

Introduction

This guidance is intended to help those who are preparing a celebration of the Eucharist at which a significant number of children will be present, and at which it is intended to use one of the authorized Additional Eucharistic Prayers contained in this volume.

The guidance sets out:

- ¶ some general principles of best practice applicable when children are present at a Eucharist in significant numbers;
- ¶ specific guidelines which are related more specifically to the Additional Eucharistic Prayers.

It is assumed that those preparing such a celebration are familiar with the theology and practice of eucharistic celebrations in the Church of England, and that what is said here will be adjusted and adapted in appropriate ways in the light of local needs, resources, and experiences.

The Additional Eucharistic Prayers (and this guidance) have been prepared on the assumption that the majority of the congregation – or at least a significant proportion of it – is made up of children of primary school age, although the possibility has also been in mind that younger children may be present. The Eucharistic Prayers are not otherwise directed to particular age groups, least of all to successive age groups.

The most usual occasion for the celebration of a Eucharist in which a significant proportion of those taking part are children,¹ is a school Eucharist. This will commonly be celebrated in the school itself or in a parish church, although other settings can be imagined.

The increasing participation of children of all ages in celebrations of the Eucharist, and the admission of children to communion at a younger age and/or separately from confirmation, have been marked features of the life of the Church of England in recent years. The Dearing report *The Way Ahead: Church of England schools in the new millenium* (2001) emphasized the importance for the Church's mission of its work with schools; and schools themselves, especially church primary or secondary schools, have recognized the importance for their children of familiarity with the Eucharist. Many church schools now include a termly or half-termly celebration of the Eucharist in their school calendars. All this forms the immediate background to the preparation of Additional Eucharistic Prayers for use at celebrations of a service of Holy Communion at which a significant proportion of those present are children.

First principles

For all that a children's Eucharist has an integrity in itself as the Church's eucharistic act, it also serves as a preparation for and a bridge into the worshipping life of a Sunday eucharistic community, typically that of a parish church. One important part of that preparation is the building up of a repertoire of remembered liturgical texts. This makes it important to include in a children's Eucharist a number of texts which will, over time, be learned by heart. Another aspect of the preparation is the child's growing familiarity with the underlying structure of a celebration of the Eucharist, which in both Common Worship Order One and A Service of the Word with Holy Communion is as shown opposite. Within the underlying structure, there is considerable scope for the liturgy to be adapted to particular times and circumstances, but it is important that the underlying structure is maintained and becomes familiar.

Welcoming children to the holy table

The admission of unconfirmed children to Holy Communion is governed by Regulations published in 2006, pursuant to paragraph 1(a) of Canon B 15A. These are available on the Church of England's website. Only those children who have been admitted to Communion under the Regulations should be invited to receive communion at a children's Eucharist. These notes assume that a significant number of those present at a children's Eucharist will receive communion during the service. The principle that a significant proportion of those present at any celebration of the Eucharist should normally receive communion remains true for a children's Eucharist, but there will also be occasions, in the variety of settings in which a children's Eucharist is celebrated, when there are good pastoral and missionary reasons for departing from this principle, and arranging a celebration at which only a smaller number of those present receive communion.

In any case, provision needs to be made for those who are non-communicant, either because they have not yet been admitted to communion, or because they are members of a church whose discipline prevents them from receiving communion at an Anglican celebration, or for some other reason. A common practice would be for them to present themselves for an individual prayer of blessing at the time of communion, in which case there needs to be a clear and previously agreed way of signalling to the ministers that they are to be blessed rather than communicated. It may also be that members of other faith communities are present at the service, in which case the head teacher and governors should be consulted about the way in which their presence is acknowledged. Children who are not receiving communion or a blessing can also stay in their seats; permission to do this may need to be given explicitly.

Thought needs to be given to the way in which, and the places at which, communion is to be administered. Communion should be distributed only by those who have the bishop's permission to do so.

The president of the rite and the administration of Communion

The president at a children's Eucharist must always be someone who has authority to preside over the celebration, not only in terms of priestly ordination, but also in terms of licence and local permission. The president should also be someone who has a pastoral relationship with the school or other community to which the children belong. If a children's Eucharist takes place in a school, and the president is not one of the parish clergy, then there should be careful consultation between school and parish to clarify which children have or have not been admitted to communion. For similar reasons, it is important to keep parents well informed about any arrangements for a children's Eucharist.

The use of fermented wine

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.

Creating the space for a children's Eucharist

Children may not have the language to talk explicitly and connectedly about God, but their sense of God is direct and vivid: they 'move with ease in the world of the transcendent'.² Adults who have not altogether forgotten what it was like to be a child will recall this sense of the closeness and obviousness of God. It is connected to a child's sense of wonder, and to his or her ability to ask profound and simple questions: 'Who made God?', 'Why is there something rather than nothing?' The fact that the child cannot yet develop such a question in the way similar to that of an adult philosopher of religion does not mean that it is not a real question, really asked. In the *CommonWorship* baptismal rite, the whole congregation takes on a responsibility to help children to become gradually more articulate in developing their intuitive sense of God. But the sense of God is there already, and children's worship is to be taken seriously as a present reality, not as a future hope.

In planning a children's Eucharist it is important to look at the celebration from two points of view:

- ¶ from the point of view of the child;
- ¶ from the point of view of the wider Church.

The Eucharist is always the one Eucharist; it is not divided according to the age (or colour, or language, or gender) of those who celebrate it. In that sense, there can be neither a children's Eucharist, nor an adults' Eucharist. But the celebration may take its tone and style from those who celebrate it. Again, the Eucharist is celebrated to the glory of God because the Lord commands us to 'do this in memory' of him. It proclaims the death and resurrection of Jesus until he comes again in glory. It is the remembrance of God's saving work in Jesus, and a visible expression of the Church.

Wherever and however it is celebrated, the aim of the celebration is not to entertain those who are present, whether children or adults. But this does not mean that a children's Eucharist may not be filled with a properly child-like sense of playfulness, celebration, delight and fun, and it does not prevent those planning the service from trying to approach it from the point of view of a child – asking, so far as their adult imaginations allow, how each aspect of the celebration is likely to be experienced by a child. This approach needs to extend to the most basic of practicalities, for example children are smaller than adults, so their sight lines are different.

Every Eucharist needs to be seen as a whole, and these prayers have therefore to be placed within a rite that has been carefully planned in its entirety as a children's Eucharist. Several different learning styles will be present in any group of children, from the verbal and theoretical to the practical and experiential, and this variety has to be taken into account when designing both the celebration itself, and any activities that lead up to it. Similarly, the celebration itself is not a recitation of texts; it is a whole that includes speech, music, and silence as well as sight, taste, touch, and smell.

The capacity of children to be silent and to appreciate silence, if they are led into it carefully and deliberately, should not be underestimated. This might be made easier through the use of a gong to signify the beginning and ending of a 'period of quiet prayer', particularly during the intercessions. Images on a screen could effectively be used during such a period of silent prayer.

Specific practicalities

The initial planning and preparation needs to cover:

- ¶ the lay-out and physical preparation of the worship space;
- ¶ the height of the table at which the Eucharist is celebrated;
- ¶ the provision of any materials that are to be used in the celebration, some of which (e.g. bread, banners, vestments, frontals, flower arrangements, artwork, and similar 'installations') may be made by children who are taking part;
- ¶ the selection, arrangement, and (where appropriate) composition of texts to be used;
- ¶ the choice of readings and readers;
- ¶ the choice of music and musicians;
- ¶ the order and movement of processions;
- ¶ arrangements for the bringing of bread and wine, and the preparation of the table;
- ¶ arrangements for communion;
- ¶ the assessment and mitigation of any risks associated with the use of candles, or charcoals for incense.

The planning provides an opportunity to engage the whole community – school or church – in a process of creative preparation for the celebration, and to involve a wide range of people directly in it. It is especially important that children are as fully involved as possible in the preparation and celebration of the rite. The capacity of children to lead particular sections of an act of worship, if they are properly prepared, supported, and rehearsed, is much greater than many adults imagine.

The lay-out of the space needs particular attention if the celebration is not taking place in a church. At a Eucharist, the ordinary furniture of a school hall or classroom is put to an extraordinary use, and this needs to be reflected with care and imagination in the way in which a desk or folding dinner table, for example, is adapted for use as the holy table. Appropriate positions need to be found for both the bible and the table, both of which need to be clearly visible to children. Children can take part in this physical preparation of the space, in a way that provides a structured anticipation of the celebration over a period of time.

Composing fresh liturgical material within the rite

Some liturgical texts are fixed, or are to be selected from a field of authorized choices (e.g. collects, words of absolution, Affirmations of Faith, the Eucharistic Prayers themselves). The outline structure [here](#) shows which components of the rite must be used on every occasion, which must be used if the celebration takes place on a Sunday or Principal Feast or Principal Holy Day, and when authorized texts must be used. Other parts of the rite allow for the composition of fresh material. Such texts include:

- ¶ The individual lines of a Kyrie confession
- ¶ Prayers of intercession for the Church and the world
- ¶ Introductions to the Peace
- ¶ Short prayers for use at the preparation of the table
- ¶ Short proper prefaces
- ¶ The seder-style questions and answers in Prayer Two

There is no reason why children may not in principle be involved in this process of composition, as long as it is never turned into a competition. The president takes responsibility for the appropriateness of any texts prepared in this way, and has to ensure that they do not depart from the requirements of paragraph 3 of Canon B 5.

Participants in the celebration need to be confident, both about any words that they are to say and sing, and any actions they are to perform. A decision will need to be made about how much text the participants are given, and in what form. Some songs, responses and prayers can be learned in class beforehand so that they are committed to memory before the service takes place. Text can also be provided on paper, or on screen. It is worth remembering that children are very used in school to reading words from an interactive screen, and it will often be better to project words than to print multiple paper copies.

Lectionary readings

On many occasions (e.g. Harvest Festival, St Michael and All Angels, Ash Wednesday, days in Holy Week, Ascension Day) there is no need to look beyond the provision in authorized lectionaries, which should be used. On some other occasions (e.g. after a death in the school or at the beginning and end of the school year), readings suitable to that occasion may be chosen in preference to the readings appointed for the day in an authorized (weekday) lectionary. There must always be at least one reading, from the Gospels. Readings may be read in dramatized form, and may be accompanied by mime, dance, music, or puppetry. Similarly, reflection upon the scripture that has been read may take the form of a conventional address, or it may come through drama or dance, or in other ways.

Sharing the Peace

Although most modern rites place the Peace between the prayers of intercession and the preparation of the table, the Peace may also be exchanged at the beginning of the service, or at the end, or before the Breaking of the Bread.

Short proper prefaces

Special short prefaces have been composed as part of the second of the Additional Eucharistic Prayers in this volume. However, provision is made for the local composition of a very short preface (in the same way that short proper prefaces can be locally composed for use in Eucharistic Prayers A, B and C of *CommonWorship: Order One*). Even though a fresh composition may reflect the particular occasion of a celebration, it is important to remember that the task of the preface is always to celebrate the work of God in creation and redemption, and the faithfulness of his loving purpose in salvation-history.

The Additional Eucharistic Prayers

Two Additional Eucharistic Prayers are now provided for use at a children's Eucharist. Additional Eucharistic Prayer One makes use of short responses, which build up towards the Sanctus and the final *Amen*. Careful thought needs to be given beforehand to the way in which these responses are used, so that they support, rather than interrupt, the movement of the prayer as a whole. They may be said or sung, especially to music that anticipates the singing of the Sanctus. They may be repeated and varied dynamically: louder at first, and gradually becoming very soft, or vice versa. They will need to be cued, perhaps with a visual signal. The intention is to create a sense of deepening wonder.

Additional Eucharistic Prayer Two contains three question-and-answer couplets. The prayer may be used without the questions, which are printed in square brackets. Where there are strong pastoral reasons, the three couplets may be adapted in accordance with Canon B 5. Where the answer is altered from the default, the same answer should be used each time. If the couplets are used, a single child or group of children may ask the questions and the answer may be given by another child or group of children. The responses should not be made by the president or by the whole congregation. It is important that the dialogue is spoken in a way that does not appear to patronize or 'squash' any child or children that have asked the questions. In order for the questions and answers to be as dramatic and effective as possible in the liturgical celebration, it may be necessary to prepare children in advance for this participation.

Confidence to celebrate with children

An inspiring and uplifting Eucharistic celebration will always stem from several key factors:

- ¶ adequate preparation of a worshipping community, including the president;
- ¶ confidence from the president of the rite in gathering the worshipping community together and knowing the flow of the liturgy;
- ¶ understanding the needs of the community (so, for example, teachers and president listening to each other in respect of preparation for a school Eucharist).

It is important to rehearse the celebration, as a whole and in parts, so that children feel properly supported and confident in every contribution that they are making. At the same time, children should not be drilled in a way that will make them anxious. The celebration should be seemly and practised; it need not be liturgically perfect. The way in which the president presides is particularly important in drawing children into the celebration, and in communicating both confidence and a sense of invitation.

Footnotes

1 For the sake of brevity, the phrase 'children's Eucharist' will be used from this point onwards. Each time it appears, the fuller form of words is to be understood.

2 Sofia Cavalletti, *The Religious Potential of the Child*, New York: Paulist Press, 1993, p. 45. For excellent surveys of children's sense of, and response to, God, see David Hay with Rebecca Nye, *The Spirit of the Child*, revised ed., London: Jessica Kingsley, 2006, and Rebecca Nye, *Children's Spirituality: What it is and why it matters*, London: Church House Publishing, 2009.

Common Worship: Additional Eucharistic Prayers - with Guidance on Celebrating the Eucharist with Children, material from which is included here,

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