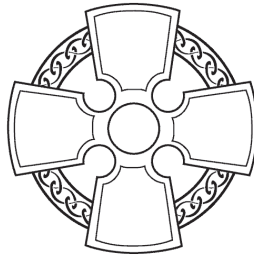


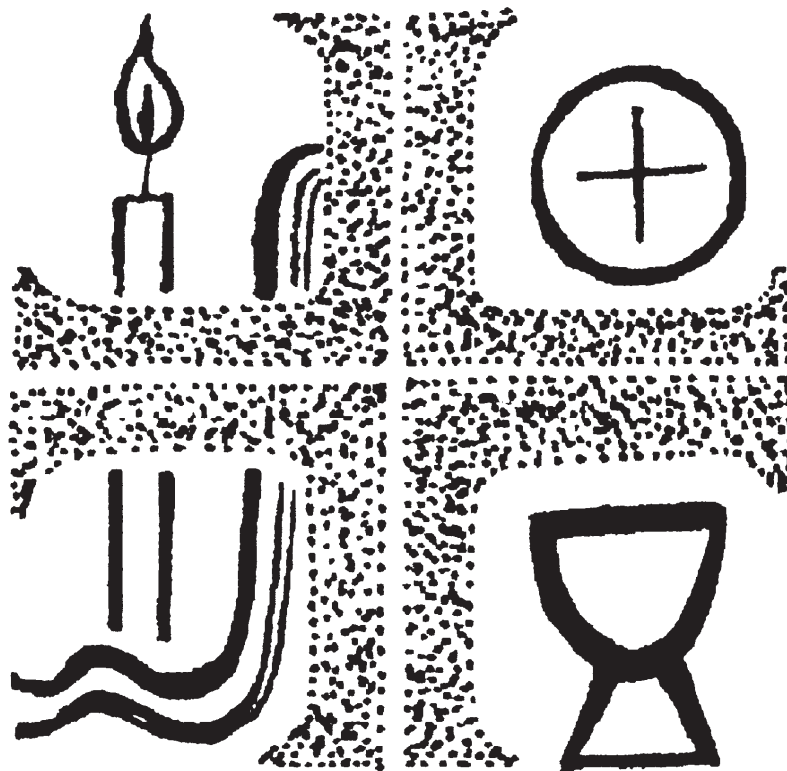
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THE CHURCH
IN WALES

Children and Holy Communion

Guides and resources for Parishes



Prepared by the **Children's Committee**
The Church in Wales
Council for the Mission and Ministry

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FOREWORD

The Church has not always known how best to obey Christ's command to 'let the children come to me', and it is only quite slowly that the Anglican Church in various countries has begun to open the question of the admission of baptised children to Holy Communion. Parishes which have developed their practice along these lines, however, have generally spoken with real enthusiasm of the effects in the wider life of the Church, and it is the hope of the Bishops in Wales that there will be a growing number of such initiatives. However, it is important that these be properly resourced and carefully reflected upon. I am happy to commend what follows as an aid to this resourcing and reflection.

+Rowan Cambrensis

1. GUIDELINES

The Bench of Bishops of the Church in Wales has approved the following guidelines for the admission of baptised children to Holy Communion, to take effect from October 2001.

1. The Bench of Bishops wishes to authorise parishes to admit baptised children to Holy Communion, provided that the proposal has received appropriate support from the clergy, PCC and parishioners.
2. The parish clergy, the PCC and those engaged in ministry with children should actively be involved in the introduction and implementation of this new practice in the parish.
3. Before a scheme is introduced in a parish, it is desirable that as many parishioners as possible understand the reasons for the new practice. Resource materials, such as those produced by the Church in Wales Children's Committee may prove useful.
4. The admission of children to Holy Communion should be seen as part of the parish's whole programme for nurture in the Christian faith. An appropriate period of preparation for children and parents/sponsors should precede it. *Blessed be God for Ever*, the programme produced by the Provincial Children's Committee, may be helpful
5. The Parish should ensure that the children admitted to Holy Communion have the active support of parents/sponsors and other members of the congregation.
6. Infants are baptised and children are admitted to Holy Communion in the expectation that they will wish to seek Confirmation in due course.
7. When a child communicant moves home, the clergy of the new parish should be informed of the child's communicant status. The child should be received as a communicant in the new parish and communicant status should not be withdrawn.
8. Children should normally be admitted to Holy Communion for the first time at a Sunday celebration. A simple form of admission such as that prepared by the Provincial Children's Committee may be used. The emphasis should be celebratory rather than interrogatory.
9. A record of names of those admitted to Holy Communion should be kept with the parish registers.
10. The Church in Wales should collate and publish the numbers of children admitted to Holy Communion in the same way as figures are published concerning baptism and confirmation.
11. When appointing clergy to parishes authorised to admit children to Holy Communion, full account should be taken of the existence of the practice.

2. THE ROLE OF CONFIRMATION

What was “confirmation” (the varied practice of praying for a newly baptised person, with anointing and/or laying-on of hands as a sign of the ongoing strength of the Holy Spirit for the new life begun in the waters of baptism)? Down the ages, what did it become as it responded to contemporary needs?

The popular view of Confirmation is that it is a rite of commitment, which imparts the Holy Spirit, ‘dismisses’ the newly baptised, and is the ‘episcopal stamp’ on Church membership. However, this rite, which is used throughout the Anglican Communion, has had a chequered history. Unlike Baptism and the Eucharist, it was not dominically instituted and scriptural evidence is scanty and controversial.

Confirmation originated from the post-baptismal anointing (chrismation) and/or imposition of hands during the single rite of initiation. Jesus commissioned his disciples to baptise in the name of the Trinity (Matt. 28.19). Although the New Testament writers say much about the significance of baptism, they provide little liturgical detail. In the Acts of the Apostles there are nine references to baptism but post-baptismal laying on of hands occurs only in two – the Samaritans (8.12-17) and the disciples at Ephesus (19.1-6). The Epistle to the Hebrews (6.1-2) has frequently been cited as evidence for Confirmation. However, the consensus of opinion is that the early Christians were initiated simply by water-baptism, and additional ceremonies like imposition of hands may have occurred in some churches but cannot be said to have been the norm.

By the Second Century, a baptismal rite had emerged and according to the writings of the Didache and Justin Martyr (A.D.160), fasting, prayer, and instruction preceded it. The candidate was immersed in cold running water, or just sprinkled three times with water, in the name of the Trinity. By A.D. 200 post-baptismal ceremonies such as anointing (chrismation) and imposition of hands had been added to the baptismal rite which had emerged.

By the Fourth Century, initiation had become shrouded in secrecy – the details of the ceremony, the Eucharist, the Creed, and Lord’s Prayer were a closely guarded secret (*disciplina arcani*). Initiation took place during the Easter Vigil and was preceded by a three-year catechumenate. Meanwhile the rite of baptism had acquired many additional ceremonies including chrismation, signing of the cross, and washing of the candidate’s feet by the Bishop. The person thus initiated was

vested in a white garment (to signify righteousness), and carrying a lighted candle was led into the Eucharist, to receive the first Communion. In some Churches, they were also given a drink of milk and honey to symbolise entry into the Promised Land.

The 'imparting of the Spirit' evolved in different forms – imposition of hands and blessing (Tertullian *d.225*), anointing, imposition, signing with the cross (consignation), and the kiss of peace (Hippolytus *d.236*) or imposition, anointing, and consignation (Cyprian *d.258*). Ambrose (*d.397*) believed that the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit were imparted through this spiritual 'sealing'. These were obviously the origins of what became the Confirmation rite.

In the Eastern Church up to the present day, infants are baptised, anointed, and communicated, by the priest, using episcopally blessed chrism oil. However, in the Western Church the pattern of initiation was influenced by several factors. Firstly, Augustine (*d.430*) through his doctrine of original sin promoted infant baptism within a week of birth - often by the midwife or a member of the family. Consequently, confirmation would be deferred until the Bishop was available. The norm was that few people regarded this 'additional ceremony' as a completion of baptism or necessary to salvation. A stage was ultimately reached where confirmation was only administered if the Bishop was in the vicinity and often from horseback or carriage, to people standing in the fields afar, rather than hands being laid on each individual.

Next, Archbishop Peckham (1281) tried to regularise this situation by enforcing confirmation prior to communion. This legislation failed, however, and this practice of the baptised but unconfirmed receiving Holy

Communion continued through the Middle Ages up to the sixteenth century until it was banned by the Council of Trent (1547). Thus, the structure inherited by the sixteenth century Reformers was that what had been one rite of initiation had, through practice, become three separate stages - Baptism and Confirmation, followed by Communion.

During the Reformation, a much stricter line became the norm and some understanding was a pre-requisite to receiving Communion. Subsequently, in 1549, Cranmer produced a separate rite of 'Confirmation' in which the candidate had to be able to recite the Creed, Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer. This rite was administered to children who had 'come to that age (when) . . . they begin to be in danger to fall into sin.' Confirmation gave them 'strength and defence against all temptations to sin and the assaults of the world and the devil.' The final rubric stated, 'And there shall none be admitted to the Holy Communion until such time as he be Confirmed' ¹

The service began with questioning on the Catechism. The Bishop's pre-confirmation prayer asked God to 'Send down from heaven,' the seven fold gifts of the Holy Spirit: it still included consignation (without oil) and introduced the laying on of hands with the words, 'I sign thee . . . and lay my hands on thee,' but this had no inner significance. The post confirmation prayer referred to 'the Apostles example' in the laying on of hands, thus removing a link with the inner gift of the Holy Spirit. ²

The 1552 revision changed 'Send down' to 'Strengthen' and all other ceremony disappeared at the imposition of hands; this was now accompanied by a non-sacramental prayer for spiritual growth - 'Defend O lord, this child with thy heavenly grace, that he . . .

may . . . daily increase in thy Holy Spirit . . .' In this way, the giving of the Holy Spirit was played down.³

In the 1662 revision, the Catechism was printed separately from Confirmation and the Priest instructed to catechise the candidate before presentation to the Bishop. Thus questioning on the Catechism was replaced by the renewal of baptismal vows. Significantly added to the final rubric were the words 'or be ready and desirous to be confirmed.'⁴ (The latter reflected the eleven years of the Commonwealth when dissenting groups had begun to spring up and when there were also few infant baptisms.)

Thus the pattern of initiation was set for the next three centuries - infant Baptism (usually), followed by Confirmation, and Communion. However, confirmation was often neglected or done in a perfunctory way - hundreds might be confirmed with one prayer and no imposition of hands. Many people underwent some catechesis and received communion without confirmation. The Sacramental Test Act (1673) required all holders of Crown appointments to receive the Sacrament according to the usage of the Church of England, regardless of whether or not they were confirmed. Consequently, during the nineteenth century various bishops voiced concerns - H. Ryder, C. Sumner, J.B. Sumner, and Samuel Wilberforce - resulting in more regular confirmation with better preparation. This was aided by the division of dioceses, episcopal retirement, and the development of the railways. In addition, the effect of the Oxford Movement was a stricter confirmation discipline with more sacramental emphasis. Confirmation came to be regarded either as the completion of initiation (Mason-Dix line) or as a non-sacramental, catechetical rite. These two viewpoints co-existed whilst the

ritual remained the same - confirmation before communion.

This pattern worked well when baptism and confirmation were well rooted in 'popular religion'. However, after the Second World War, there grew an increasing disparity between numbers for baptism and confirmation. Also, the rite of confirmation had almost become a 'graduation' from the Church. The Lambeth Conference (1968) subsequently presented a report which voiced concern over the traditional pattern of initiation, and the question has been debated throughout the Anglican Communion, at various levels, over the past thirty years.

Various doctrinal commissions and reports⁵ have concluded that water-baptism alone is complete initiation and in principle admits a person (child or adult) to communion. The consensus of opinion is that Confirmation/laying on of hands whilst having a pastoral role in the renewal of faith among the baptised is in no longer seen as the gateway to Communion.

NOTES

- 1 Buchanan C. *Anglican Communion*.
- 2 Buchanan C. *Anglican Communion*.
- 3 Buchanan C. *Anglican Communion*.
- 4 Buchanan C. *Anglican Communion*.
- 5 The Ely Report (1971), Report of the Doctrinal Commission of the Church in Wales. (1971), The Knaresborough Report. (1985), The Boston Consultation (1985), The Toronto Statement (1991), Report to the Bench of Bishops, Church in Wales (1993).

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3. ANGLICAN TRADITION

Can we argue that the admission of children to Holy Communion prior to confirmation is consistent with Anglican tradition and practice, particularly in respect to the Book of Common Prayer of 1662, and that of the Church in Wales?

This question is not a new one and has been discussed in several provinces of the Anglican Communion and many synods over the last few decades. There is a wide variety of literature on the subject, and much of what is written here has already been said before. In particular the following reports and publications have been heavily drawn on in the preparation of this paper.

- Isaac, D. (ed.) (1985), *Communion before Confirmation? The report of the general synod board of education working party on Christian initiation and participation in the eucharist, chaired by the Bishop of Knaresborough* London, CIO Publishing,
- Buchanan, C. (ed.) (1985), *Nurturing Children in Communion: Essays from the Boston Consultation*, Nottingham, Grove Books
- Jones, W.D. (ed.) (1993), *Children and Holy Communion: a report to the bench of bishops of the Church in Wales*, Penarth, The Board of Mission.

It is a mistake to view the Anglican tradition as if it began with the reformation and has existed on its own since then. It grew out of the tradition of the western church in Europe, and has always existed alongside the traditions of other communions and churches. Indeed it has been argued on many occasions that the Anglican tradition is a middle way between others, be they reformed, catholic or orthodox. It is, therefore important that any

discussion of children and communion should not only take into account Anglican traditions but preserve an ecumenical perspective as well.

In the Knaresborough Report chapter two is devoted to a consideration of scripture, the early church, and later developments. It concludes, 'an attempt has been made in this chapter to touch upon some of the more important biblical and patristic passages, which bear upon our theme. Such an attempt in so short a compass is bound to yield an unsatisfactory result. Nevertheless, enough has been included to convey an impression of the complexity of the material, which we have inherited from the first five Christian centuries. The biblical evidence leads most easily to the conclusion that in the church of the first century there was a wide diversity of practice and of understanding, particularly regarding the imposition of hands in Christian initiation' (Isaac, 1985; 13). Earlier in the chapter attention had been drawn to the final abolition of infant communion by the Council of Trent. 'Confirmation had not been seen as a necessary precondition for admission to Holy Communion. Archbishop Peckham's regulation issued at the Council of Lambeth in 1281 (barring admission to those not confirmed or not reasonably prevented from receiving confirmation) was but a matter of discipline directed against the 'damnable negligence' of parents content only to have their children baptised. By then the church had been communicating unconfirmed infants and adults for centuries' (Isaac, 1985; 10). In other words the tradition which we, as twenty-first century anglicans, inherit has recognised the validity of admitting children to communion for more of its history than it has denied it.

But what are we to make of the peculiarly Anglican inheritance of the reformation?

Appendix 4 of the Knaresborough report (Isaac, 1985; 61-76) contains a long memorandum on the Reformers' understanding of the relationship between baptism confirmation and admission to communion.

The comments here are based on Appendix 4 and on the third and fourth chapters of the report (Isaac, 1985; 15-19).

'Cranmer stated that the conferring of the Spirit was not now the function of confirmation, but he located the gift of the Spirit sacramentally in baptism . . . Nevertheless Cranmer incorporated the old provision of Archbishop Peckham into his new confirmation rubric that 'there shall none be admitted to the holy communion, until such time as he can say the catechism, and be confirmed'. The reformers inherited the notion that some ability to answer for oneself was a

necessary condition for admission to communion, and they systematised the notion to suit their own presuppositions. In particular, they viewed learning the faith as the necessary deliverance from the superstition in which they had themselves been brought up, and inevitably placed a high premium upon the ability to respond to catechisms. The 1662 Prayer Book retained most of the Reformers' emphases, though it removed the catechism from within the confirmation rite . . . The Prayer Book set the pattern whereby in the nineteenth century a more intensely 'pastoral' use of confirmation arose, which in turn fixed in the minds of very large numbers of Anglicans the conviction that confirmation was an absolute precondition for receiving communion. This by the 1880s, led to the theological insistence that confirmation was the completion of sacramental initiation' (Isaac, 1985; 15-17).

The question posed at the end of the third chapter of the Knaresborough report is this. 'Did the reformers fasten a particular tradition upon us for ever, albeit one open to changing understandings, or did they provide a principle of reformation which would encourage us to look critically at what we have inherited?' (Isaac, 1985: 17). The answer to this question is the key to whether or not we should admit children to communion. The following chapter goes on to consider the nature of our tradition, how it 'contains both Christian truths fixed for all time and also elements of understanding which evolve from age to age' (Isaac, 1985; 18). The authors of the report are clear in their understanding that Article XX shows that the rites of the Book of Common Prayer have a basis of authority which is 'at most a matter of discipline, not of doctrine' excepting that matters which have

an explicit basis in scripture are 'to be believed for the necessity of salvation' (Isaac, 1985; 19). They conclude, 'It is clear, from this understanding of the nature of tradition in the Church of England that changes in the matters of discipline are both possible and, sometime, necessary' (Isaac, 1985; 19).

Traditions grow and change. In 1971 the doctrinal commission of the Church in Wales was asked by Archbishop Glyn Simon to explore the whole theology of baptism and confirmation. In its report, it makes the following statement:

"Baptism itself is to be regarded as the total rite of Christian initiation . . . Accordingly, it becomes possible to meet the legitimate desire of some clergy to introduce baptised children to the communicant life at a pastorally appropriate age. **No question arises as to their qualification to receive the sacrament.** Such children are recognised as members of the church in a *formal* sense though their relationship to Christ is of the character described as *indirect*, or at least partially so, depending on the degree of individual response to which each has become capable. Obviously the practice of admitting children to the holy communion calls for appropriate safeguards. **The essential point, however, is that the status of the baptised child as potentially a child communicant is not made to depend upon the 'completion' of his initiation by the administration of episcopal 'confirmation'. His qualification to receive the holy communion is not called into question"** (Doctrinal Commission of the Church in Wales, 1971; 25-26) (my emphases).

In commenting on this passage the working group set up, by the Bench of Bishops to

consider the question of the admission of children to holy communion before confirmation, following the April 1991 meeting of the Governing Body, commented that 'This report remains a significant contribution to the Church in Wales thinking on Christian initiation' (Jones, 1992; 7). This report, after considering at some length theological, pastoral and liturgical issues, concludes 'We believe that access to this scheme to provide admission to Holy Communion before confirmation would be of value to the Church in Wales and enrich its life' (Jones, 1992; 32).

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4. LOWER AGE LIMIT?

Can a lower age-limit of 7 years be maintained? Is this not an arbitrary figure? If baptised under-7's belong fully to the Church, do we need to defend our practice of refusing the Sacrament to them? Should we remove the lower age-limit entirely?

The Church in Wales Doctrinal Commission (1971) stated that baptism is complete sacramental initiation and admission to communion is not dependant on the 'completion' of his/her initiation by the administration of 'episcopal' confirmation. Thirty years on, baptism is now almost universally regarded as complete initiation. Children are members of the eucharistic community of the Church by the right of their Baptism, which incorporates them into the Body of Christ. One could therefore say that theologically, there are no reasons why children should be barred from receiving the sacrament of Holy Communion whatever their age. In fact, today several Anglican Provinces are currently admitting baptised children to Communion at various ages: United States, New Zealand, and some dioceses in Canada (at any age); Australia, Canada, England, Iceland, South Africa, Melanesia and Wales (at 4 to 8 years).¹

The following practical and pastoral reasons are usually put forward for delaying admission of children to Holy Communion:

- The desire for admission to be a significant event in the child's life.
- The need for instruction and understanding.
- The need for appropriate behaviour, reverence and care for the sacrament.

To answer these concerns, one might look back to what has happened in history.² In the first four centuries of the Church, children participated in the Eucharist naturally. In the New Testament there is no clear-cut evidence of whether or not children received Holy Communion. However, they were present at worship, which presumably included the Eucharist. It was the belief that if at least one parent belonged to the community of faith, the children were 'holy' (1Corinthians 7.14). There is therefore no conceivable reason why these children did not receive Communion. By the Third Century, it was the norm for children to receive the sacrament.

From the writings of Cyprian of Carthage (*On the Lapsed*), it seems that infants received communion here, from birth. Writings on the Syrian Church of the fourth century (*Apostolic Constitutions*) stipulate the order in which the congregation is to receive communion: bishops, presbyters, deacons, sub-deacons, readers, singers and ascetics, followed by deaconesses, virgins and widows; the children come next before the rest of the congregation.

St Augustine built a good case for child communion, by focussing on John 6.53 "Unless you eat the flesh of the son of Man and drink his blood you can have no life in you". However, by the Middle Ages people became uneasy about 'child' communion, partly guided by the words of 1 Corinthians 11.27 "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord". However, children continued to receive communion with certain provisions and restrictions – sometimes they were simply given the wine rinsed out of the chalice at the ablutions.

By the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a growing reverence for the Eucharist prompted

theologians to conclude that children should not receive Communion until they reached years of discretion. (*Fourth Lateran Council 1215*). (At this time, too, there was a defection of the laity from receiving the wine as it was seen to be a priestly activity). Finally, The Council of Trent (1281) reinforced this ruling by prohibiting children from receiving Communion below the age of discretion. The Reformed Churches whilst disagreeing on theology agreed on the principle of barring young children from Communion.

Children were deprived of communion from the Reformation, because it was a time of defending the truth – both Protestant and Roman Catholic. Thus understanding, through Catechesis and Confirmation prior to Communion, became the established practice.

In the twentieth century, with new approaches to worship, Parish Communion, Family Communion, and All-age Worship, it became

customary for children to receive a blessing at the altar, during Communion. Subsequently, congregations began to ask the question – if children can be baptised can they not receive Communion?

There are several questions in this context, which the church now needs to address:

- Should there be a set lower age limit for admission of children to Communion?
- Should the age be arbitrary?
- Should infants be communicated?

There are points for and against each of these considerations.

One viewpoint is that before being admitted to communion, the child needs to have reached a certain stage of intellectual understanding. The child needs to:

- Have reasoning power, which can be used in learning and adopting spiritual truth.
- Understand what behaviour is acceptable in church, even if he or she does not always comply.
- Understand that prayer is meaningful.

This would suggest that a lower age limit should be maintained and that it should certainly not be lower than 5 or 6 years.

However, a child's intellectual and spiritual development may not coincide. Children as young as three may have an appreciation of wonder, awe, and reverence. Recent work by D. Hay and R. Nye indicates that young children emerge from infancy with an amazing spiritual awareness, which needs to be nurtured. Also, it is evident that some parents are currently giving their children a piece of the host and thus unofficially administering Communion to them. This is too important a decision to be taken by parents alone.

Admission at an appropriate age of intellectual understanding presupposes that catechesis precedes reception. Admission of all baptised, whatever age, does not preclude that instruction and Christian nurture will follow. It is an interesting fact that where Baptism of infants does not require their prior understanding, Communion does. Peter Reiss says, 'All Christians as part of their discipleship should always be 'learners'. The Eucharist is a meal for the road, not for the homecoming – that meal is the heavenly banquet.'³

The Boston Consultation (1985) stated that:

It is paradoxical to admit children to membership in the body of Christ through baptism, and yet deny that membership in the eucharistic meal that follows. Given this principle, it is paradoxical to assert that communion is a 'means of grace' and yet insist that children must show 'signs of grace' before they can be given the eucharistic 'means of grace'. Given this principle, it is paradoxical to place further hurdles, whether of age, or of attainment . . . which have to be crossed before the candidate could begin communicant life.⁴

Some comments from the Church of New Zealand,⁵ where by the mid 1980's in almost half of all parishes children received communion:

Those who have experienced child communion in their parish have also experienced spiritual growth within that community, with children and adults learning from each other.

Children feel that they belong and are a part of God's Family.

A parent commented:

To enjoy the service fully with children is an added joy to the act of communion

itself. I believe that early admission to communion is working well.

A final comment from a member of the Church in Wales:

To see a child kneeling before me at the altar rail with outstretched hands is an awesome and humbling experience.

In consideration of the age limit, there is a word of caution. There are many people in today's Church who complain about indiscriminate Baptism and it is important the Church must take care that it does not fall into the trap of indiscriminate Communion. In all of this there is a need to retain a mystery and reverence for the Sacrament of the Eucharist⁶ and to ensure that pre-baptismal preparation of families always be given

Finally, a parable from Toronto called *Peter and Mary go swimming*.⁷

Peter and Mary's parents are keen swimmers and have regularly taken their two children to the swimming pool, from birth. However, the children are delayed from entering the pool and actually swimming, until they have sufficient understanding and know how behave appropriately. They spend many years in little rooms beside the pool, hearing stories from the Swimmer's Manual and drawing pictures of swimmers. Sadly, the dedicated people who teach them hardly ever swim any more because they are too busy with the children. The children are sometimes allowed to paddle in the wading pool and on special occasions, they are allowed in the pool with their parents, provided they don't splash around and disturb other people. After thirteen years, they undergo intensive training, learning all the rules, hearing about Olympic swimmers and looking at slides of swimmers, from other countries, standing by the pool. At last,

they finish Swimming School and they are allowed to swim with the adults, but they have now lost interest in swimming and prefer to stay at home and watch the television. (For full version see McKelvey H. *Children at the Table.*)

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NOTES

- 1 McKelvey H. *Children at the Table.*
- 2 Strange W.A. *Children in the Early Church.*
- 3 Reiss P. *Children and Communion.*
- 4 Buchanan C. *Nurturing Children in Holy Communion.*
- 5 Buchanan C. *Nurturing Children in Holy Communion.*
- 6 Macquarrie J. *A Guide to the Sacraments*
- 7 McKelvey H. *Children at The Table.*

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5. CONFIRMATION IN THE FUTURE?

What of Confirmation in the future? Should it remain as it is, an adult rite of commitment and laying-on of hands with prayer for the strength of the Spirit, or should the prayer for the Spirit be restored (as in the Eastern Churches and the Covenanted Baptism rite) to the rite of Baptism? Would we then work towards a rite of commitment to adult discipleship or is the pattern of commitment to Christ now so diverse that we would be better served with an annual dedication to discipleship, service, and mission (perhaps with a mandatory adult 'catechumenate' every few years)? Whatever we decide, it will affect our liturgical provision (which will also have to remain flexible for many years to come).

This question pre-supposes a definition of Confirmation as 'an adult rite of commitment and laying-on of hands with prayer for the strength of the Spirit', although the status quo of Confirmation in the Church in Wales at present is rather more complex than this. The Church in Wales Catechism (Vol. 2 p. 698) describes Confirmation as a sacramental rite 'by which we make a mature expression of the commitment to Christ made at Baptism and receive the strength of the Holy Spirit through prayer and the laying-on of hands by a Bishop.' (Catechism questions 56 & 57).

This 'sacramental rite' is often, therefore, seen as a 'completion' or 'second part' of the sacrament of Baptism (Infant Baptism being 'by water' and Confirmation conferring the gift of the Holy Spirit – a view reinforced by

the practice of refusing Holy Communion to children and adults who are not yet confirmed). However, the report of the Doctrinal Commission of the Church in Wales in 1971 stated that Christian Initiation was complete in Baptism: 'Accordingly, Baptism itself is to be regarded as the total rite of Christian Initiation . . . Baptism includes the full gift of the Spirit. Baptism means all that anybody has ever meant by 'baptism' plus 'confirmation'. Baptism is baptism of water and the Spirit'.¹

This apparent dichotomy about what we may consider to be the status quo regarding Church in Wales belief and practice concerning Confirmation has a bearing on how Confirmation may develop in the future. On the one hand, we have a practice – based on the 1549 BCP and a nineteenth century *modus operandi* – which links Holy Communion to Confirmation – reinforcing the idea that Confirmation is necessary for 'complete' Christian Initiation; whilst on the other we have a definite statement that Christian initiation is complete in Baptism and the unconfirmed are not thereby barred from receiving Holy Communion. Such theological mixed messages need to be made clear before it is possible to move forward.

In looking towards the future of Confirmation, however, it is also necessary to consider the questions of pastoral need and ecclesiological expediency. Children (and adults) benefit from 'rites of passage', marking the stages on their spiritual journey. The current practice allows for this, along with an opportunity for ongoing nurture in the faith. (The only danger being that this ongoing nurture risks stopping abruptly after Confirmation at the age of 11 or 12 years, often before children have begun to look seriously at questions of faith). The current practice of Confirmation by a Bishop

also enables those confirmed to see their faith in the context of the whole Church of God rather than through the narrow confines of their own congregation. But, on the other hand, this risks limiting a Bishop's contact with parishes to meeting only with Confirmation candidates and their families.

Our question goes on to ask us to consider the liturgical questions surrounding the future of Confirmation. Firstly, the possibility of restoring the prayer for the Spirit to the rite of Baptism. Early Baptismal texts differ in their approach and later texts (seventh to eleventh cent.) are similarly inconclusive, although the separation of Baptism and Confirmation was established by the time of the Reformation and continued in Anglicanism beyond the Reformation.² However, in the most recent text in the Anglican Communion – the Church of England's Common Worship (CW) – the conferring of the Holy Spirit is seen to be part of the process of a lifelong journey of faith. (Gilly Myers in her guide to the CW initiation services (p. 17) comments that 'The view that baptism is complete initiation might seem not only to depreciate confirmation but also to deny to a certain extent the process element in the sacramental event'). The CW prayer at baptism asks that the newly baptised 'daily be renewed by his anointing Spirit'. (CW *Initiation Services* p.40) and the prayer at confirmation is that the candidates be equipped 'with the gift of your Holy Spirit' - the laying-on of hands accompanied by the words 'N., may God renew his life within you that you may confess his name this day and for ever' (idem.) p.112).

By 'restoring' the prayer for the Spirit to baptism we would be bringing ourselves in line with some, but not all, of the rites of the early Church (see note 2). But perhaps it is important to ask ourselves, first of all, why we

use such a prayer at all. The Scriptural authority for its use is disputed – the text often quoted being Acts 8:14-17, which was cited by Irenaeus and Tertullian to show that the Apostles laid hands on converts to confer the gift of the Spirit, although evidence of early baptismal rites, as we have seen, suggests that this was not always the practice of the early Church. In using a prayer for the Spirit today, do we consider it to confer 'strength for the journey' (as in CW)? Or do we rather regard it as a prayer to give courage and confidence to the mature Christian making a personal commitment of faith? Is the Holy Spirit absent from baptism if the prayer is omitted? Or is the seal of the Holy Spirit only effected through such a prayer, as opposed to through Chrismation or the very act of baptism by water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? (cf. the report of the Church in Wales Doctrinal Commission on Christian Initiation, p.22 'Christian Initiation is the Gift of the Spirit' and the WCC report *Baptism, Eucharist*

and Ministry – p.6 IVB14 – ‘Christians differ in their understanding as to where the sign of the gift of the Spirit is to be found. Different actions have become associated with the giving of the Spirit. For some it is the water rite itself. For others it is the anointing with Chrism and/or the imposition of hands . . . For still others it is all three, as they see the Spirit operative throughout the rite.’) However we come to view the prayer of the Spirit, there is agreement that the full gift of the Holy Spirit is conferred in baptism – but this does not preclude such a prayer from the rite of confirmation, provided we understand that it is not the exclusive preserve of confirmation. (cf. Oliver Quick ‘The Christian Sacraments’ p.183-184: ‘A theory which declares that Confirmation marks the first gift of the indwelling Spirit, and a practice which places Confirmation a dozen years or more after Baptism, point, when taken together, to conclusions which are intolerable’.)

The second part of this question looks at the need for a rite of commitment to adult discipleship – whether through Confirmation or an ‘annual dedication to discipleship, service, and mission’ (perhaps with a mandatory adult ‘catechumenate’ every few years). A form of annual dedication already exists in the provision for the renewal of baptismal vows at the Easter Vigil. This corporate act of ‘rededication’ could well serve those who wish to renew their commitment to faith; although it may not be helpful for those wishing to mark a ‘once-off’ stage on their spiritual journey. There is, however, some provision in the CW services for ‘affirmation of baptismal faith’ (CW *Initiation Services*, p.164), so such a rite to meet the needs of specific individuals already has a precedent. As far as a possible ‘mandatory adult catechumenate’ is concerned (although a catechumen is, by definition, someone who is

not yet baptised), I suspect that any such system would probably be practically unworkable and could be over-prescriptive. For example, what sanctions could we impose on those who refuse to attend? The report of the Doctrinal Commission provides a caveat in this respect: ‘Willingness to accept Christian responsibility is more important than the actual taking of vows. It is for this reason that we would wish any such formal act of commitment to be strictly optional. None of us remains faithful to Christ *because* we have taken vows. Rather we continue to regard vows as binding *because we remain faithful.*’ (p.31). Many people find Lent courses and study groups - for which there is a multiplicity of material available - helpful, even enjoyable, but would not at all welcome a compulsion to attend and to make a formal commitment of faith at the end of it! The journey to adult baptism/confirmation is one which is made seriously and often after several years of searching – hopefully providing a springboard for further exploration of faith throughout life. For the candidates this is an unrepeatable experience – perhaps, even, one which they would not care to repeat, as they have, hopefully, moved on in faith since their confirmation and a further ‘catechumenate’ experience would now be inappropriate. For those confirmed as children, who consider themselves in need of nurture in basic Christianity as adults, many find *Alpha* or *Emmaus* courses helpful - or even joining the adult confirmands in their course, perhaps as sponsors!

For those adults new to faith, Baptism and Confirmation should, in any case, form part of the same rite. But for those who are lapsed and unconfirmed, confirmation as an adult can provide both the opportunity for a mature commitment of faith and the grace and strength of the Holy Spirit, given through the

laying-on of hands and the anointing with Chrism. This is a powerful argument for keeping the rite of Confirmation, and, perhaps, for encouraging children to be confirmed at an older age than at present, i.e. in their mid to late teens, when they have had the opportunity to ask questions and explore their faith.

This does not deny that the process of Christian Initiation is complete in baptism, but enriches the life of the developing Christian through a rite for strengthening with the Holy Spirit. To emphasise the 'complete' nature of baptism, the baptismal rite could incorporate a prayer for the Holy Spirit, without precluding the possibility of using such a prayer at confirmation – rather it may provide an encouraging echo of the candidate's baptism.

And so 'what of confirmation in the future?' As a 'completion' of the rite of Christian Initiation begun at Baptism, Confirmation clearly has no future, theologically. Yet as a mature commitment of faith within the framework of a laying-on of hands (and anointing with Chrism), confirmation has a clear pastoral role for both older children and adults. The consequences for liturgical provisions would not, then, be great, except insofar as any implication that confirmation 'completes' baptism should be avoided.

There has not been room, in this short essay, to do justice to historical experience or to the demands of the Gospel in our own generation. Our Baptism begins our Christian journey and the grace of Baptism continues with us as we grow and explore our faith. So echoes of Baptism will always be important in our Christian lives and in our liturgy - Kenneth Stevenson in his book *'The Mystery of Baptism in the Anglican Tradition'* writes that "we need to bring baptismal resources right into the

Eucharist itself . . . we need, above all, a deeper baptismal theology." The future of Confirmation is to play a significant role in making these resonances real for all the baptised.

NOTES

1. *Christian Initiation: A Report of the Doctrinal Commission of the Church in Wales*, p.25.
2. The earliest reference to a prayer for the Spirit at Baptism occurs in Hippolytus (*Documents of the baptismal liturgy*, p.6), for there is no reference to such a prayer in Justin Martyr or the Didache. Tertullian and Cyprian, who were not advocates of infant baptism, include the prayer, but in the Syriac texts (Cyril of Jerusalem and the Apostolic Constitutions), Chrismation only, without a prayer, is used - and Theodore of Mopsuestia claims that it is Chrismation which confers the Holy Spirit (op. cit. p.50). However, John Chrysostom states that 'through words and the hand of the priest (in the act of baptism) the Holy Spirit descends upon you' (op. cit. p.40 - my parentheses). Later texts are similarly inconclusive on the subject: Isidore of Seville (seventh cent.) says 'After baptism the Holy Spirit is given through the bishop with the laying-on of hands' (idem. p.111); whereas the Gelasian Sacramentary (eighth cent.) states that the prayer for the Spirit is made by the Bishop *at* Baptism (idem p. 188) and the Liber Ordinum (1052) tells us that the laying-on of hands and prayer for the Spirit follows immediately on Baptism (idem p.121). At the time of the Reformation Confirmation with prayer for the Holy Spirit was administered to children at the age of 7 years - although if the candidate was of age and the Bishop was present Confirmation followed Baptism. (Sarum rite 1543 idem p.248ff). This practice continued beyond the Reformation in the Anglican Church, although the age of Confirmation was raised.

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6. LITURGIES

The Children's Committee of the Church in Wales Council for Mission and Ministry commend the following two liturgies as different ways of celebrating the admission of baptised children to Holy Communion.

LITURGY 1

The liturgy takes place after the Peace in place of the Offertory or preparation of the gifts. It is recommended that the children to be admitted to Communion are invited to bring bread and wine and to stand with the President in front of the altar.

Reader *Jane and John* have been baptised in water. They have worshipped with us. They have watched as the bread is being broken and as the wine is being shared. They have listened to readings from the bible. They have learned about prayer. Today they are going to receive Holy Communion for the first time.

President *Jane and John* we welcome you in Jesus' name to receive Holy Communion with us.

Congregation **We welcome you** (*applause*).

President *Jane and John* you bring bread for the people of

God.

Congregation **This is our gift.**

President Blessed are you, Lord God of all Creation. Through your goodness we have this bread to offer, which earth has given and human hands have made. It will become for us the bread of life.

Congregation **Blessed be God for ever.**

President *Jane and John* you bring wine for the people of God.

Congregation **This is our gift.**

President Blessed are you, Lord God of all Creation. Through your goodness we have this wine to offer, fruit of the vine and work of human hands. It will become the cup of our salvation.

Congregation **Blessed be God for ever.**

LITURGY 2

The liturgy takes place directly before the peace, that is, after the intercessions and prayer of humble access in the Alternative Rite (Church in Wales 1994).

President Jesus is the true vine who gave his life on the Cross for us and for the whole world; he is the living bread who rose again from death to give us eternal life. From today, you will share with God's people the great feast of his love - the bread and wine which are the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, given for you.

NN., as God's people, we welcome you on this special day.

We have all been growing together in the Christian faith; learning about our Lord Jesus Christ; about his life, death, and resurrection; and about how we follow him every day of our lives.

NN., as you continue to love God, follow Jesus, and live the Christian life, do you wish to receive Holy Communion?

Children **Yes I do.**

President Parents and Sponsors, will you support these children as they grow in the Christian faith and encourage them, when they are ready, to be confirmed by the Bishop?

Parents and Sponsors **Yes we will.**

President People of God, these children are members together with us of the Body of Christ. Will you pray for them, support them, and encourage them on their Christian pilgrimage?

Congregation **Yes we will.**

President NN., in Jesus' name, we welcome you today to the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

Congregation **We welcome you.**

President Lord Jesus, our Good Shepherd, we thank you for the life and joy NN. bring to our worship. Guide and care for them and their families as they grow in knowledge and love, worship and service, and bring your life to the world. May they know your risen presence in this Sacrament of Holy Communion and in their

daily lives, and strengthen us all to love and serve you, now and for ever. **Amen.**

The Peace

President Blessed are those who make peace; they shall be called God's children.

The peace of the Lord be always with you

Congregation **And also with you.**

(Let us share with one another a sign of God's peace)

The Eucharist continues as usual. The children bring the bread and wine to the altar at the Offertory.

NOTES

1. This liturgy is intended to focus on welcome, rather than initiation, and to help the children feel confident, and relaxed about receiving Holy Communion, whilst being aware of the solemnity of the occasion.
2. Every child is a member of the community of faith and the contribution of all - those who receive and those who do not yet receive Holy Communion - should be affirmed.
3. Parents and Godparents and/or Sponsors should be involved throughout the preparation process and should be encouraged to continue their support of the children as their faith develops.
4. It is particularly important that the congregation understands what is happening and is willing to affirm and pray for the children.
5. The service at which the children are welcomed to Holy Communion should be appropriate for children. Where possible, the music should be familiar to them and the sermon, readings, intercessions, and eucharistic prayer should be accessible to their age group.
6. If desired, a link may be made with Baptism through the children holding their lighted baptismal candles during the Creed.
7. Certificates may be given at the Peace or after the service. The children's name should be recorded in the parish register.
8. Although the welcome to Holy Communion is done by the authority of the Bishop, it should normally only be presided over by the Parish Priest, to avoid comparison with Confirmation.
9. Project work undertaken by the children during their preparation could be used and/or displayed during the service.

RESOURCES

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