

of our young people so that more of them come to the point of wanting to make such a considered commitment at Confirmation, perhaps aged 16 or 17.

Are there Church of England Rules?

Yes. The Church of England authorised guidelines for children to receive communion in 1997. These have recently been given more formal status by being incorporated into Canon Law. The Bishop has the final decision as to whether a chaplaincy can admit children to communion.

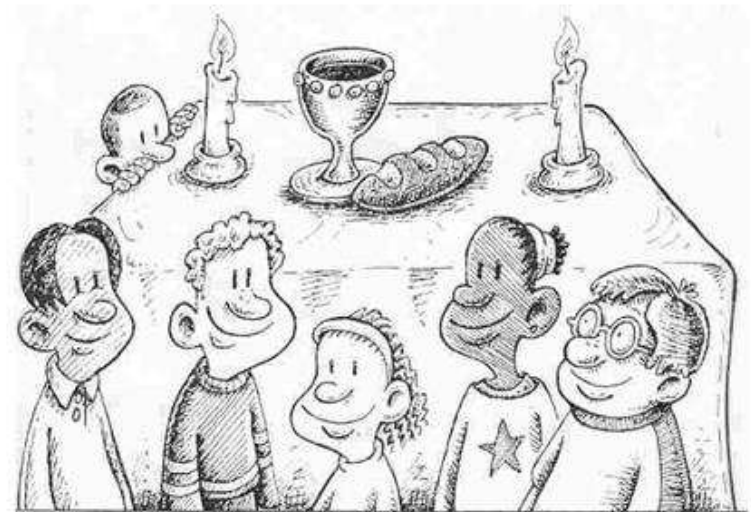
What Next?

- If after reading this leaflet you have comments, concerns or ideas, please fill in one of our questionnaires or speak to one of the clergy or church council members
- Further information is available on our church web-site www.htbrussels.com
- We will organise a meeting for parents and families to think about this question.
- After this, the Church Council will consider the mood of our church and decide whether, in principle, to go ahead.
- If there is this decision, we will seek the Bishop's advice and apply for his permission.
- We will then need to do further work. There will be a policy to write, preparation materials to consider, and practical arrangements for involving children in our communion services to decide.
- At the end of all of this, we would run preparation sessions for children and hold a service admitting children to communion. This would probably become an annual event.



Holy Trinity Brussels

Children and Communion



What is it about?

The *Children and Holy Communion* discussion is about admitting to communion children who are baptized and not yet confirmed.

Why are we discussing this?

Children and Communion has been on our Church Council's mind for some time. Our wider church has recently published new guidelines on the subject. Some children are already in the habit of receiving communion. Other families would very much like the children to receive communion but refrain because of our current rules.

Belonging to the community

We become *fully* part of the Christian community, the body of Christ, when we are baptized. Through their Baptism, adults and children are equal members of the body of Christ. Confirmation is a mature commitment to active discipleship, not a second level of initiation to admit people to communion.

What is Holy Communion

The church is the family of God's children. Holy Communion is the family meal, our food for the journey. It is a central part of our worship, which symbolizes to us the free gift of God's grace, enabling us to live by faith. It has its roots in the Passover, a Jewish meal in which children played a full part.

Why admit children to communion?

Christ commanded his followers to 'do this' to remember him (1 Cor. 11:24). He also made it clear that children are important members of the kingdom of God (Mark 10:13-16). If the church is to follow Jesus example we will value children and allow them to participate fully in the body of Christ. In fact, children have received communion in most churches and for most of the church's history.

Frequently asked questions

Why change what we're doing now?

Holy Communion is a central part of worship, and our children

are nearly always present when we celebrate communion. To exclude baptized, believing children from participating in it contradicts what they learn in other aspects of church life: that they belong, and that they are loved, valued and welcomed in the body of Christ.

The present practice of children being confirmed before receiving communion largely arose as part of a drive to educate English children at the time of the Reformation. Times, and ideas about education, have changed.

Will children understand?

Many adults do not fully understand communion, but that is no reason for excluding them. What matters is not a complete understanding, but knowing and loving Jesus, and children are just as capable of that as adults (sometimes more so). For both adults and children, understanding grows through participation, so to deny children communion denies them an important opportunity for growing in their spiritual life.

Will children misbehave?

Children are very good at sensing atmosphere. When they see those around them behaving with reverence, they echo that behaviour and learn from it. Our children already come to the altar rail, with their parents or leaders, and usually behave appropriately.

Which children would receive communion?

Children who are baptized, who love Jesus and who wish to receive communion would be admitted after appropriate preparation. No child will be pressurised into receiving communion before they feel ready. Our Sunday School leaders would work with parents to encourage each child to make their own decision.

What will happen to confirmation?

Confirmation is properly seen as the opportunity to make a mature commitment to Christ. Making it the 'gateway' to communion confuses this purpose. We would hope and expect that receiving communion before Confirmation would nurture the faith