

# EXPLORING CHRISTIAN FAITH

*No. 13*

## *YOUR CHILD AND FIRST HOLY COMMUNION*



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AN INTRODUCTION

## **INTRODUCTION**

We believe that children should be included in the life of the Church as far as possible. For many years it has been apparent that their exclusion from Holy Communion has been causing difficulties whilst it has been clear that many are too young to be prepared for Confirmation.

In the Roman Catholic Church it has been customary to prepare children for Holy Communion before Confirmation. Recently more and more Anglican churches have introduced this step in faith for young people in order that they can know themselves to be fully part of the mystery of the Church and participate in its Sacramental life especially in the Eucharist. Anglicans, like Roman Catholics, believe the Eucharist is the central act of worship for Christians and expresses the nature of the Church in its relationship with God. *First Holy Communion* is most often celebrated by children around the age of seven or eight, when they have reached the age of reason and are capable of participating in the sacramental life of the Church. First Holy Communion must be preceded by the sacrament of Baptism.

In September 2002 the PCC of St. Andrew's agreed that we adopt this policy. We now offer a preparation Course for baptised children from the age of 7 to 13, whilst offering Confirmation to those aged 14 and over. Admission to Holy Communion does *not* replace Confirmation. Rather it acts as a stepping-stone to adult affirmation of that faith in which they have grown.

## **PREPARING FOR FIRST HOLY COMMUNION**

The best preparation for the Eucharist is taking your child to Mass regularly and helping your child understand what it is all about. However, we also require children to take part in a Course designed for them which takes place each Spring.

In First Holy Communion the children encounter Jesus in this very special sacrament. The Rite of *First Holy Communion* celebrates the child's second step toward full initiation into the Church: the first being their Baptism (Christening). After preparing through study the child is ready to receive Communion for the first time. The Sacrament consists of the outward form of Bread and Wine which communicate, for the believer, the inner and invisible graces God offer us and which we seek. Through the Eucharistic Prayer, offered at Mass by priest and people, Christ becomes fully present under these forms of Bread and Wine, which we then refer to as *Holy Communion*, or the *Blessed Sacrament* of Christ's Body and Blood.

Your involvement in the preparation of your children for First Holy Communion is paramount. The parish 'helps', but does not replace your part in the process of leading your children in the development of their faith, through the development and example of your own.

The Eucharist is the greatest gift that Jesus gave to us - the gift of himself. The Eucharist is a gift that takes a whole lifetime to open; it is a gift that requires a response from us. That is why it is so special and why we must take such care that our children are well-prepared.

### **FIRST HOLY COMMUNION PROGRAMME REQUIREMENTS**

First Holy Communion preparation programmes vary from place to place. In Sunday School your child will be following a Course designed to help them discover more about our Christian Faith. In the – short – Preparation Course for First Communion, the emphasis is on seeking to help the child understand the Sacraments, especially that of the Eucharist.

### **TRADITIONS**

First Holy Communion is traditionally a festive occasion for families. Traditions surrounding First Holy Communion usually include large family gatherings and First Holy Communion party to celebrate the child's First Holy Communion.

Those who receive this Sacrament sometimes wear new clothes to the ceremony that reflect the true significance of this holy event. Whilst this is not obligatory, white dresses and white rosettes worn for First Holy Communion are reminders of the white Baptismal robes - reminders of the clothes worn when we first entered the Body of Christ, the Church, and began our journey with Jesus. Boys typically wear a dark First Holy Communion suit with a white shirt and a First Holy Communion tie, or sometimes a white First Holy Communion suit. Girls, especially, wear white First Holy Communion dresses and often a First Holy Communion veil attached to a headdress, as well as white Holy Communion gloves. The veil symbolises the tablecloth used at the Last Supper and the dress the robes that Jesus wore.

First Holy Communion Gifts are usually given and often this will include gifts of a religious nature, such as First Holy Communion rosaries, First Holy Communion prayer books, First Holy Communion candle in addition to religious statues.

Many families will also take this opportunity to have formal, professional photographs taken, in addition to their own snapshots of the day.

## **CONCLUSION**

Those considering to have their children prepared will need to provide a copy of their baptism certificate.

Children and their parents are expected to attend Mass frequently (weekly).

Children are expected to attend all preparation classes and complete all course work.

According to the Church of England *Regulations for ADMISSION OF BAPTISED CHILDREN TO HOLY COMMUNION*, the parish must make: ‘adequate provision for preparation and continuing nurture in the Christian life and will encourage any child admitted to Holy Communion under these Regulations to be confirmed at the appropriate time.’ This we do through our Sunday School and, later on, through our programme for teenagers (the GapGroup).

The day when children receive their First Holy Communion is one of great joy for the whole church. Do feel free to discuss, with one of the priests, whether your child should be prepared for this next step in faith.

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## **YOUR FIRST HOLY COMMUNION**

- Pope John Paul II Speaks to Children

“Dear friends, there is no doubt that an unforgettable meeting with Jesus is First Holy Communion, a day to be remembered as one of life’s most beautiful. The Eucharist, instituted by Christ as the Last Supper on the night before his passion, is a sacrament of the New Covenant, the greatest of the sacraments. In this sacrament, the Lord becomes food for the soul under the appearance of bread and wine.

Children receive this sacrament solemnly for the first time and are encouraged to receive it afterwards as often as possible in order to remain in close friendship with Jesus.

To be able to receive Holy Communion, as you know, it is necessary to have received baptism. This is the first of sacraments and one most necessary for salvation. Baptism is a great event! In the church's first centuries, when baptism was received mostly by grownups, the ceremony ended with receiving the Eucharist, and was solemn as First Holy Communion is today. Later on, when baptism began to be given mainly to newborn babies, and this is the case of many of you, dear children, so that you do not remember the day of your baptism, the more solemn celebration was transferred to the moment of First Holy Communion.

The day of First Holy Communion is also a great day of celebration in the parish. I remember as though it was yesterday when together with the other boys and girls of my own age, I received the Eucharist for the first time in the parish church of my town.

For how many children in history of the church has the Eucharist been a source of spiritual strength, sometimes even heroic strength? How can we fail to be reminded, for example of holy boys and girls who lived in first centuries and are still known and venerated? St. Agnes, who lived in Rome; ...”

*Pope Benedict XVI said:*

"I also recommend that, in (the religious teaching of children), and especially in their preparation for First Holy Communion, children be taught the meaning and the beauty of spending time with Jesus, and helped to cultivate a sense of awe before his presence in the Eucharist." (*Sacramentum Caritatus*)

***From Anglican sources:***

Ambrose Bonwicke was a young man admitted to St John's College, Cambridge in 1710. When he made his First Holy Communion he prepared himself by 'examination' of his life. He made resolutions to avoid the sins which he felt most inclined to, and wrote his resolutions down in a list, adding new ones as needed. One of them reads, 'To avoid rash anger, I'll endeavour to gain a contempt of worldly trifles; not be eager about my meat, bear wrong, and remember that the greatest affronts I can suffer are less than my deserts.'