also takes on responsibilities:

- to provide a warm and continuing welcome to children at services of Holy Communion;
- to ensure that the liturgy of the main celebration of Holy Communion is appropriate for all ages (in our case, this is at the 10.30 service);
- to provide resources for the preparation of children for communion
- to provide for the ongoing nurture and growth of Christian faith in children and young people through children's and young people's groups.
- to allow opportunity for children to use their gifts and develop their ministry, encouraging them in due course to come to confirmation and a commitment to adult discipleship.

When is a child ready to receive?

Rather than attaching an age limit to receiving communion we will follow The House of Bishop's guidelines 1997 which state;

“In general the time of the first receiving should be determined not so much by the child’s chronological age as by his or her appreciation of the significance of the sacrament. Subject to the bishop’s direction, it is appropriate for the decision to be made by the parish priest after consultation with the parents or those who are responsible for the child’s formation, with the parents’ goodwill.”

Who decides whether children are ‘ready to receive’?

Views on the admission of children to communion will differ within the congregation. The decision as to whether a baptised child receives communion will be a shared responsibility between parents / carers, and the Priest-in-Charge and will be taken only after the children themselves have indicated that they would like to take communion and undergone some preparation. Since we know there are people in our congregations with differing views on this matter, enabling each household to make their own decision means that such views can be held together with integrity. It is important that differing views are held with grace and understanding and without judgement.

Preparation and Education

It is required that any child receiving communion will have received some age-appropriate preparation prior to admission. This preparation will be done in the home for those of primary school age and below. Resources will be provided for this. If the family are not in a position to take part in this way (for example if a child comes without a parent) then other arrangements will be made with the child’s group leaders. In these cases the consent of the parent / carer will always be sought at the earliest possible time. Those of secondary school age may prefer to explore the material in their groups.

Every year the whole congregation will receive teaching on communion.

Implications for Worship

It is expected that children receiving communion will be present for the confession, absolution and communion prayer.

If a child holds his/her hands open as they come to communion, they are given the bread, if this is acceptable with their parents. Some children may also receive the wine at the discretion of their parents. Parents can also break their own bread to give to their children if they prefer.

Policy Review

The PCC will undertake to review the policy and its implementation annually. Any proposed amendments will be discussed with and approved by the Diocese Advisor prior to implementation.

Confirmation

Confirmation will continue to be encouraged as a rite of personal commitment and the beginning of adult ministry.