

Eucharists in Schools



Some Questions
and Some Answers

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Why have Eucharists in Schools?

A Eucharist is an expression of Christ in a gathered community. A school Eucharist is all about belonging to the community of the school, the community of the local church, and the world-wide Christian community.

A Eucharist in school helps to:

- give expression to the strong links already in place between the church school and its parish community – and with the wider Christian community
- give children an understanding of this central Christian act and what it means to Christians
- enrich the school's collective worship provision and contribute to spiritual development in the school
- explore the school's values
- develop the children's sense of God
- help children feel accepted and valued by the Church for who they are
- involve families in the locality in the life of the church

The National Society has the following article on its website. It was written by Canon John Hall when he was Secretary to the Society (now Dean of Westminster).

"The centre of the Church's mission."

It was said of Church schools - that they stand at the centre of the Church's mission to the nation - by General Synod in November 1998.

There were two intentions behind the wording: description and aspiration.

It was partly a description of fact.

Through the schools originally provided and in many ways sustained by the Church, the Church reaches families and whole communities it wouldn't otherwise reach.

It was partly a statement of aspiration.

Church schools should so clearly reflect the character of the Church that the Church's mission of service to the nation, to the community, generous and open but with the Gospel beating visibly beneath the surface, could be directly fulfilled through the work of Church schools.

There are many aspects to the Church's mission ("mission" means what the Church is "sent" to be and to do) but they all flow out from and are sustained by the worship of God, which lies at the very centre of the Church's life. The first question in the Westminster Shorter Catechism is, "What is the chief end of man? Answer: Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him for ever." (The catechism, of course, predates inclusive language.)

If Church schools are to be central to the Church's mission, they will reflect this centrality of worship to the life of the Church. In fact some wonderful worship takes place in Church schools, centred on God but also centred on the school community. Moreover it is often an attractive way into the worshipping Church for parents who would otherwise find the Church door forbidding, thus fulfilling both aspects of mission mentioned so far.

The characteristic form of Christian worship is the Eucharist, sometimes called the Lord's Supper, or the Mass, or Holy Communion. The Eucharist is celebrated in many Church schools. Others understand the importance of educating their pupils in Christian worship, including the Eucharist, but find it difficult to see the value for young pupils or those who cannot receive Holy Communion and might feel excluded. They perhaps should look more widely at the meaning of the Eucharist. Holy Communion is an important part but there is much more to it than that.

"Eucharist" is the Greek word for thanksgiving, the ancient name restored, and has become increasingly current as the name for the service of Holy Communion in the Church of England over the last thirty years. The name focuses attention on the so-called Eucharistic prayer, the Prayer of Thanksgiving, when the bread and wine are consecrated using the words of our Lord, rather than on the act of Holy Communion which follows it. This giving of thanks is an offering of ourselves to God, in which we "enter into the movement of Christ's self-offering to the Father". It is the association of ourselves with Christ's self-offering that alone makes our offering acceptable.

Another ancient name for the Eucharist also focuses attention away from the act of Holy Communion. This is the biblical name, found in St Luke's Gospel and in St Luke's second volume, the Acts of the Apostles.

Remember the journey to Emmaus, described by St Luke (Luke 24.13-35), on the day of the resurrection. Two disciples, Clopas and his companion, having heard strange rumours, have nevertheless given up hope and decided to return home. On their journey, they are joined by the risen Lord Jesus but do not at first recognize him. He explains to them the things said about him in the Scriptures (the Old Testament) and their hearts burn within them but still they fail to recognize him. They arrive at Emmaus and he makes as if to go on. But they say, "It's late. Stay with us." During supper in the inn, they recognize Jesus "at the breaking of bread". They are so excited that they rush back to Jerusalem to tell their fellow disciples.

St Luke tells us in the Acts of the Apostles four characteristics of the life of the early Church (Acts 2.42). "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." The "breaking of bread" would have evoked for them the Last Supper at which Jesus had taken bread, given thanks for it, broken it and given it, saying "Do this to remember me." It would be the moment at which they recognized the living Jesus with them, as those disciples had at Emmaus.

So, firstly an act of thanksgiving and self-offering and secondly recognizing Jesus in the breaking of bread: these are two of the many meanings of the Eucharist for pupils and others who might not be able to receive Holy Communion (despite the recent changes in Church discipline affecting many dioceses).

Who do we need to talk to?

The first discussion about School based Eucharists should take place between the headteacher of the school and the incumbent of the parish. Thereafter governors, staff and the local church community will all wish to discuss (and, it is hoped, support) the introduction of the Eucharist. *There will undoubtedly be a range of ideas and beliefs amongst this diverse group of people that will need to be respected and explored.* Some involved will find it important to explore theological issues; others will be more absorbed in organisational aspects. In some contexts it may be easier to plan a service together, drawing out the issues as they arise, rather than having an abstract discussion.

Key questions which will arise will probably be:

- Will / should all year groups attend?
- How will those who cannot receive Holy Communion be included / feel valued?
- How does this relate to the policy of the parish church with regard to children and Holy Communion?
- What preparation will the children receive – and who will undertake this?
- How will the Eucharist link with school RE and collective worship?
- Will parents, governors and / or the local church be invited to attend?

A careful briefing sheet for parents, with clear explanations of what is planned and why, should be provided in good time before the first Eucharist takes place. Parents may be especially concerned about the role their children will be expected to play in the service, and it is important that they realise they may withdraw their children from the service, just as with any other act of collective worship. Ideally, and if space allows, the school should consider inviting church members and children's parents to attend the Eucharist.

Usually the incumbent will preside at a school Eucharist, but where there are schools that serve multiple parishes some discussion needs to take place about how local clergy are to share in presiding at Eucharists. These neighbouring incumbents should be included in the dialogue at an early stage. (Note for Schools: Where *any* visiting clergy are asked to preside at a Eucharist it is essential to consult the local incumbent.)

It is important to remember that some school staff may feel vulnerable if they do not receive the elements at Communion when most other staff present do – staff training from the Diocese or the incumbent may be appropriate. Ultimately, staff members have the right to withdraw from this act of worship, just as they do in any act of collective worship.

How do we prepare the pupils?

Before introducing the Eucharist in school for the first time, there needs to be a planned teaching programme at a level appropriate to the age of the children (i.e. this will be different with each year group). This programme needs to range from the beliefs lying behind the service to the way the liturgy is structured.

Examples of teaching programmes which can be used in school can be found in:

- Exploring Holy Communion in Primary Schools. Jumping Fish Publications (Diocese of Gloucester) <http://www.gloucester.anglican.org/education/resources/> - this is tailored to individual year groups (*Reception – wine; Y1 – bread; Y2 – confession; Y3 – Trinity; Y4 – memory and symbolism; Y5 – salvation; Y6 – Kingdom of God*).
- Creative Communion. Margaret Withers & Tim Sledge. Bible Reading Fellowship. 9781841015330 (This is a parish based resource but the all-age workshops can be used in school.)
- www.educhurch.org.uk - Find out about communion at St Mary's, Combs, watch service clips, and do an interactive diamond about reasons for taking communion. www.request.org.uk – Separate infant and KS2/3 sections have material on communion and other aspects of Christian worship. They include details of an Anglican communion service and retellings of the Last Supper story, worksheets, annotated pictures, etc.

Before any Eucharist, but especially before the first, it is good to rehearse the words in class. It also helps if children already have some familiarity with parts of the service and this can be achieved by incorporating prayers, responses and music which are already used in collective worship. With primary children, books or service sheets can be very distracting in a service – a powerpoint of the service is far more effective (including images as well as words to support the liturgy).

Once Eucharists have become an established part of the school's annual timetable they will undoubtedly be linked to a particular time of the Church's Year (e.g. Easter, Pentecost) or of the school year (e.g. end of year). In some places the Eucharist in school may serve as the Eucharist for that day in the parish. Each time a Eucharist occurs there should be an opportunity for the theme of the Eucharist, and a reminder of the service itself, to form a natural part of RE lessons in all classes.

Where should the Eucharist take place? This needs to be discussed between the head teacher and the parish priest. It is best to have the first Eucharist in a place where the children are used to experiencing worship i.e. in the local church or at the school. Local circumstances will need to be taken into account such as accessibility, facilities, safety, musical resources, etc. If the service is to be held in the school, consideration will need to be given to the creation of an atmosphere that helps children enter into worship. Many schools already think about this carefully as they prepare for collective worship – you will find some photographs of this on http://www.churchschoolseast.org.uk/pictures_home.htm It can be part of the preparation for the Eucharist for pupils to work on themed decorations for the school hall or church. Some schools hold their summer Eucharist on the school playing field – this brings its own challenges!

A checklist for preparing for a Eucharist

- Where will the Eucharist take place, and how will this affect the dynamics of the worship?
- How is the worship space to be arranged?
- Can music or artwork be used to help create the right atmosphere?
- Where will the pupils be sitting (and what will they be able to see) – how will this enhance their experience?
- What will be used for the table/altar? Will there be a cross and candles on it? If children are sitting on the floor, will the communion table be at a suitable height for them to see?
- Where will the Bible be read from? Can the reader be seen and heard?
- Will those participating have sufficient of the text to follow the movement of the service, but not so much as to lose them?
- Will a sound system be needed? Who will control it?
- Are service sheets or hymn books to be provided?
- Will an OHP or projector be needed? Who will operate this?
- What visuals are needed and who will create them?
- Who will choose and lead the music? Where will any musicians be placed?
- How will any drama or other activity be arranged?
- How will the peace be shared?
- Who will provide bread, wine, candles and any other liturgical items?
- Who will administer the bread and wine? How will this be arranged?
- Will any children be involved in reading, leading prayers or as servers? When will they rehearse?



What form should the service take?

The Church of England's National Worship Development Officer has issued the following guidelines for Eucharists in Schools. They are based on the order for A Service of the Word with a Celebration of Holy Communion (Common Worship (Main Volume), p 27)

Purple highlight = authorized text required

ESSENTIAL	OPTIONAL
Greeting	
	Collect for Purity
Confession & Absolution	
	Gloria / Song of Praise
Collect	
	First Reading
	Psalm
	Second Reading
	[Hymn or Song]
	Gospel acclamation
Gospel reading	
	Sermon
	Creed / Affirmation of Faith (essential on Sundays and Holy Days)
Prayers of Intercession	
Peace	
Preparation of the Table	
Eucharistic Prayer	
Breaking of the Bread	
	Agnus Dei
The Lord's Prayer	
	Prayer of Humble Access
Administration of Holy Communion	
Post Communion prayer	
Blessing	
Dismissal	

The chart shows that, with a few obvious exceptions, the team which is planning a Eucharist in a school can select or create prayers and other elements of the service in child-friendly language.

Eucharistic Prayer H is the one most frequently used in all-age worship with children present, as its responsive nature helps them focus on the action of the liturgy.

Some schools have developed their own service and hymn sheets. Sometimes these are produced for the service; in others they use a standard format on card. Creative use of the overhead projector and Powerpoint displays can be extremely helpful and this mode of operating is usually preferred by the children as this helps them keep pace with the service – they are more likely to lose their place if they have individual cards..

It is important that the length of the service be appropriate to the age of the pupils present, and it may be useful to make a time plan for the sections of the service. Some parts can be achieved quickly while others, according to the theme of the worship, may need to be developed at greater length.

What about an Interpreted Eucharist? An interpreted or commentated Eucharist is where a person explains briefly each stage of the service before it takes place. Sometimes service books may be found with this commentary printed alongside, but in a school context the headteacher or one of the staff (or even suitably rehearsed pupils) could give the commentary. This reminds children and others present about what they have learned of the Eucharist, and acts as a gentle reminder about what they themselves should be doing at each stage. Properly handled, this can be a very effective teaching tool, and helps those present feel included in the movement of the service. The Diocese of Montreal, Canada, has an interesting 'Instructed Eucharist' for a very traditional service. It provides one model of how one might comment either to church children or even to some extent to school-children on some of the parts of the Eucharist. Details at: <http://www.montreal.anglican.org/resources/chldeuch.shtml>



How can the service be inclusive?

At the centre of the Eucharist is God's love and forgiveness which is unconditional and open to all. For many, however, the question of inclusion centres not on this truth, but on who receives communion.

It will be an important part of the pre-service preparation for children to feel affirmed that by coming forward for a blessing (however this is organised) they are not being regarded as second class or being sold short. Properly explained, children will understand why some people receive bread and wine and some do not – and as those who come forward for a blessing will probably be in the majority, children will not feel that they personally are being singled out and excluded. The evidence from All Saints School (see last page) suggests that pupils feel a personal blessing is something special.

Clear instructions should be given in the pre-service preparation, and in the service itself, on how to receive communion or a blessing.

Where a school serves different parishes, sensitive consideration should be given to their various practices regarding communion before confirmation, and how these relate to the policy of the parish in which the school is situated.

It is always good practice to evaluate initiatives in school, and an evaluation of the Eucharist which focuses on what the children have experienced, and how included they felt, will inform future planning.



Can the children lead the worship?

It is good practice for children and others present to be **involved in the worship in as many ways as possible**, providing music, prayers, readings, etc. They may also be involved in setting up the worship area and welcoming the congregation, as servers (where appropriate) and in bringing the bread and wine to the table. Care should be taken that this involvement does not slide into being a 'performance' rather than worship. It is essential that any children involved know exactly what they are required to do and where to sit so that they may participate naturally and with confidence.

PUPILS COULD PARTICIPATE IN ALL OF THE FOLLOWING WAYS:

It may be possible for pupils to **bake the bread** for the Eucharist in school.

Pupils can be shown how to **set up the hall** for a Eucharist (just as teams of pupils set up the hall for collective worship). This may include contributing **artwork** which reflects the theme of the service, or making a temporary altar frontal or banners.

Music can make a powerful contribution to worship and needs careful selection. A **school music group or choir**, or individuals can play a lead role here. Songs can be used at various points when all can join in: children can help choose suitable music to reflect the different moods of the service such as quiet contemplation or celebration.

- quiet singing or recorded music to create the mood as the children and others assemble
- a familiar song at the beginning, possibly for a procession
- a song reflecting the theme of the sermon/presentation
- a hymn or song while the table is being prepared
- quiet, reflective singing during communion
- a lively final hymn or song

The celebration of the Eucharist should have a **clear beginning**. A hymn or worship song can serve this purpose during which the presiding priest (president) and any children helping them may **process in formally**.

Schools are now using **opening words and greetings** in collective worship (see the recent resource "Flippin' Praise" for ideas on this). The opening words and greeting can be those commonly used in school and be delivered by a pupil.

The president or children may **introduce** the theme of the service.

Do you want to support the **confession** with a visual reinforcement of the message? This could include such things as blowing out candles as we think of the various things we are sorry for. OR Children could bring a small piece of "secret paper" with something written on it they are sorry about - these are burnt in a small brazier as a sign of God's forgiveness in our desire to start afresh. OR Each child/class/year group presents a stone or another object which represents failings already identified. These are laid down below a cross or in front of the altar table. At an appropriate time they are removed from sight symbolising the grace of God's forgiveness.

The **collect** is a prayer that relates to the theme or the season. The collect can be accompanied by a version of the prayer in more child-friendly language, perhaps written by the children.

The message of the **Gospel** may be shared in drama, or a children's story Bible be used. Pupils can bring the Bible in as a procession to be read. A child can undertake the reading.

An additional **presentation** (rather than a sermon) of some kind can be given. It may be a short talk, or the children could be involved in preparing their own interpretation of the theme of the readings. This could be dramatic or visual in some way.

In the **intercessions** we offer to God the needs of the church, the world and our local community (school or geographical) all of these prayers can be written and read by pupils. Sometimes silence is the best way to offer such prayer, but it is important to introduce this with some ideas of what to pray for. A 'prayer activity' or the lighting of candles can be helpful in establishing the right reactions; quiet music (eg from Taizé) between or behind spoken intercessions can be helpful. These can all be led by children. Any prayer ritual normally used in collective worship can be used here also.

The sharing of the **peace** needs to be handled sensitively but not necessarily solemnly. Children could greet their neighbours on either side, or the peace could be passed along the length of a row.

When the **table is prepared** (as the service moves from the Liturgy of the Word to the Liturgy of the Sacrament) a team of pupils could transform the plain table by covering it with a cloth and adding candles.

The **offertory** is when the gifts of bread and wine are brought forward (by children) to show that 'all things come from God and of his own do we give him'. Gifts of children's creative work may also be presented. Money that the school has been raising for charity can be brought forward, as signs that our whole lives are offered to God, and of our concern for the needs of others.

The **eucharistic prayer** - prayers D, E and H may be the most appropriate for use in schools. They all contain a number of common elements:

- Responses at the beginning and at other points to allow participation by the whole people of God
- A thanksgiving for what God has done for his people, leading them to freedom
- 'Holy, holy, holy ...' - the song of the angels Isaiah heard in his vision of the worship of God (Isaiah 6.3)
- The narrative of the last supper
- A prayer for the Holy Spirit to come on his people and the gifts in communion

Various musical versions of the **congregational responses** are available, and this could help children to focus on the action. *It is important that all present actually have sight of the action of the Eucharist.*

The **Lord's Prayer** The prayer can be said or sung – many schools will be familiar with a variety of musical versions of the prayer.

The **giving of communion** is the final action of the Eucharist. Clear guidance on how to receive the consecrated bread and wine or a blessing needs to be given. Schools where very few people are receiving could:

- invite children forward for an individual blessing
- invite up a class at a time – all join hands in a circle with the celebrant and be blessed as a class family
- have blessed (but not consecrated) Friendship Bread to give to the children as *they leave the service* – this could be replaced with e.g. mini-eggs at Easter! Friendship Bread is related to the Orthodox tradition of sharing bread with all who have attended the Eucharist.

The invitation to communion could be an inclusive one i.e. it should not refer specifically to the bread and wine or, conversely, it should refer to both the bread and wine and the blessing.

During the administration of communion, music, projected images or the suggestion of an idea to think about may be helpful as a focus for concentration.

How often?

This decision needs to be made by the incumbent and the head teacher together. It is best to take one service at a time, but, once introduced, many schools like to have the next service fairly soon after the first, to consolidate and build on the practice and principles established in the first service. Schools having regular Eucharists have a service anything from once a year to once a week, though the commonest pattern seems to be termly.

Eucharists are often linked to special aspects of the school's life, or to the Church's calendar. In many schools the Eucharistic worship arises naturally out of the curriculum themes or the whole term's worship pattern. .

Children's Voices

We asked some of the pupils of All Saints Interchurch School in March what they thought about their regular Eucharists. The first group attended Anglican churches with their families - three of them were confirmed recently and had begun receiving communion in school services. The second group did not come from church-going families.

Both groups agreed that the things they enjoyed or appreciated in the services were:

- high pupil participation in writing and reading prayers, readings, drama, responses etc
- Y6 children sit at the front with Reception pupils and guide them through the service
- The variety of worship songs and the special role of the choir
- The stories
- Words of the Eucharistic Prayer on powerpoint so that everyone can follow
- Everyone is blessed individually

The Anglican children said:

- "It feels like we are part of the Last Supper!"
- "Our friends are curious what the bread and wine taste like – some of them ask if it is legal for us to drink wine."
- "Most of us feel really comfortable with everything, but some of the boys get bored and just sit."
- "We feel left out when we cannot take the bread and wine in Mass, and our Catholic friends say the same thing about Eucharists."

The non church-going children said:

- "Sometimes we feel left out because the priests usually choose the children they know from church to read or lead – it should be fairer! It is fairer when the teachers choose people." Connected with this was – "It would help if the priests came into assemblies and our classes as well, so that we could get used to them."
- "The Eucharist is about half an hour, but sometimes it is an hour which is too long for the young ones to sit."
- "We feel privileged and special when the priest comes in and we have a proper blessing."
- "Not everything is on the powerpoints – we don't always know what is going on."
- "Our families come when they can,, it is special when they can get involved like Mother's Day... we should think of ways they can get involved without making it longer."
- "(In the Eucharist) we get properly involved with special people, all together like one big massive family – our school family."