

D7 ADMISSION OF BAPTISED PERSONS TO HOLY COMMUNION BEFORE CONFIRMATION

The following diocesan guidelines are based upon advice issued by the House of Bishops.

Since 'communion before confirmation' is a departure from our inherited norm, it requires special permission. After consultation, every diocesan bishop will have the discretion to make a general policy whether or not to entertain new applications for 'communion before confirmation' to take place in his diocese. If he decides to do so, individual parishes must seek his agreement before introducing it. The bishop should satisfy himself that both the incumbent and the Parochial Church Council support any application, and that where appropriate ecumenical partners have been consulted. If the parties cannot agree, the bishop's direction shall be followed.

The incumbent must ensure that the policy adopted for the parish is clearly and widely understood. The policy should be considered within the general context both of the ministry that is carried out in the parish through initiation, and also of the continuing nurture of people in the Christian faith. **The bishop must be satisfied that the programme of continuing Christian nurture is in place leading to confirmation in due course.**

Before admitting a person to communion, the priest must seek evidence of baptism. Baptism always precedes admission to Holy Communion.

There is a question regarding the age at which children may be admitted to Holy Communion. 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 (see below), 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. An appropriate and serious pattern of preparation should be followed. The priest and parents share in continuing to educate the child in the significance of Holy Communion so that he gains in understanding with increasing maturity. *In this diocese the norm is to admit children into a scheme who are aged five or above. Clergy should consult with the bishop if there is a question of admitting a child who is under five.*

The Church needs to encourage awareness of many different levels of understanding, and support the inclusion of those with learning difficulties in the Christian community. Particular care needs to be taken with the preparation of any who have learning difficulties, including children. The incumbent should consult with those concerned in their care, education and support regarding questions of their discernment of the sacrament, their admission to Holy Communion, and their preparation for confirmation.

Before a person is first brought to Holy Communion, the significance of the occasion should be explained to them and to their parents, and marked in some suitable way before the whole congregation. Wherever possible, the person's family should be involved in the service.

A register should be kept of every person admitted to Holy Communion before confirmation, and each should be given a certificate and ideally the baptismal certificate should be endorsed.

Whether or not a parish practises 'communion before confirmation', the Incumbent should take care regarding the quality of teaching material, especially that used with children and young people. The material should be reviewed regularly and the advice of diocesan officers and other professional advisers taken into account.

The priest must decide exactly how much of the liturgy communicant children will attend. Even if there is a separate 'Ministry of the Word' for children, anyone who is to receive Holy Communion should be present in the main assembly at least for the eucharistic prayer.

No baptised person, child or adult, who has once been admitted to Holy Communion and remains in good standing with the Church, should be anywhere deprived of it. When, for example, a family moves to another area, the Incumbent of the parish they are leaving should contact their new Incumbent to ensure that there is no confusion regarding the communicant status of children. It is the responsibility of the new Incumbent to discuss with the children and parents concerned when the children should be presented for confirmation. Such children should normally be presented at least by the age of 18.

Since baptism is at the heart of initiation, it is important for the bishop regularly to be the minister of holy baptism, and particularly at services where candidates will be both baptised and confirmed. It is generally inappropriate for candidates who are preparing for initiation into the Christian life in baptism and confirmation to receive baptism at a service other than the one in which they are to be confirmed.

In using rites of public re-affirmation of faith other than baptism and confirmation, care should be taken to avoid the impression that they are identical with confirmation. In the case of people who have not been confirmed, it will be more appropriate for the incumbent to propose that they be confirmed.

If a parish is contemplating the setting up of a scheme then the incumbent should consult with the bishop at an early stage. The experience of such schemes in this diocese has on the whole been very positive and advice and examples of good practice are available.

2005