

Bread & Wine

Draw near with faith



Mary Hawes, formerly National Going for Growth (Children’s and Youth) Adviser for the Church of England, offers thoughts on including children and young people in Holy Communion services.

Recently, a class of Year 1 children (6-year-olds) visited the church where I serve as a priest. Their teachers wanted them to experience an actual church rather than just the photos they had seen during RE lessons. From the moment they entered the church, they wanted to get as close as possible to anything I was talking about – they hung over the side of the font, fascinated by the plastic bowl that held the water; they wanted to climb into the pulpit to see the view; they exclaimed at the ancient Bible on our lectern; and when seated in the choir stalls, couldn’t resist retrieving the hymn books, sheet music and packets of tissues left by the choir on Sunday.

Children are not passive observers – they are intuitive, eager explorers wanting to be close to what’s going on, to be involved in activity and to have the opportunity to ask questions. When they are present at Holy Communion they are also curious and want to be engaged, but it can be a challenge to do this meaningfully. Here are a few simple starting points to consider.

What’s happening?

It’s easy to take for granted that everyone knows what and why things are happening in a Holy Communion service. Holding a ‘What’s going on?’ session can offer a chance to explain what’s happening, give children (and their parents/carers) the opportunity to hear why we do what we do, ask questions, and learn any congregational responses (if these are used regularly in your service).

Ask what’s needed

Have a conversation with children and young people about how they feel included/excluded from Holy Communion. Ask them to suggest ways they would like to become more involved, or which would help them become more included. Sometimes our adult perspective doesn’t match theirs – so it’s best to ask.

Where are we now?

A simple timeline or clock can help parents/carers let their child to know what’s coming next in the service. ‘Look – it’s time to listen to the Bible. I wonder what we will hear today.’ ‘It’s nearly time to get the Communion table ready – what can you see happening?’

Include me

Consider the whole of the service in which Holy Communion is taking place. How can children and young people be involved in its various aspects – welcoming people? The readings? Leading the prayers? Helping prepare the Communion table?

Make it interactive

Spiritual styles [WEB](#) remind us that gestures, symbols and visual images are important in helping children, young people and adults come close to God. Look at the pattern of your service. Are there obvious areas where gesture or symbol could be used? Where the projection or provision of visual images or tactile objects could be incorporated? The Messy Church Eucharist, although intend for an Anglican context, offers some excellent ideas for places in worship (greeting, confession, intercessions, the Eucharistic Prayer) where an interactive aspect could be used [WEB](#).



Make it musical

Putting words to music helps with remembering things – which means singing some of the repeated phases or prayers in a service can make it easier to join in. The Revd Ally Barrett has used the tune of ‘Kum ba yah’ as the setting for prayers and responses used in Holy Communion, but there are many other possibilities that could be explored [WEB](#).



And, on the subject of music – when children and young people are present, try to include songs and hymns that have a simple tune, a refrain that can easily be picked up, and which espouse the theology of your denomination or congregation. Smaller children will enjoy using musical instruments; older children and young people might be invited to be part of the choir/singing group/worship band.

Liturgy bags and boxes

Some churches have created bags or boxes which contain several elements that can be taken out and used at particular points in the service (e.g. linking toys to symbolise gathering together, a Bible story book, a credal triangle, play bread, pattern and chalice for Holy Communion). They are designed either for a parent to support their child through the liturgy in a tactile way, or for a leader to use with several children, perhaps near the front of the church or to one side (while in view of what's happening). This site explores further what might be included in a liturgy bag or box (but always adapt them to suit your context) <http://www.spiritualchild.co.uk/liturgyboxes.html>

Just get close

Sometimes all that is needed to feel included is getting close to the action. Invite children to gather round the altar or Communion table while it is being prepared so that they can see and hear what's going on.

A word of caution

Not all children and young people are the same. While some might relish action songs and coming forward to help prepare the table, others may not. Be respectful of them – invite their participation rather than insist on it.

The elephant in the room

The best way to participate in Holy Communion is to be included in receiving the bread and the wine. Some denominations are more open to welcoming children to communion than others, or have particular regulations which need to be followed. If you do not already admit children to communion, have a conversation with your church leadership about what is permissible, and whether the journey to admission could be started.

Jesus took bread, gave thanks to God, broke it and shared it with his disciples. 'Do this to remember me,' he said. Children and young people need to be included in Holy Communion so that they too can remember Jesus, know that through the Holy Spirit he is with us now, and be sent out, strengthened in their faith, to love and serve the Lord.

Using Bread & Wine

Each set of Roots Bread & Wine resources – two per issue – is themed to fit with either a season covered by a particular Roots issue (e.g. Advent and Christmas) or with a general or overarching theme of some of the weeks in an issue (e.g. parables, or kingdom of God). We provide one set for each theme or season – rather than one per week – to aid continuity and familiarity.

What is Bread & Wine?

It is words, prayers and texts that, together with the usual weekly content, provide themed resources for intergenerational or all-age Communion worship. It includes:

A gathering prayer – a themed prayer suitable for the beginning of an all-age Communion service.

An invitation to penitence – a seasonal or thematic sentence or two to help people prepare themselves for an act of penitence. It is an alternative to that provided in the weekly resources, which is likely to be specific to that week's theme.

A Kyrie confession – a simple form of confession with three brief phrases, each leading to a response: 'Lord/Christ, have mercy'. *

An all-age prayer of confession – a seasonal or thematic prayer suitable for an all-age Communion context. Again, it is an alternative to that provided in the weekly resources, which is likely to be specific to that week's theme. **

An assurance of forgiveness – also known, in some traditions, as an 'absolution'. **

Gospel acclamation – in some traditions an acclamation, often a brief sentence or phrase from Scripture, together with said or sung alleluias, is used to introduce the Gospel reading.

Introduction to the Peace – an introduction and call to share the Peace; often followed by: 'Peace be with you' or similar words.

Short Preface for a (Eucharistic) Thanksgiving prayer – brief words of thanks and praise, focused on the theme of the season or occasion, suitable for use in the first part of a Communion Thanksgiving prayer, or in any part of worship where they might be appropriate.

A post-Communion prayer – a themed prayer suitable for the end of an all-age Communion service.

Prayers of blessing – two prayers of blessing, both suitable for an all-age Communion service: one short and simple, especially in its language, and the other more formal but still suitable for an all-age context.

* designed to be Church of England compliant; see [WEB](#) for more details.

** Church of England and other Anglican provinces allow only authorised words to be used.