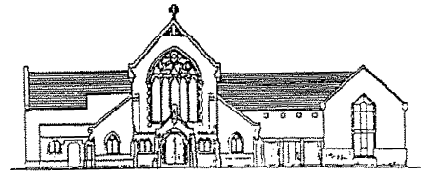


St John the Evangelist Sunday School



Policy for teaching of children leading to admission of children to Holy Communion

1. Admission of children: principles of the policy

- 1.1 The underlying principle of this policy is that the sacrament of Holy Communion is a central part of the worship of the whole family of the Church and should be available for anyone who wants to take part. Age is not a criterion; the only important criterion is the desire of the communicant to express their response to Jesus's sacrifice and resurrection. Given that no-one in this life will ever fully understand the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection, the issue of the level of understanding required is not black-and-white. Thus the more important criterion is the desire that follows from whatever level of understanding is appropriate to the age and experience and each individual.
- 1.2 We will admit to Communion any children who volunteer a desire to take Holy Communion and who can articulate a level of understanding appropriate for their age. The second condition presumes some prior instruction. The first condition presumes that the children themselves actually express a desire to take a full part in the sacrament of Communion. The corollary is that the staff of the Sunday School and the parents will not offer pro-active encouragement to the children, but allow children to take part in Communion in response to an expressed interest. Children who are to receive Communion will have been baptised and have their parents' permission.
- 1.3 Our approach will recognise that even young children are capable of expressing their faith and making some decisions about their lives, whilst understanding that young children can be overly receptive to suggestion. We will take seriously any expressed desire to take part in the sacrament of Communion, but will endeavour to ensure that this expression does not arise as a result of suggestion. Each child is an individual, and it will be essential that the admission of any child to Communion is handled on an individual basis.
- 1.4 The assumed pattern for this document is based around membership of the Sunday School in St John's. However, some children will serve in the Choir and thus will take less part or no part in the Sunday School. For these children the primary source of teaching will come within the Choir itself, which presents complementary opportunities for teaching and service. The teaching given in the Choir will be outlined in this document in parallel with the description of the work of the Sunday School.

2. St John's Sunday School

- 2.1 The Sunday School presently teaches children in the age range from around 3 to mid-teens in the following age groups: 3-4+, 5-7+, 8-10+ and 11+. Each class has one or more teachers, and helpers as appropriate.

- 2.2 The Sunday School meets each Sunday morning during the main morning Church service (the exceptions are when there is a family service, which we will comment on below, and during School holidays). The groups meet in the purpose-built community rooms of the Church.
- 2.3 The pattern of the regular sessions is that the whole Sunday School begins together with a short introduction and some singing of modern spiritual songs. The group then splits into individual classes for approximately 45 minutes.
- 2.4 The teaching in the classes follows the SALT programme produced by the Scripture Union. This is described in Section 4.
- 2.5 Each Sunday, the Sunday School joins the rest of the Church for the main part of the Communion service, beginning at the Peace. This is a very public act. The congregation is quiet whilst the Sunday School walks in to the Church. The children can follow the service using the standard service books, and the hymn following the peace is chosen to be suitable for the children. The act of the children joining the main congregation is greatly appreciated by the congregation and seen as essential in the life of the Church.
- 2.6 One Sunday each month is the Family Service, and the children are encouraged to come with their parents. This is an “all-age” service, both in style and content. The programme of family services is planned by a special committee chaired by the Vicar.

3. Pattern of teaching and worship in St John’s

- 3.1 The main teaching and worship at St John’s takes place during the traditional Sunday services. A large proportion of the morning services are Communion services. Once a month the main morning service is a family service without Communion.
- 3.2 Additional adult education is provided by regular series of mid-week teaching sessions, organised on an *ad hoc* basis.
- 3.3 One important activity concerned with teaching and worship is the Choir. Teaching in the Christian faith is an essential component of the training of the younger choristers as part of their work towards the Bishop’s awards, and this is taken very seriously in the St John’s Choir. Indeed, some children take the Bishop’s senior award.
- 3.4 St John’s has in the past run various types of holiday clubs for the children of the Parish.
- 3.5 St John’s has, until recently, run a midweek “Toddler Service” once a fortnight, which was designed for mothers and small children.

4. Pattern of teaching in St John’s Sunday School

- 4.1 The main teaching material used in the Sunday School follows the SALT programme produced by the Scripture Union. The programme consists of series of related topics, which typically last 4–6 weeks within a 3 month schedule. These topics are partly determined by the church’s year, and are integrated into the liturgical calendar.
- 4.2 The teaching material is produced in separate programmes for each age group, following the same set of topics. For each age group there is a separate leader’s book containing background information and suggestions for structuring the session. For example, there will be two versions of a story, and suggestions for practical activities. The leader has a great deal of flexibility in building a morning session from this material (indeed, the SALT material is specially designed to provide this flexibility). For each age group there is also an activity book for each child which is used in the teaching programme.

- 4.3 Additional teaching is provided in the Family Services as described above. It should also be noted that occasionally there is also a Family Communion Service, which is designed to introduce the Communion Service to children and their families with teaching about the components of the service.
- 4.4 The involvement of children in the worship of the Church, in joining with the Communion service, and in the family service, is seen as an essential part of their education.

5. Integration of the Sunday School into the Church

- 5.1 There are a number of options for children once they have grown too old for Sunday School. One popular option is the Choir, which allows development in service and also continued teaching. Teenagers are also encouraged to develop in service through acting as servers, or indeed helping in Sunday School.
- 5.2 The special needs for teenagers are catered for by a Sunday evening youth group. This meets fortnightly in a home. There is a varied programme with formal and informal components (including games, discussion, and some teaching) to help meet the specific social and spiritual needs of the members.

6. Management

- 6.1 The staff of the Sunday School meet together to discuss any practical or policy matters on an *ad hoc* basis. In the past this meeting was attended by the Vicar.
- 6.2 The responsibility to the PCC for the working of the Sunday School and the general youth work of St John's was, in the past, overseen by a committee of the PCC. This committee was able to take a global perspective of the youth work of the Church, and of the integration of the children into the whole life of St John's.
- 6.3 The Sunday School has a representation on the regular St John's team meetings chaired by the Vicar. This forum provides an opportunity for the work of the Sunday School to be discussed within the context of the work of the whole Church.

7. Children and Holy Communion

- 7.1 We have two models for the specific training of children in preparation of admission to Holy Communion, which will be used and adapted depending on individual circumstances.
- 7.2 The first model builds on the fact that the training occurs naturally as part of the normal cycle of education. Since the Sunday School takes part in the weekly Communion service, the children have a regular exposure to the celebration of the sacrament. The sacrament of Communion features regularly in the cycle of lessons, in particular associated with the teaching around Passiontide and Easter. The normal cycle of teaching in Sunday School includes training and preparation to allow children to receive Holy Communion, including regular teaching about the various elements of the Communion service. After a few early years in Sunday School, the training will have built up bit by bit. By the time that any individual child wants to start to receive Holy Communion, it is probable that he or she will already have received adequate training. Perhaps a discussion with the parents, together with an appraisal by the Sunday School teacher, will be enough to provide satisfaction that the child is ready. No fuss needs to be made.
- 7.3 Our second model will apply when appropriate rather than as the norm. Any child who asks about Communion can receive special instruction, either instead of the normal Sunday

School classes, or at a separate time. This would involve a set pattern of lessons in which the basic issues are dealt with one at a time, appropriate to the age of the child. The child can be evaluated during these sessions to determine whether he or she is actually ready. These special lessons can take place at any time during the year, and to avoid undue pro-active encouragement they will take place in response to an interest, not on a separate timetable.

8. Implementation

- 8.1 We will not specifically encourage children towards taking receiving Communion, but we do need to allow children to know that there is the possibility. There is clearly a delicate balance, in which parents have an important role. We will alert the parents to our policy, occasionally giving out our policy statement (packaged as part of a general set of policy statements at the start of the year), and will remind parents of the policy occasionally during the year in our monthly newsletters in a low-key manner.
- 8.2 The policy of allowing children to receive Holy Communion prior to Confirmation is in line with the trend towards viewing Confirmation as a specific statement of faith on approaching or entering into adulthood. In this view Confirmation also contains the element of admission to adult ministry, with the person offering himself/herself to the Church in service. Our policy on children receiving Holy Communion reinforces this interpretation of Confirmation.
- 8.3 In regard to the issue of early Communion and later Confirmation, we consider that our policy will be of positive benefit for our young people during the transition between childhood and adulthood. In the situation where a public expression of faith and service in the Church hinges (or at least appears to hinge) so strongly on Confirmation, we lose the opportunity to reinforce their developing faith and the growing confidence in their faith.