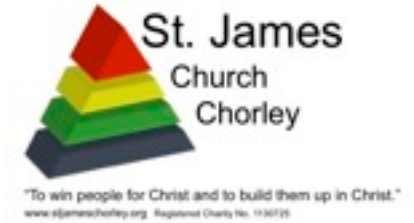


Lord's table. Except that we should expect those who wish to continue as communicant members of St James to be baptised because it is commanded by Christ (Mtt 28.20) and even he himself received baptism.

An article explaining why we baptise children was printed in the St James Magazine in December 2011 and is available on the church website (www.stjameschorley.org).

St James Chorley
Parochial Church Council
May 2012

Children at Communion



This paper has been approved by the St James Parochial Church Council as the policy for the Church. If you would like to discuss anything in this paper then please speak to the Minister.

1. Background

Until about the year 2000 the Church of England baptised children as infants, expected that they be confirmed as young people and then be admitted to the Lord's Table. Some churches tended to wait until young people were 14 or more before confirming them. This is because of the warnings in Scripture (see 1 Cor 10.21 & 11.27) and the expectation in the old Book of Common Prayer (which is still the standard for Church of England teaching) that confirmation requires a mature profession of faith. Other C. of E. churches tended to confirm children and admit them to communion at a much younger age as happens in Roman Catholic churches.

About 2000 the General Synod of the C. of E. approved some new guidelines from the House of Bishops. In particular these allow children to be admitted to Holy Communion before they are confirmed. There are various procedures that ought to be followed including the giving of instruction to children and parents, maintaining a register of those so admitted, giving a certificate, marking the event in some way and reporting on the parish practice to the Bishop.

2. Why the change?

It is possible to see a number of factors influencing this change in our society and in the churches.

- First, more churches have weekly communion than would have been the case a couple of generations ago.
- Secondly, children in Sunday Schools now often re-join the main service. My impression from various churches is that this is partly because parents want their children to be at the communion and partly because Sunday School teachers are less likely to attend other services and therefore want to receive communion themselves.
- Thirdly, we live in a culture that no longer wants to wait for things. This puts pressure on parents and particular pressure on children. Whether it is what they wear, watching adult films or such things as sex education, children are being pressured to grow up quicker and not wait.
- Fourthly, the drop off rate of children attending church has led to people thinking that if children are admitted to communion at a younger age they are less likely to drop away. I don't know of any evidence to support this view, and I think the evidence points in the other direction - making children wait makes it more likely that they will value communion when they finally reach that point.
- Fifthly, as happens in Chorley, some churches confirm at an early age, and children are confirmed at some church primary schools. Some children can then find that at church secondary school if they have a sincere faith they are not permitted to take communion whereas others who have been through a process are permitted to do so.
- Finally, many evangelicals have argued that if baptism is the sign of the new covenant, then children who are baptised should be admitted to the Lord's Supper as well. There is a parallel of sorts between the Lord's Supper and Passover and children were definitely present at Passover meals and encouraged to ask questions (Ex 12.26). Whilst this is a strong argument parents do not usually want their children to receive wine and very young children do not receive the bread.

One important thing to remember is that it is possible to obtain the benefits of the Lord's Supper without receiving the bread and wine. Roman Catholic teaching focuses on the grace being conveyed by the bread and wine but in Anglican theology (ie Thirty-Nine Articles, Book of Common Prayer and Ordinal) it is stressed the means by which the body and blood are received is faith. It is stated explicitly in the service for the Communion

of the Sick that the benefits are not dependent upon receiving the elements.

3. Present Practice

The problem we now face in the Church of England is that there is widespread confusion on this matter (as many others) and churches seem to be encouraged to do their own thing. At St James some parents want their children to receive, others do not, whilst those administering communion find it difficult to know who to give the bread and wine to. In addition the value of confirmation has been undermined.

In view of this, following consultation the PCC has agreed that the following policy should be pursued at St. James. This largely amounts to reverting to previous practice.

1. To encourage believing parents to have their children baptised.
2. To teach children the faith and encourage them to profess that faith for themselves as they grow.
3. To encourage confirmation as marking a mature profession of faith.
4. To require as the norm that children brought up in the church are confirmed before they are admitted to Communion.
5. Nevertheless, if parents wish to continue to give part of the bread to their children that should be at their discretion.
6. Where families join us from other churches, and the children were previously admitted to communion, to explain the practice at St. James. If they wish to continue with their former practice to permit this but endeavour to follow the Bishops' guidelines regarding instruction and maintaining a register (partly for the benefit of those administering the chalice and paten).
7. Where people visit us from other churches, of whatever denomination, to encourage them to take part in the Lord's Supper if it is their normal practice to do so and they are trusting in Christ.
8. Where adults join us from non-Anglican churches to encourage them to accept the practice of the Church of England, but if they do not feel able to do so not to make this a barrier to fellowship at the