

Revision Date - September 20/89

Source - Bishops Office

CHILDREN AND COMMUNION

Diocese Of Nova Scotia & Prince Edward Island

The 122nd Session of our Diocesan Synod, meeting in May 1989, passed the following resolution;

"That this Synod enables the practice of permitting baptized children to become communicants prior to Confirmation. This practice shall be implemented in accordance with guidelines to be established by the Bishop."

The following guidelines shall be effective as of September 1st, 1989.

THE ROLE OF THE PARISH COUNCIL AND THE PARISH PRIEST

1. The Parish Council shall sponsor a major educational programme regarding Children and Communion. Discussion should be initiated through an appropriate committee of the Council, i.e., Spiritual Development, Pastoral Ministry.
2. The Parish Priest shall help the parish to understand the alternate pattern regarding children and communion, shall help the parish in the implementation of the practice in accord with these guidelines, and shall help individuals and the parish as a whole to live with a plurality of practice for some time to come. The parish shall respect the role of the parish priest in this regard.

The Priest's willingness to respond to those parents who express the desire that their children become communicants prior to Confirmation should be supported as, in all cases, it is to be understood that the priest would have had a full discussion with the parents concerning the pastoral care and nurture of their children.

3. In those parishes where baptized children are to be communicants prior to Confirmation, the Parish Council shall notify the Bishop, in writing.

THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY

1. A child shall become communicant with the full consent of the parent(s), guardian(s). The parent(s), guardian(s) shall be regular in their attendance at the Eucharist.
2. There may be children who, in the judgment of the priest might receive Communion, but whose parents are not regular participants in worship. If such parents give their permission, these children may be brought into association with devout adults who are regular at worship, and who will accept the responsibility for accompanying and supervising them at Holy Communion when their parents are not present.
3. Parent(s), guardian(s), or other adults who accept responsibility for accompanying and supervising children at Holy Communion, shall make a commitment to participate in a Christian Education programme with the child(e.g., Life In The Eucharist). In the case of a child who becomes a communicant from infancy, participation in such a programme will be delayed until an appropriate age.
4. Each baptized child who becomes a communicant shall receive a Certificate and his/her name shall be recorded in a Parish Register. (Certificates and Registers are available at the Diocesan Book Room.)

ADMINISTRATION OF THE SACRAMENT

1. Normally, at least one of the parents or sponsors should be with younger children at each reception of Communion. Children (and adults, too, for that matter) should be present at the Eucharist at least for the Offertory, if they are intending to receive Communion at that service.
2. Children shall be communicated in both kinds in accord with our usual means of administering the blessed sacrament.
3. Infants shall be communicated in accord with the following guidelines:
 - a) When infants are communicated at Baptism, they should be given the consecrated Wine alone.
 - b) The officiating priest or other minister should dip his/her forefinger in the chalice and present it to the infant to suck, or at least moisten the infant's lips with the Wine. (It is possible to use a spoon to place a few drops of Wine in the infant's mouth, but this method is less convenient and is not well supported in Western tradition.)
 - c) If (as seems fitting) baptized infants are frequently brought to Communion the same procedure should be followed on each occasion.
 - d) As soon as a child has learned to eat bread from his/her hands and to drink from a cup, he/she should begin receiving Communion in both kinds, in the same manner as adult communicants.
 - e) Before a child receives Communion in both kinds, careful practical instruction should be given by the parents or other responsible adults. (It will be helpful for the child to practice transferring unconsecrated bread--leavened or unleavened, according to local custom--from the hand to mouth)

(If the foregoing guidelines are carefully followed, the Communion of young children will not be marred by even apparent irreverence. However, it will be crucial for adults, and especially for parents, to set a consistent example of reverence in their own approach to the Eucharist. Otherwise, the positive values of the Communion of young children will be compromised.)

UNIVERSALITY

It is to be understood that within the Anglican Communion, "a communicant in one part of the Communion is a communicant in all parts of the Communion." Therefore, within the Diocese, it shall be the principle that every parish will immediately welcome to Holy Communion any baptized child who is a Communicant.

CONFIRMATION

1. Confirmation shall continue to be a significant rite. Through the Episcopal laying on of hands with prayer, a baptized person who has been catechized and nurtured at the Eucharist, is strengthened in making an affirmation of faith accompanied by a responsible commitment to discipleship.
2. Preparation for Confirmation should focus on the nature of the Church as The Body of Christ at work in the world. The candidate should be challenged to make a decision about his/her active participation in that working community.
3. The rite itself presents the candidate with the opportunity to make that commitment to Christian service and to be strengthened for the same by the Holy Spirit.

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

The promotion of Christian Education Programmes for all ages is a Diocesan goal. As baptized children become communicants, it will be especially important for the parish to promote programmes for young people to move toward an "adult owned faith" that can be expressed in a mature affirmation of faith and commitment to service in The Rite of Confirmation. I commend the resources available through the Director of Program and through the National Church.

Bishop's Commentary Regarding Children and Communion

This commentary comes in an effort to address some of the concerns which have been raised about the Guidelines. It is an attempt to clarify those areas about which questions have come to me.

The Role of the Parish Council and the Parish Priest

1. The purpose for a major educational programme is to assist parishioners towards an understanding of this practice which is now permissible within our Diocese. Parishioners may, or may not, wish to avail themselves of this practice. They need to know, however, that permission to proceed with the practice has been given by the House of Bishops, enabled by our Diocesan Synod and authorized by the Diocesan Bishop according to these Guidelines.

2. Children and their parents will present themselves before their parish priest following one of three routes.

a) Families come to Holy Communion after leadership has been provided in their parish through a programme of education and nurture. This situation is covered in the Guidelines.

b) Those who became Communicants in another parish and relocate in this parish. This situation is covered in the Guidelines under the section "Hospitality".

c) A difficult situation arises when families request communicant status in a parish where the priest is not prepared to introduce the practice of "Children and Communion". While these situations are apt to be rare ones, yet, they do present something of a conflict between the rights of the child and parents(s) as members of our Diocesan Family and a priest who may want to exercise personal objection. A way forward could follow this path:

The family might be directed to a programme of preparation in a neighboring parish. When the family have completed the programme and communicant status is granted, then the family would return to their home parish where the priest would treat the family as indicated in #(b) above. This arrangement would serve to protect the rights of the child, honour the objection of the parish priest who does not wish to lead in this particular direction and is consistent with the "Hospitality" section of the Guidelines.

As a footnote to the above, I would remind clergy how many times the necessity of doing something on a pastoral basis has been the occasion to re-think your opinions about the issue. I would point out, as well, that clergy occupy positions of leadership and trust; therefore, your personal conscience must be weighed alongside the rights of those entrusted to your pastoral care.

3. The purpose of writing the Bishop is to enable a monitoring process to take place to ensure that the practice is being introduced in accordance with the Guidelines. The Parish Council is not to debate and vote on the issue (see Section I of the Guidelines). It is not within the authority of a Parish Council to reverse a decision made by the Diocesan Synod. The Synod decided in favour of the implementation of the practice. An individual Parish Council or priest cannot deny any Anglican family that right.

Administration of the Sacrament

3. This guideline gives the priest guidance as to the most practical and historic way to proceed. The threat of infection would seem to be the general concern of most questioners. Dr. David Gould, a medical doctor, associated with the National Doctrine and Worship Committee, has written in his paper, "Eucharistic Practice and the Risk of Infection" about the use of the common cup by suggesting there is probably less risk in its use than that of airborne infection in using a common building. If the concern about infection is associated with the use of the priest's finger, then, that same concern would also exist regarding the use of the priest's hands in association with the consecrated Bread!

It should be noted there is the optional use of a spoon, although that option is not as convenient and has the potential to cause spitting up. The most natural instinct for young infants is to suck and it would seem to be the best method of administering the Sacrament on those occasions. I do not foresee, however, great numbers of our young infants coming forth to receive Holy Communion.

Some questioners point out that this practice of administering the Sacrament is inconsistent with the historic Anglican insistence on Communion in both kinds (Article 30). Dr. Eugene Fairweather addresses this concern in a recent article:

"Yet tradition, thus forcefully reasserted in its Western form, did provide for numerous exceptional cases... For instance, Christians who for diverse reasons, in a wide range of circumstances, did not have access to the communal celebration, were communicated (or very often communicated themselves) from the reserved element (s). In fact, for the most part, such communion seems to have been in the form of Bread alone. On the other hand, there was the Communion of infants, which was very widely administered under the form of Wine alone. The same practice was applied to the case of some sick persons, who could not swallow solid food,

In such exceptional cases, the Church's concern for the frequent Communion of the baptized overruled even the explicit recognition of Communion in both kinds as normative. It should be added that the exceptions just summarized long antedated medieval scholastic speculations about the eucharistic presence (e.g. the theory of 'concomitance'). What seems to have been in the early Christian mind was a profound conviction that participation in the Eucharistic sign of the crucified and risen Christ was of such great importance that the administration of the sign could legitimately be accommodated to various pastoral situations.

The very moderate Anglican article spoke to a recent, and peculiarly Western, development. In the later middle ages, Roman authority had gradually, and with some embarrassment, shifted its ground and adopted the practice of Communion in one kind -- the form of Bread -- as normative. In that context, the Church of England condemned the denial of the cup of the Lord of the laity.

No doubt it was essentially right. But we need not extend the condemnation to such pastoral accommodations of the norm of Communion in both kinds as are consonant with 'the godly and decent order of the ancient Fathers'."