



The Church of Scotland

TOGETHER AT THE TABLE

A resource for congregations to explore policies and practice in welcoming and including all ages in Holy Communion



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'Our church has accepted the place for children and young people at communion for over 25 years. This helpful booklet reflects on that journey and encourages Kirk Sessions and congregations to review their current practice as to how open and welcoming they are to people of all ages. By including children and young people in communion, churches have found this to be not only meaningful at a personal level, but also transformational for the corporate experience of communion.'

Rt Rev Colin Sinclair

Introduction

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayer. They continued to meet together in the temple court. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts. Acts 2:42; 46

The Church of Scotland seeks to be a place of welcome and hospitality for all, enabling and deepening spirituality and providing opportunities to grow in discipleship.

This *Together at the Table* booklet has been developed as a resource to help congregations gain a deeper understanding of Holy Communion in the reformed tradition, review and explore our practice in relation to communion, and suggest ways in which we might welcome and include children, young people and their families to this sacrament.

The booklet explores the theological background to including children and young people in communion and the place of baptism. There are specific questions for a Kirk Session to use to review the practice of communion in local congregations. You will also find ideas to help in planning a Holy Communion service, that encourages the active participation and engagement of people of all ages, as well as guidance on how to prepare and teach people about Holy Communion.

'If we are the Lord's family, around the Lord's Table, on the Lord's day, then children must be present.'(*Come and Join the Celebration, Muir and Pedley, 2001 p5*)

As you explore this topic, you might like to consider and share your personal experience of communion

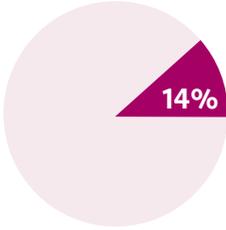
- What does the sacrament of Holy Communion mean to you?
- Describe one of your most significant experiences of communion. What made it special?

Terminology

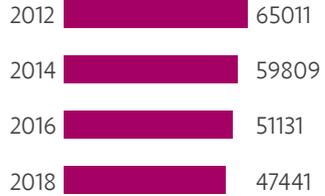
- i) Various terms are used to describe the sacrament and service of Holy Communion, including the Lord's Supper, which reminds us of Jesus sharing the Passover meal with his disciples. Communion, reflects the fellowship we have with each other and Jesus, in sharing bread and wine, and Eucharist, means thanksgiving. In this booklet, we are largely using the term Holy Communion for the service and communion for the sharing of the sacrament of the bread and wine. We refer to the Lord's Table as the table around which God's people gather to receive the sacrament.
 - ii) This booklet explores the welcome and inclusion of under 18s in the church and to Holy Communion. We refer to 'children and young people' to cover all under-18s.
 - iii) The Church of Scotland recognises two key sacraments – baptism and communion. A sacrament is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace and is a pledge of God's love and a gift of God's life. Sharing in these sacraments can be valuable milestones and experiences in an individual's journey of faith. As we gather around the Lord's Table, we remember God's acts of love and salvation and we meet with Jesus in bread and wine.
- The unattributed quotes used in this booklet come from Church of Scotland congregations across Scotland, in response to a 2017 survey on children and young people and communion
 - There are case studies from a number of different churches
 - Photos used come from New Kilpatrick Church, Bearsden, Portobello and Joppa Parish Church, Edinburgh.

Children and young people: trends in the Church of Scotland

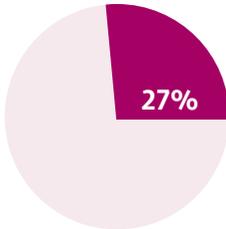
Under 18s in the Church of Scotland make up 14% of our congregations



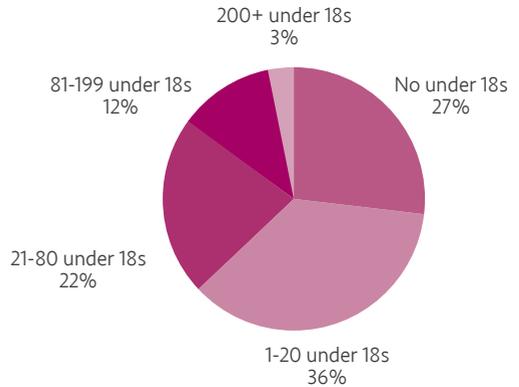
Numbers are declining:



27% decrease since 2012



Congregations in 2018 with:



Across the Kirk, there is great concern at the declining numbers of children and young people. Increasing numbers of churches have no children and young people at all coming regularly on a Sunday morning and few wider engagements with children, young people and families.

Church of Scotland church returns 2018



Baptism

Most churches are seeing a decrease in families bringing their children for baptism. There has been a 51% fall in the last six years. The number of adults being baptised is also declining. A further challenge is that those who are baptised are not necessarily remaining and growing in faith within the church. Where churches do have children and young people present in services, they are increasingly a mix of those who are baptised and unbaptised.

Frequency of Holy Communion services

Within the Church of Scotland there is great significance and reverence placed on communion. A communion service is usually part of a Sunday service and most frequently held quarterly. Some churches also offer communion at other times. The majority of communion services are planned for adult members and may not be accessible for all.

In 2018, 77% of Church of Scotland congregations had no children or young people receiving communion. Many of these have no under-18s associated with the congregation. However, out of the 47,441 children associated with the Church, only

2,975 (6.3%) received communion. Some churches do connect with a significant number of children and young people outwith Sundays, through uniformed organisations, schools, Messy Church, holiday clubs and other settings.

'In our efforts to nurture Christian faith in our children, we end up creating a separate community that is distinct and often isolated from the wider body of believers who participate in worship services and other core practices of the faith community.'
(Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus, Csinos and Beckwith, p111)

In a 2017 survey of Church of Scotland congregations with children and young people, 10% of the 215 respondents said that children and young people were not admitted to communion. Reasons given included the following:

- The Kirk Session had never discussed it, or were unclear if they had a policy
- Children were not present in worship, or were in their own groups when communion took place
- There was a lack of understanding of both the theology and the Act regarding children and young people and communion
- There was a lack of clarity on the relationship between receiving communion and baptism, profession of faith and church membership
- Some Kirk Sessions hold negative or 'traditional' attitudes, e.g. children and young people should not receive as they 'do not understand'
- There was a feeling of holding to tradition and doing things the same way they have always done

Churches that do welcome and include children and young people in the sacrament of Holy Communion, see a stronger sense of belonging, development of faith and discipleship and increased commitment across the whole church. Where children and young people never have an opportunity to be part of this important sacrament they miss out on being fully included as part of the Body of Christ and experiencing the unconditional love of God. What message is communicated where the invitation is given that 'all are welcome' but the elements are not offered to children and young people who are present?

'The children and young people in my congregation are treated with dignity and respect and fully included in the life of the church and sacrament of mystery, blessing and love. Including children and young people is normal practice for us. This is their church and they are very much part of the community of faith.'

'When we asked about bringing 30 of the teenagers we work with into communion, we were 'permitted' to sit at the back, but they were not to be served. We had hoped to encourage these young people further in their faith, but they were treated like 'second class citizens' which caused great damage.'

Kirkton Church, Carlisle

'We have been having our children and young people join us for communion for the last four years and now they are part of every communion service too. Younger children usually leave for the sermon and have a reminder of what communion means in their groups, but return for the invitation to communion and sit with their own family or as one group at the front. Teenagers stay in for the full communion service, children and young people help to serve communion. They never used to come in to the sanctuary at all during a communion service and wondered what was going on behind 'closed doors.' Our young people are delighted to be part of this. Some of our members are less keen on our children or young people being there. Somebody complained once that the children ran back into the church. So I asked them when was the last time they were so excited to be part of worship, that they ran in? We are gradually becoming more of one body in Christ.'

The theological background to admission of children and young people to communion

Dr Sarah Lane Richie – The Theological Forum of the Church of Scotland

Since 1992, children and young people have been admitted to communion in the Church of Scotland. The legislation surrounding children and young people and communion is permissive, allowing for a diversity of practice across congregations in terms of whether and when children and young people are permitted to take part in the Lord's Supper, in any particular congregation. Children and young people can be encouraged to participate in communion not only for pastoral reasons, but also because the theological logic behind the sacrament of communion warrants and even encourages the inclusion of children and young people.

As James B. Torrance has written in *Children at the Table* (written in 1982 to help the Church in thinking about questions around children and young people and communion) '*Christ baptises us into His Body that He might nourish us by faith.*'¹ At baptism, we are welcomed into the universal Church; baptism is a '*sign and seal of the covenant of grace, a sign of our ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins.*'²

Baptism is not about personal piety or devotion, but '*signifies the action and love of God in Christ*'³; thus, baptising children and young people is about '*recognizing the nature of grace and childlike faith, without which none can enter the Kingdom.*'⁴

It is thus in baptism that we recognise the inclusion of children and young people in the Body of Christ.

Once children and young people are recognised as fully included in the Body of Christ, it remains for them to be nourished in communion. As Torrance notes, '*God's covenant love (held out in Baptism and the Lord's Supper) is unconditioned by any considerations of worth or merit or good works – unconditioned even by faith and repentance and faith.*'⁵

1 James B. Torrance, "Some Theological Grounds for Admitting Children to the Lord's Table," in *Children at the Table*, ed. by David G. Hamilton and Finlay A. J. Macdonald, (Church of Scotland, 1982), p.6

2 Westminster Confession of Faith, xxviii.1

3 Act V.3, Consolidating Act (Anent The Sacraments)

4 Torrance, p.6

5 Torrance, p.5

Both baptism and communion are *'signs and seals of the Covenant of Grace,'* and this grace is never dependent on an individual's actions. It is true that in communion, we *'receive in faith that grace'* into which we have been baptised.⁶

A child's growing faith is thus an important consideration as they are welcomed at the Lord's Supper. But it is also true that the child's faith *'may be as a grain of mustard seed, and understanding minimal.'*⁷

Admitting such children and young people to the Table is not an indication of lowered standards or of not taking communion seriously, but is rather recognition of the nature and importance of their faith. As James Torrance aptly asks, *'where a child can hear and understand something of the meaning of the words, 'Take, eat...'* who can forbid him?'⁸

'We do not see that Scripture prohibits children from the Lord's Supper. Children share in the Passover meal in Exodus 12:26—27, and learn through asking questions and sharing in it. We believe this is how the Lord's Supper should be shared between all ages.'

6 Torrance, p.6

7 Torrance, p.6

8 Torrance, p.6

The place of baptism in relation to communion

Dr Sarah Lane Richie – The Theological Forum of the Church of Scotland

The Church of Scotland encourages children and young people to participate in communion. But what is the connection between communion and baptism? Should children and young people, or indeed anyone, be turned away from the table if they have not yet been baptised? These questions need to be considered both theologically and pastorally.

According to Act V (2000), *'The Lord's Table is open to any baptised person who loves the Lord and responds in faith to the invitation, 'Take, eat.'*⁹

This reflects what can be called the "normal order" of the sacraments, wherein baptism is to be considered a standard precondition for participation in communion. It is worth noting the theological rationale for this ordering. At baptism, we are welcomed into the universal Church; baptism is a "sign and seal of the covenant of grace," a sign of our *'ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins.'*¹⁰

The Lord's Supper is a calling and invitation for those *within* the Body of Christ to commemorate the sacrifice and work of Christ, to be fed by Him, and *'to be a bond and pledge of their communion with Him, and with each other, as members of His mystical body.'*¹¹

There is a clear theological logic and order to the sequencing of the sacraments.

The question here arises: What about unbaptised children and young people? Should they be permitted to participate in the Lord's Supper? While it is true that the normal order is for baptism to precede communion, it is also important to recognise the importance of pastoral considerations in such cases. There is real spiritual value in the act of seeking to participate in the Lord's Supper, to be nourished by Christ – whether or not the person is baptised. To turn away one who seeks to be fed by Christ would be to do real damage to the one who seeks.

9 Act V.12, Consolidating Act (Anent The Sacraments)

10 Westminster Confession of Faith, xxviii.1

11 Westminster Confession of Faith, xxix.1

In other words, while the Church remains committed to baptism preceding communion as the norm, this normal ordering does not mean that unbaptised persons should be turned away from the Table. Rather, such persons should be welcomed to the Lord's Supper, and subsequently encouraged to seek baptism and further instruction in the life of the Church. It is hoped that such subsequent encouragement would not be seen as anomalous – for such instruction should already be a component of the life of the Church.

Indeed, this question regarding unbaptised children may present a real opportunity. Admitting unbaptised children and young people to the Lord's Supper should not be seen as a softening of theological standards, but rather as the appropriate theological and pastoral response to one who seeks to be nourished by Christ. This being said, such situations remind us of the importance of offering ongoing instruction and education for both children and young people and adults.

Nurturing young lives in the faith and practice of the Church, as well as offering opportunities to make professions of faith, should be important milestones for the development of faith within the body of the Church. The development of creative, instructive, and grace-filled pathways for the spiritual development of children and young people should be a key focus for the Church. When such pathways are available, the question of unbaptised children and young people and the Lord's Supper becomes less problematic: the congregation can simultaneously affirm the unbaptised child's hunger for Christ, and subsequently extend an invitation to the child (and his or her family) to pursue instruction, participation in congregational life and baptism.

'Holy Communion is part of the whole church being serious about the vows made at baptism. 'We welcome you into the life and worship of the church'. How is this experienced by families who have their children baptised?'

'We have had long debates about admitting people who are either not baptised or who have yet to make a commitment of faith, to the Lord's Table. In exploring 1 Corinthians 11 and 12, we have come to the decision that Paul's restriction on admittance to the Lord's Table and his warnings about the seriousness of this are actually intended for Christians who know they are rebelling against God's will intentionally. This has allowed us to open communion as a missiological as well as a discipleship opportunity.'

Church of Scotland legislation

In 1992, The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland passed legislation recognising the right of Kirk Sessions to permit (baptised) children and young people to share in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

The key points in the Act (Consolidating Act V, anent the Sacraments 2000), that relate to the admission of children and young people to the Lord's Table are:

1. The Lord's Table is open to any baptised person who loves the Lord and responds in faith to the invitation "Take, eat"
2. A Kirk Session is obliged to test the response in faith of a baptised person before authorising admission to the Lord's Table. The Kirk Session should be satisfied that the baptised person has received instruction in the faith and order of the Church, is of Christian character and is ready to make public profession of faith, they can then be admitted to the Lord's Table and their name is added to the Communion Roll of the congregation
3. Where a Kirk Session is satisfied that baptised children and young people are being nurtured within the life and worship of the Church and love the Lord and respond in faith to the invitation "take, eat", it may admit such children and young people to the Lord's Table, after pastorally overseeing the response of faith of such children and young people to see when it is right for them to come to the Lord's Table. The names of such children and young people shall be admitted to the Communion Roll of the congregation, when they have made public profession of their faith

Twenty-five years on from this original Act, a number of congregations have still not formally agreed to welcome children and young people to communion and others are seeking clarity on the relationship between communion and baptism. The General Assembly of 2018 reaffirmed the Church's understanding that those who receive communion be baptised, while recognising that church law allows the offering of communion to an unbaptised person as part of the mission of the Church. Kirk Sessions were encouraged to review their practice in welcoming children and young people to communion.

'The clarification by the Theological Forum of the General Assembly, regarding communion and baptism, was helpful, especially in our current missional context. It gives an opportunity to learn about sacraments and commitment to the whole people of God.'

'I inherited a system which allowed the children of only those members who had asked, to be served. I refused to tolerate such a divisive and unjust approach, and Session were happy to move to full inclusion of the Sunday School. I wrote to all parents outlining the intention to serve the children and inviting questions and discussion. The only responses were enthusiastic welcoming of this development. The first time we had all the children in for communion I served them first and did so on the steps of the chancel – it was profoundly moving and some adult were in tears. Any debate about the appropriateness of including them ended that day.'

Guidance on how to respond to the legislation

The guidelines below can help a congregation think through how they can respond in the light of these theological and legal principles.

With regard to children and young people

- The normal order is baptism followed by admission to the Lord's Supper
- If they are not baptised, they can still be welcomed to receive Holy Communion and invited to be baptised at a later stage
- Be a regular church attendee at church or Sunday groups or Youth Fellowship etc. that helps them to grow in faith and discipleship
- Desire to receive communion
- Receive appropriate preparation and ongoing nurture by the church and in the home
- Be supported by their family and church members

With regard to the minister and the Kirk Session

- The minister can make a formal representation to the Kirk Session for anyone to be admitted to the Communion Roll
- The Kirk Session takes decisions concerning the admission of anyone to the Lord's Supper. The district elder and or children and young people's leaders should be actively involved
- Record on the Communion Roll the names and ages of children and young people receiving communion. These are also counted in the annual parish return
- Provide specific explanation and exploration on the nature and significance of the Lord's Supper
- Offer continuing nurture and opportunities to grow in faith and participate in worship
- Encourage profession of faith and membership of the Church of Scotland

The congregation should

- Commit to fulfill the baptism promises to welcome and nurture faith as 'members together of the Body of Christ'
- Welcome and include children and young people in all areas of worship and church life, including the sacrament of Holy Communion

'Reasons for admitting children and young people must not be merely pragmatic or sentimental, but flow from a positive understanding of the nature of the Gospel of grace and the Church as the Body of Christ.' (Children at the Table, J. B. Torrance, 1982 p5)

Communion in our reformed and reforming tradition

Rev Roddy Hamilton - New Kilpatrick Church

There is one thing that you can be sure of in the reformed tradition of communion: it has constantly been reformed. From sharing bread and wine round the minister's kitchen table, cleaned and scrubbed the day before, to the more beautiful pieces of furniture we use today; from people simply sharing oatcakes together, to the perfectly cubed pieces of white bread brought to you by elders; from tokens handed out only if you were suitably knowledgeable about the scriptures, to the greater emphasis on emotional intelligence now. Our communion service has continually been reshaped as our culture and traditions change.

Welcoming children and young people is part of this constant reforming principle of our faith. We have moved from a tradition of 'fencing the table' for those who are members, to a more inclusive approach. In communion we are not rewarding belief with belonging but being a place to belong, in order to come to belief. The relationship to the table is an emotional one rather than one of intelligence or understanding. Perhaps we should not be asking those who welcome children to communion to explain why they do so, but ask those who don't, why they do not.

Some might argue that the institutional church can become protectionist and resistant to change, rather than creating a space where meaningful change can happen. Yet the communion we offer, that is shaped by the Last Supper, is not a protected zone. Those gathered at that first table with Jesus were perhaps the least likely community the Church today would welcome round the table. Yet because of those folk, rather than despite them, the institution of communion is recognised as a grace-filled relationship, rather than one based on understanding and knowledge.

While there is always an argument for pattern and order in the sacrament, we often forget that pattern is there as a guide. Books of liturgy offer a pattern into which the community's own culture and traditions and events can be shaped into a unique form for that service. Being a free church we believe the whole liturgy can be reshaped and rewritten for the people; the liturgy is simply 'the work of the people'.

New material can be developed for every communion service, encouraging creativity, imagination and awareness of the context in which the service takes place. This allows the communion of earth and heaven to become a touching place, a sacramental connection, between the church and our contemporary

life. Inviting children to sit with us, invites us to rethink how we shape words and create liturgies that engage people of all ages and the whole community of faith, and perhaps even the community beyond the church in this gift for the world. As we creatively reimagine and re-enact this story, we find meaning in bread and wine and community each time we share.

One of the most interesting things found in congregations who offer communion to all ages, is that by explaining the traditions to children and young people as they sit round the table, adults are as much enlightened, having either forgotten or never known where those traditions have come from. A whole community learns and re-learns together. We can all be enabled to question and develop traditions, in order to reform them for the next generation. Many, if not most of our traditions, are human made and not divine.

As we are challenged in our beliefs and practice and allowed to question and rethink our traditions, we can deepen the meaning and bring new life into the place where God's people gather and share in the very place Jesus offers himself for each one of us. What makes the service sacred are the people who are there rather than the meal itself. The story we invest in simple bread and wine, reinterprets and offers new meaning for us.

Some particular changes in our tradition

The Altar: After the Reformation the altar was banned from churches. There was no communion table but the minister's kitchen table was often used. There was a riot in Govan when the first communion table was introduced to the Church of Scotland 100 years later.

Elders: Ruling or teaching elders approved who would attend and when communion would be served. When the eldership role changed from ruling to a more pastoral role, elders were given the job of moving the bread and wine from the communion table to the congregation, who then serve each other. You do not need to be ordained as an elder to do this.

Epiclesis: Epiclesis is the calling down of the Holy Spirit to set apart the bread and wine. John Knox deemed the epiclesis unnecessary. However, this was later changed and this is now the one thing that an ordained minister needs to perform. In reality, it is the whole setting of the service that sets the elements apart or makes them holy.

Kirk Session responsibilities

The Kirk Session is responsible for deciding how often and when Holy Communion is held and some of the practicalities around it. This includes consideration of how the sacrament is made available to members of the church, including the sick and housebound and also children and young people. Decisions relating to the control and style of worship lie with the minister.

'The Kirk Session's spiritual responsibility involves leadership, nurturing the spirituality of the congregation and its members, caring for the spiritual welfare of the parish and parishioners, encouraging members to participate in the worship and life of the congregation, and promoting mission and evangelism in the parish.'
(*Guidelines for Operating the Deed of Constitution, J. L. Weatherhead*)

Since 1992, when legislation was passed encouraging churches to welcome children and young people to communion, church practice on children and communion has varied. Some churches have been regularly welcoming children to the Lord's Table, others have never discussed it or changed their practice. Changes are made in this area when churches get a new minister or when the children and young people themselves have expressed interest. With the recognition of ageing congregations and the rapid decline in attendance of families and young people, there is an increased urgency to look at the kind of church we are and how we nurture faith and discipleship.

Below are some questions for a Kirk Session to consider. These considerations are important for all congregations, whether or not they have children present in Sunday services.

- Does your church have a vision and direction for ministry with children and young people?
- Do you consider how everyone, of any age, is welcomed and included in the life and worship of the church?
- How are all members of the church nurtured and growing in their faith and discipleship?

'The Kirk Session's stating a positive policy regarding children and communion reinforces the high value placed upon children and young people by the congregation.'

'Having children included in communion has sparked some good conversations, especially with some folk who have more traditional standpoints and are not too enthusiastic about younger participants.'



What is the current practice in your church?

Below are ways that a congregation might respond to children and young people participating in communion.

- Anyone who wishes to may receive communion
- Only members can receive communion
- Only those who understand can receive communion
- Only those who are baptised and prepared can receive communion
- Under-18s are ignored or 'passed over'
- Not aware that children and young people are allowed to receive communion
- Children do not come in for the communion service
- No children attend worship
- We are unwilling to change

- **Which of these practices relate to your church?**
- **Why is this your current practice?**
- **What might you want to change and why?**

Questions for the Kirk Session to consider

Whether or not the Church has children and young people associated with it, or already welcomes children and young people to communion, it is important for the Kirk Session to be aware of the legislation on children and young people and communion and review their policy and practice.

The following template can be used to guide a review and decision-making process:

Kirk Session children, young people and communion policy template

Congregation:

Presbytery:

Minister:

Session Clerk:

Consultation:

1. Has the Kirk Session discussed the admission of children and young people to communion in the light of the 1992 Act? Yes / No (date)
2. What was the outcome?
3. What is the reasoning behind this decision?
4. What advice and input was given for this discussion?
5. How has the wider congregation been included in the discussion and decision?
6. What strategy do you have for affirming children and young people as part of the Christian community?
7. How do you encourage and nurture children and young people on their journey of faith?

Preparation

8. How will preparation of children, young people and adults for Holy Communion be done?
9. Who will do this preparation and what support will they have?
10. What materials will be used?
11. How will the nurture of children and young people continue after they have been admitted to Holy Communion?
12. How will those receiving communion before baptism be encouraged towards baptism? How do you follow up from baptism?
13. How and when do you invite people to profession of faith?

Pastoral

- 14. How are parents involved and supported in the nurturing of faith and involvement of younger children in the church?
- 15. How will parents be involved in the process of deciding whether and when individual children are ready to take communion?
- 16. How will parents be involved in the preparation of children and young people?
- 17. What pastoral strategy will you have for children and young people who do not have parental support?

Practical

- 18. How much of the liturgy will communicant children and young people attend? How will they be involved?
- 19. How often will children and young people have the opportunity to receive communion?
- 20. What consideration has been given to the liturgy and service, when children and young people are present?
- 21. How will you make clear to parents, young people, or visitors that children and young people are welcome to receive communion?
- 22. Who will record the numbers of under-18s receiving communion on the Communion Roll (as required for the annual returns)?

Signed:

Minister..... **Date:**

Session Clerk..... **Date:**

Lenzie Union Parish Church

At our church, we were prompted by two elders to look at welcoming children to communion. A Boys Brigade officer had heard of a BB company helping in the serving of communion and a children's leader was keen that we should include our children. With recent General Assemblies discussing children, young people and communion, we were encouraged to discuss this in our Kirk Session. I had previously assumed that the Session was not interested in this. However, it transpired that the Session had considered it carefully and enthusiastically 15 years ago, but nothing had happened. So we have restarted discussions about this and are exploring the issues within the Kirk Session. The Session is wholeheartedly enthusiastic about wanting to welcome children within the church, and reasonably enthusiastic about welcoming children within communion. We have done some deep thinking and discussion about faith, and about what we do at communion. We've also had questions about whether age matters in receiving communion, the role of parents and needing to be sure we are actually remembering Jesus as we take bread and wine. We have discussed this with our children and parents and been encouraged by positive stories from other churches. This has been a very positive journey so far.

Practical and pastoral considerations

In welcoming children and young people to communion, there may be a number of practical and pastoral considerations for a Kirk Session to consider.

Practical

- **Should there be a minimum age to receive communion?**

There are no theological grounds for a minimum age for admitting a child to Holy Communion. Communion is offered by grace and is not related to human achievement or understanding or knowledge. This is a practical and pastoral issue and can be agreed by the Kirk Session and the parents.

'I am regularly asked, 'When are we doing communion again?' Communion is something that our children treasure and look forward to. It's something significant and more than words.'

- **Can we offer communion to those who are not baptised?**

Those who are not baptised can receive communion and can be encouraged to be baptised.

'Our Kirk Session believes that Holy Communion is an educative and evangelistic ordinance. Withholding it from the non-baptised children who are drawing close to Christ, as far as we can tell, hinders their journey of faith.'

- **When should the children and young people join the communion service?**

Some churches plan the whole service to welcome and include everyone. Others have the children and young people joining the congregation, from their groups, for the Communion Prayer. Some join their families for communion and others sit and receive with their group.

'My own children have found the transition to this church difficult because they were admitted to a table in a previous charge and are not welcome here. The current practice is that all children go directly to Sunday School on Communion Sunday. We are working towards a changed pattern.'

- **Should we have non-alcoholic wine?**

It is good to have a non-alcoholic option and gluten free option available for any communicants.

- **Can under-18s be involved in serving the elements?**

This does not need to be the sole responsibility of elders. Younger people may need to be prepared and practice what they are being asked to do.

'The capacity of children to lead particular sections in an act of worship, if they are properly prepared, supported and rehearsed, is much greater than many adults imagine.' (Guidance notes for the planning of a Eucharist at which children are present, The Liturgical Commission, Church of England)

- **How do we ensure due reverence in the service?**

Where children and young people have been prepared and know what to expect, they can appreciate the significance and know how to behave in different parts of the service. Children and young people can also bring joy and enthusiasm.

'Our children and young people are invited to the Table along with everyone else in the church family. They have learned a bit about communion, and approach the Lord's Table with a great deal of reverence, which is noted by the whole congregation.'

- **What if we have different types of communion services?**

It is important for all under-18s to be included and feel part of the whole Body of Christ in sharing the sacrament at the main service. Communion can also be offered at different times and in different styles or for specific groups, e.g. formal communion services, Messy Church or at a youth retreat.

'In our church we have a traditional communion, family communion and also an informal communion. Each kind of service has its own feel and all are appreciated. For our family communion we start with the words in the Book of Common Order and we weave in prayers and hymns suitable for all ages. There is all the joy and participation of a family service, but also a wonder when we come to share bread and wine. I personally appreciate all three types of communion services that we offer and feel each adds something to our worship and our being together.'

Pastoral

- **How is communion part of the ongoing nurture and discipleship for all ages in the congregation?**

Receiving the Lord's Supper, with fellow members of the Body of Christ, encourages deeper discipleship and commitment, with baptism, profession of faith, and membership, as further markers on their journey. It is important for people of all ages to continue to deepen and grow in their understanding and experience of communion and in their faith and relationship with God. Children learn by doing and Jesus asked us to 'do this and remember me.'

'The participation of our young people has been in the doing and letting that active experience make its own impact and speak for itself. The looks on their faces, the careful concentration of laying cloths and carrying plates and goblets, the eager watching and waiting their turn for the bread and juice, says it all.'
'For some, communion has been the catalyst for beginning a deeper faith journey. It gives a tangible and experiential way for both children and adults to express their faith.'

- **Children and young people cannot understand what communion is.**

None of us receive the sacrament because we are good or clever, nor because we fully understand. Even the very youngest can be included in the meal that unites us as a Christian family and tells the story of who we are as a community.

'This is not a believers table or a members table but a kingdom table - there is room for everyone. This bread and wine is not a reward for believing in a certain way or signing up to a course, but an invitation to live more fully in community.'

- **We don't have any children and young people, so do we need to discuss this?**

If we don't plan for and welcome children and families to be included in our services, they are unlikely to come at all. Every church needs to be ready and welcoming for families who may visit, come with grandparents, etc.

'When we came to this church, my daughter was the only person under 18 and sang in the choir. The church did not welcome young people to communion and she felt very excluded and hurt at being the only one not able to receive.'

- **Do you need to be prepared and taught about communion before receiving communion?**

Technically no, but it is not a bad thing for both adults and children to have times when they can learn what to expect and reflect on the significance of the sacrament. Preparation can be done as part of nurture groups, in special classes or before or during a communion service.

- **Should there be a formal welcome and inclusion for communion?**

The minister and elders have a role to play to make sure people know they are welcome and what to expect. Some churches have a special welcome or recognition where people may be receiving communion for the first time.

- **How can parents be involved in bringing children and young people to communion?**

It is important that the parents and caregivers of younger children are included in the discussions about their children receiving communion and are encouraged to talk about communion at home.

'We have only two families, with between them, six children. The children are committed and enthusiastic members of the church family. The congregation values and includes them.'

- **What do we do about visiting children and young people and families?**

Elders should make a special effort to welcome visitors and explain how communion happens on a Communion Sunday. Children and young people may be a communicant in their own church or never have had the experience.

'Our youth group visited another church which did not have any young people but we felt so welcomed and included by the elders and others. We were able to receive communion, which meant so much.'

- **Can we include people with additional needs?**

We need to appropriately nurture all people, whatever their age and ability, within the life and worship of the church. Baptism and communion can be offered to all and we may need to explore practical ways for each individual.

- **How do we include uniformed organisations?**

Both Girls and Boys Brigades invest in the spiritual development of young people and seek to be part of the local church. If you have a group associated with your church, do talk to them about how to involve them in the church and opportunities to receive communion.

'Most BB companies do not often have the opportunity to be included in communion. We had a very special communion at our recent camp.'

The following table shows some common patterns of ways in which children and young people typically experience the Lord's Supper.

Pre-schoolers	Experience communion as part of their worship experience, mimicking their parents' faith – just as they do when they fold their hands in prayer or turn the pages of a Bible storybook.
5 and 6 year olds	Are able to understand that the bread and wine (or juice), remind us of Jesus' body and blood. They understand that the celebration of communion reminds us that Jesus died on a cross and forgives our sins.
7 and 8 year olds	Experience communion as a reminder of Jesus' death and resurrection and are able to understand that the celebration of communion is something that God's family does together as a way of remembering Jesus' gift of forgiveness.
9 and 10 year olds	Continue to deepen their understanding that the bread and wine (or juice) are a reminder of Jesus' body and blood given through his death on the cross. They are beginning to understand metaphors and symbols and can be more thoughtful in their experience of the sacrament.
Young Teenagers	Are able to use metaphors and understand symbolism. Cognitively, many young teens have most of the same tools adults do to understand the richness of the sacrament. Most do not yet have the life experiences that adults do to help them put this sacrament in the context of their lives or of the bigger salvation story.
Children and Young People with Additional Needs	May have varying levels of understanding of the meaning of the Lord's Supper, but can appreciate that communion is a special experience and they are included in the Body of Christ. They should always be warmly welcomed and encouraged to participate.

Adapted with permission from Faith Formation Ministries, Christian Reformed Church

As you explore these and other questions that may arise, it is important to bear in mind the worship and discipleship needs of everyone – those of different ages and abilities, those already in the church as well as new people coming to the church and faith.

Portobello and Joppa Parish Church, Edinburgh

We have been working to develop a culture that is supportive of family ministry, and encourage the engagement and involvement of younger generations. We gave our children a space where they felt comfortable to talk, to question and to dream. One of our seven year olds asked, 'Why can't I come in for communion, every time communion is shared at church?' This and other questions from our young people were discussed by the Kirk Session. Drawing on ideas and insights from the national church and other denominations, it was agreed that all of our primary age children should be welcomed to our quarterly communions. This offers an excellent opportunity for our children, and indeed all of us, to learn more about this sacrament. Despite some initial concerns around reverence, choice and baptism before communion, we feel we have been able to convey to our children, through the lessons on Sundays and in conversation with parents, the understanding that they are invited and can choose not to receive. These lessons encouraged the reverence with which the children now approach communion. Communion for unbaptized children has been less of a concern for members, than reverence or the sense of welcome and hospitality. We pray the children will grow in faith through sharing in communion and our whole church can grow together, as a community, by sharing the sacrament.

Nurture and preparation for communion

Every church needs to consider how opportunities to grow in faith, discipleship and worship are deepened, for adults, children and young people. Each congregation can develop their own approach for preparation and explanation on communion. Preparation can be done within services, at home and in small groups. There are published materials available or locally written materials can be developed.

With groups

- Sessions on communion can be run for children and their parents together, in age groups or mixed ages
- Explore the Bible together and explain the different parts and elements of the service creatively
- Explore communion using videos and digital resources (these could also be used at home)
- Create and encourage special opportunities for young people to share and experience communion in a more relaxed setting, e.g. during a weekend away
- Consider the sacrament of Holy Communion in any discipleship courses or preparation for membership

'We hold a series of six classes, developed by the minister, to prepare people to join the congregation by profession of faith. One of these focuses exclusively on the sacraments.'

'We have very valuable discussions with our Sunday School before or after a communion service. Our youth group shares communion at the Easter Vigil. For some this is their first experience of communion and is very significant. We also have special communion services at our youth weekends away, which are particularly powerful because of the setting and reflective ambiance.'

At home

- Parents or carers can be involved in helping their children to know what to expect and to understand the significance of communion before, during, and after a communion service
- Encourage and resource parents to discuss communion at home, before the communion service



'The Sunday before a communion service, we remind people that 'communion is next Sunday' and encourage parents to talk to their children about what communion is and whom it is for (for the parents' sake as much as the children's!) We explain clearly in the service that sharing this bread and wine is to 'remember Jesus' and to say that we believe He died for us. Everyone who believes that, regardless of age, church experience, etc. is welcome to take, eat and drink.'

In services

- Explain what is happening in the different parts of the service through the communion narrative and the symbols
- Parents could have sheets and activities to use with their children as they share in the communion service together
- There may be specific occasions throughout the year when it is natural to include teaching for everyone on baptism, communion, and the nature of the church

'It is very encouraging for our elderly congregation to share communion with younger people.'

Areas you might include in thinking about Holy Communion:

- Life's journey and the journey of faith
- Identity and belonging as God's people
- Celebrating and remembering what Jesus has done for us
- A shared meal – bread and wine
- The structure and meaning of the Holy Communion service

'In our small rural church, preparing children for communion turned out to be as much about building relationships with one another as it was about the children knowing the right things. It was also about adults rekindling their own connection with the Eucharist, as they were encouraged to think more deeply. Some of them enjoyed rediscovering and learning new things and approaching communion with new meaning.' (Ready to Share One Bread, Harding and Millar, 2015, p37)

Bible passages to explore in relation to children, young people and communion

Your church may like to explore this further with small groups, in Bible study and through sermons and teaching. Below are some of the Bible passages that could be helpful.

- **The Passover Meal:** Exodus 12:21-27; Deuteronomy 6:1-9 - The last meal Jesus shared with his disciples was a Passover meal. Holy Communion and the events of the cross and resurrection are a fulfillment of Passover. 1 Corinthians 5:7 - Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed
- **Children recognise Jesus:** Matthew 21:14-16.
- **Jesus welcomes children:** Mark 10:13-16 - Jesus wants to fully welcome and include children. We should not hinder children or put rules and regulations in the way
- **The Last Supper:** Matthew 26:17-30 - Jesus invited the disciples to this meal. All the disciples were included in spite of their weaknesses and lack of understanding
- **Recognising Jesus in sharing meals:** John 6:5-14 - The feeding of the five thousand; Luke 7:36-49 - A meal with Simon the Pharisee; John 21:4-13 - A meal on a beach; Luke 24:28-35 - The Road to Emmaus
- **Communion in the Early Church:** 1 Corinthians 11:23-34 - Children and families were included, with due order and reverence
- **Parents and children's spirituality:** 1 Corinthians 7:14; Acts 16:34 - Children share in faith and spiritual practices as a family; Children are included in baptism and worship

Considerations for Holy Communion services

Holy Communion is a sacrament of God's grace and unconditional love, offered to everyone. Through sharing this sacrament together, our relationships with each other and with Christ are strengthened as the whole Body of Christ.

Every communion service follows a pattern and should relate to the readings for that Sunday and be appropriate for those present at that service. The Book of Common Order has an order of worship for Holy Communion when children and young people are present (the Fourth Order p.167). Those leading worship in the Church of Scotland have the freedom and opportunity to develop and create worship liturgy.

Where children and young people are present in all or any part of worship, some thought and support may be needed to make sure that they too are able to participate and engage in worship and find their place at the table. It is very important that children and young people have positive experiences of congregational worship and the sacraments. The congregation as a whole needs to be intentionally welcoming and willing to do some things in different ways, in order to include people of different ages and experiences of faith.

'If we believe that children are part of the church, then we must make sure that they can connect as fully as possible with the story and actions of one of our most important rituals.' (We All Share, Mina Munns, 2018, p9)

'The style of worship and the welcome offered in one of our communion services, means the young people don't come or stay. They feel more welcomed and included in the more informal service and choose to come again.'



Here are some key principles to bear in mind to ensure that everyone can participate meaningfully in a service of Holy Communion.

- Give clear guidance and explanation throughout the service
- Use simple language or explain particular words and use visual resources
- Help everyone become familiar with the structure, rituals, and symbols in the service
- Make use of the senses, with movement and creative use of the worship space
- Encourage a sense of mystery and wonder
- Involve people of different ages in readings, prayers, serving the elements etc. All ages can also be involved in planning and preparation for communion
- Invite younger people to participate with their family or with an adult they feel comfortable with
- Have a range of resources available to help younger children relate to the service, e.g. children's books and toys on communion
- Encourage conversations between generations about communion, sharing what communion means to them

'Our communion service is the one service that actively engages and includes our children and young people and they are happy to be part of.'



Enhancing participation of all ages in the sections of a communion service

In general, it is helpful to consider shorter, responsive liturgies and words that can engage children, young people and families.

With regard to specific parts of the service the following can be considered:

- **Gathering** – where will children and young people and families sit? How are they welcomed? Consider what words and actions might make everyone present feel truly welcome
- **Confession** – this can be done in a variety of different ways, along with explanation of why we do this
- **Readings** – consider what version you use, and different ways of sharing the reading, e.g. drama; children and young people being involved in sharing the reading; responsive reading
- **Sermon**– you might consider doing this in a different way that engages all who are present in the service; you could break the talk up into smaller sections; you could explore creative or participatory ways to engage people
- **Prayers** – these can be done in creative ways, e.g. in small groups, responsive prayers, and led by children and young people
- **Narrative** – there are a variety of ways to ‘tell the story’ and use the symbols
- **Invitation** – the invitation and welcome need to make clear that all are welcome to the Lord’s Table and explain how the sacrament is shared. Offer a blessing for those who do not wish to receive the sacrament
- **Music** – choose music that can engage and include everyone. Familiar songs and repeated phrases can work well

Considering spiritual styles

People express their spirituality, experience God and make sense of the world around them in a variety of different ways. These can be understood as 'spiritual styles', and most people have a preference in one or two of these areas. There are four distinct ways that people tend to connect with God:

- **Word** – connecting with God through knowing about God
'Word' people value spoken and written words, detail, accuracy and concreteness
- **Emotion** – connecting with God through feeling God's presence
'Emotion' people value the presence of others, e.g. in groups, dramas, dance etc.
- **Symbol** – connecting with God through mystery, symbols and images
'Symbol' people like to 'wonder' – at art, at nature, at pictures or objects
- **Action** – connecting with God in practical ways
'Action' people are often concerned with issues of justice and peace
(developed by David Csinos, *Children's Ministry that Fits*)

Much 'traditional' worship is very word focused and there is a need to explore ways to create worship that engages with other styles and preferences so that all those who are present are included and nurtured according to their dominant style, as well as given opportunities to explore different ways of experiencing God.

The sharing of Holy Communion naturally involves elements of each style – there are the words of the institution, the emotion of the shared experience, the symbols of the bread and wine, and the action of sharing the elements. The following suggestions give ideas on the varied ways that spiritual styles can be used to enrich a communion service.

Greenbank Church, Edinburgh

We have 3 services on our quarterly communion Sundays, none of which specifically included children. When we received a new Minister, the pattern was revised to make the 9.30am service an intentionally family-friendly communion, held in the round, in the church hall. This service celebrates the liveliness of our Christian community, without removing the beauty and mystery of the sacrament. Young people are encouraged to sit near the front with their families and there are rugs, to allow young children to crawl around or read books. People of all ages are involved in distributing the elements. The introduction of this service has led to a higher attendance of 70-90 people, from a wide age range, on communion Sunday, and has not detracted from the attendance at the later, more contemplative and formal communion service. Families in our church have been very positive on the experience of this family friendly provision of communion in our church.

<p>Word</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell the story of the Last Supper • Use participatory responses • Locate people and places mentioned in their historical context e.g. maps, timelines • Use liturgical, scriptural texts or poems e.g. Agnus Dei • Say 'The Body/Blood of Christ' as elements are shared • Offer the opportunity to write a response or prayer • Choose hymns for the rhythm/ rhyme of the words 	<p>Emotion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present the story as a drama • Involve a choir or dance group • Think about our feelings, or the feelings of those at the Last Supper • Share a sign of peace • Serve the elements to one another • Use relational language about God – Father, Mother, friend etc. • Offer an opportunity for discussion or talking with one another • Choose hymns that are participative, e.g. action songs
<p>Symbol</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set the table slowly and deliberately during the worship • Perform the symbolic actions in the narrative, e.g. visibly break the bread and take the cup • Include a time of silence • Light a candle • Display a relevant painting or artwork • Use Godly Play or ask 'I wonder' questions... without giving an answer • Offer the opportunity to respond creatively, e.g. draw a prayer • Choose hymns that have poignant tunes or that are repetitive 	<p>Action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite someone to bake the bread or prepare the elements • Offer everyone the chance to distribute the elements • Use Fair Trade wine and bread • Link the liturgy to practical actions of social justice or care for creation (e.g. sharing through a food bank) • Include church projects and charities in prayers • Offer an idea for an action to do during the week as a continuation of the worship • Choose hymns that refer to God's and our action in the world

'It is through our worship that we tell the story of our faith and reaffirm our belief. Therefore worship becomes not just the expression of our faith but also essential in the formation and growth of faith. Ritual, rite and liturgy are capable of both the nurturing and evangelising means of assisting people on the journey of faith.'

(Unfinished Business: Children and the Church, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, 2000, p.47)

Conclusion

Celebrating communion as a church family helps all of us to grow in our faith and experience of God and the church. We hope that your congregation can use *Together at the Table* to explore how worship might be shaped, in order to express that there is a place for all at the Lord's Table.

'We pray that across the church, we can have family celebrations of Holy Communion that are thanksgiving meals where those of all ages are welcome and in them, may we all know we are deeply loved by God, for Jesus has welcomed each one of us to his table.' Rt Rev Colin Sinclair

God who welcomes one and all,
You prepare a place for us,
a great big table,
with food and drink enough for everyone,
no matter what age we are or where we are from,
who we are, or who we are not.

In sharing bread broken for us,
help us to hunger for justice,
so more people can sit with us at Your table
without exclusion.

In sharing a drink from this cup,
help us thirst for more of Your living water,
to touch lands that are dry and barren,
to enliven faith that is parched.

Help us to share love and share peace,
as we all share in Your grace,
given to us all. AMEN

Further information

- **Ready to Share One Bread**, Nick Harding and Sandra Millar, SPCK, 2015. This book explores the theological basis and discipleship impact as well as case studies, a preparation course, and advice on including and involving children in Eucharistic worship
- **We All Share**, Mina Munns, K Mayhew, 1998. This book offers creative ideas and stories for young children and their families to participate in the themes and actions of one of our most important Christian rites
- **Welcome to the Lord's Table**, Margaret Withers, Bible Reading Fellowship, 2006. The course book and activity book cover key elements of what it means to be on the Christian journey and helps the child, family and the congregation explore Holy Communion
- **Children & Holy Communion**, Diana Murrie & Steve Pearce, Kevin Mayhew, 2006. A six session course for children aged 7 to 11. Including background, leaders' notes, take home sheets, craft and games activities, prayers, stories and song suggestions
- **The Meal Jesus Gave Us**, NT Wright, WJK Books, 2015. This gives the background of the Last Supper, the ways in which Christians have interpreted this event over the centuries, and what it means for us today. It includes questions for discussion or reflection after each chapter
- **Share this Feast – Reflecting on Holy Communion**, Methodist Publishing, 2018. Using contemporary Christian art and quotations from a variety of worship sources, this offers a devotional starting point for individual or group discussion
- **Holy Habits - Breaking Bread**, Bible Reading Fellowship, 2018. Worship and group material to explore communion in creative ways. Part of a series to explore and live out discipleship in a range of contexts and intergenerational, missional ways
- **A Table for All**, Inderjit Bhogal, Penistone Publications, 2000. Exploring radical hospitality, justice and change through the breaking of bread
- **Learn: Children and Young People**, edited S Farrant, Saint Andrew Press, 2017. Useful sections on baptism and communion, with questions to consider
- **The Good Shepherd and World Communion story in The Complete Guide to Godly Play Volume 4**, J Berryman, Church Publishing, 2018. This story connects communion across biblical themes and provides 'wondering questions' for all ages to consider
- **Welcoming Children to the Lord's Supper Toolkit**, Faith Formation Ministries, Christian Reformed Church. An online resource of stories, resources and ideas for education, families and worship.

Church of Scotland,
121 George Street,
Edinburgh, EH2 4YN

Tel: 0131 225 5722

Email: mandd@churchofscotland.org.uk

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