

**Guidance on the Eucharist in Schools**

# School Eucharists in the Diocese of Norwich

This guidance is for those wishing to hold an Anglican Eucharist in a school context.

The Communion Service is at the heart of Anglican worship. It celebrates Jesus’ command to his disciples at the Last Supper ‘Do this in remembrance of me’ and in many churches is the main service on a Sunday. It is known by different names that reflect the tradition of the church concerned: Eucharist (from the Greek word meaning ‘thanksgiving’); Holy Communion; The Lord’s Supper; and Mass.

There are several reasons why schools may be keen to give pupils an experience of taking part in a Eucharist:

* The school is part of the local parish; therefore, it provides an opportunity for pupils to share in this key act of worship with the local community
* It provides an occasion for the school to worship in the context of the most important service of the church
* The first-hand experience of being present at a Eucharist can give pupils a sense of belonging and participation which demonstrates the church’s open invitation to all
* Learning about the Communion Service in Religious Education lessons is brought to life by taking part in one

It is not a requirement of the Church of England, or the Diocese of Norwich that schools celebrate the Eucharist. The decision about holding a school Eucharist must be made in conjunction with the vicar and reflect the practice of the parish in which the school is located. Consideration should be given to the faith background of the pupils in the school at the time.

A Eucharist celebrates belonging to a Christian community. Where some pupils and staff are unable to receive the bread and wine it can have the opposite effect. Where this is the case a Eucharist may not be appropriate but another form of service such as an Agape Meal may be more suitable.

Any school Eucharists that take place are part of the worship of the parish and should therefore be led by the vicar or (in case of a vacancy) by another Church of England minister. The Eucharist would be recorded in the parish service register. Suitable members of the parish may be invited to attend or assist. For example, where many pupils request a blessing the youth and children’s worker or church wardens may be able to assist, using an appropriate form of words.

The decision to hold a school Eucharist must be carefully considered by the Headteacher and the vicar. Governors, staff, parents and pupils should be consulted before the first Eucharist and their feedback gathered afterwards to enable improvements to be made. For the pupils to gain the most from the Eucharist careful preparation is needed and adequate time should be allocated for this before the service.

Some school Eucharists are for the staff, offered before or after school or during an inset day.

In secondary schools some Eucharists are optional for pupils held during form time or lunch break. In schools fortunate enough to have a chaplain they are likely to know the pupils who choose to attend and if the pupil can receive bread and wine.

There are different approaches to remembering Jesus’ sharing of bread and wine with pupils. Not all are a Eucharist.

## Agape

This is based on the agape meals shared by the early Christians. In a school context there would be a simple liturgy and prayers and some food and or drink would be shared. This food, often bread or grapes, has not been consecrated.

## Re-enactment of the Last Supper

This is an acting out of the events of the Last supper by adults or children. All present may share some bread and or grape juice during it. The bread and grape juice have not been consecrated. It may have been blessed in the course of the re-enactment but not using a Eucharistic prayer.

A demonstration of what happens in an Anglican Communion Service to be observed by pupils

This is a Eucharist at which adults who have been confirmed receive the bread and wine. The priest may stop and explain what they are doing to the pupils as they go through the service.

A Eucharist in which everyone can join in at some level with clear explanations of why some may receive and some not

This is a Eucharist in which all pupils are involved in aspects such as the singing, prayers and readings. Only those pupils who have been admitted to communion or confirmed will receive the bread and wine. However, all are made to feel part of the worship.

Who can receive the consecrated bread and wine?

* Adults who have been confirmed in the Church of England or the equivalent rite of membership in another Christian denomination.
* Pupils who have been confirmed in the Church of England.
* Pupils who have been admitted to communion before confirmation in the parish in which the school is located, or in their home parish if this is different.

Parental Permission

* Parental permission must be given for a pupil to receive communion.
* There needs to be discussion with parents or carers where a pupil attends a church of another Christian denomination in which they receive communion

What is meant by admission to communion before confirmation?

Under Church of England policy, only children who have been admitted to communion before confirmation may receive the elements. Parishes apply to the Bishop for the permission to admit children to communion in their parish. **Schools will need to discuss this with their parish clergy.**

There is no minimum age recommendation at which children can be admitted to communion. The age at which a child can receive communion is left to the vicar’s discretion. The guidance is clear that some understanding of the significance of what they are doing is required for children to receive communion.

Under Church of England policy this admission to communion must follow a period of preparation, usually undertaken in the parish.

Communion preparation should usually take place with one of the child’s parents present.

The preparation consists of an age appropriate course about communion, which includes information about confirmation.

At the end of the preparation course the children will be admitted to communion, and take their first communion, in their parish church. This often includes the presentation of a certificate and sometimes a Bible.

The parish keeps a register of children admitted to communion before confirmation.

Where admission to communion is within a school context this can only happen in parishes where the Bishop’s permission to admit children has been applied for and received**.**

In the event that preparation for communion is carried out in the school setting, for example in an after-school group, the pupils would be expected to be admitted to communion in the parish before receiving communion during a school Eucharist.

When a group of children from a school are being prepared to receive communion before confirmation, it should be made clear that they are part of a wider (Anglican) church community.

Children at a school may be from several different parishes, so communication between parish priests around the admission of children to communion is essential.

Developing spirituality

The Eucharist is a very emotional and moving service, the innate journey it takes a participant on within the service and the reminder it gives them as to the journey Jesus took nurtures personal spirituality of all involved. Personal development and spirituality are encouraged and encountered through asking ourselves big questions about why Jesus did what he did for us. This provides a series of links back to the last supper, the parallels to God’s love for all of creation all bring great depth of spiritual reflection. The Eucharist reassures all participants that there is something bigger than us and we can be forgiven. This personal time of self-reflection and the time for everyone coming together as the church / ‘the body of Christ’ underpins the spiritual nourishment this service provides.

Spiritual development is also found in prayer as the Eucharist is also about how God can heal/ make people better. It is the mystery behind the occasion/ the reverence – the chance to be still and grateful. The hearing and participating in various forms of prayer through the service, including asking for forgiveness, celebrating Jesus resurrection and stating our belief and commitment allows participants to encounter spirituality in many different ways.

Possible music for school Eucharists

Music is an essential element of any service. Schools who successfully develop a Eucharist service in their school community often choose music that is emotive and intimate. A good starting point is for the children to liaise with the clergy to plan the songs or hymns chosen within the service. This will bring a sense of familiarity for them. Other schools have chosen to use specific music that supports the distinctiveness of the service. A good example is the use of the book *Mass of the Risen Lord* by Mike Anderson (ISBN 1 84003 454 8). This comes with sheet music and a CD to allow children to practice the sung elements of the service back in school.

Ways to consult and engage your school communities

Schools will be concerned in how to best approach hosting a school Eucharist and will want to approach this with the sensitivity it deserves. Below is a simple flow chart which may help you in the process:

Note about **the use of fermented wine**

***Guidance taken from the Church of England website – Guidance on Celebrating the Eucharist with Children, prepared by The Liturgical Commission***

Canon B 17 specifies that the Eucharist is celebrated with ‘wine the fermented juice of the grape, good and wholesome’. Although the Church of England has always taught that the whole sacrament is received even if it is administered in one kind only, it has always been its deliberate practice to administer Holy Communion in both kinds. It should therefore be normal practice to offer consecrated wine to children, as well as consecrated bread. It may be that a parent or governor objects to the administration of any alcoholic wine to children. The current law states that ‘an alcoholic drink’ may not be given to a child under the age of five except in an emergency and under medical supervision. From the age of five, parents may allow a child to consume an alcoholic drink at home, but they may not buy their child an alcoholic drink in a public house or restaurant until the age of 16. The administration of communion wine at a service in church or school does not fall into either of these categories, but it is reasonable to suppose that a parent may give permission for any child over the age of five to take a sip from the chalice. The amount of alcohol consumed is tiny (< 0.04 units; even less if a generous quantity of water is added in the preparation of the chalice). If a parent declines to allow their own child to receive consecrated wine, then communion should be administered in one kind only to that child.

Acknowledgements

**Aspects of this document adapted from Diocese of Guildford guidance and developed with feedback from a range of Head Teachers and Clergy who undertake Eucharist services in schools within the Diocese of Norwich.**

Further Guidance

**Further guidance on celebrating the Eucharist with children can be accessed on the church of England website:**

[**www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/holy-communion/additional-0**](http://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/holy-communion/additional-0)