**The Admission of Children to Communion at St Paul’s Banbury**

**1. Principles**

**1.1 Theological Background**

The admission of children to communion is in accordance with the gospel of Christ as revealed in the Bible, and in particular his teaching on God’s grace, the Church, and communion:

*God’s grace* is available to all, regardless of age. Faith in God may be evident in children from an early age, and according to Jesus, it is children who exhibit the type of qualities that are needed in order to enter the kingdom of God. (Galatians 3.26-28; Mark 10.13-16)

*The Church* is a body made up of people of all ages, in which children are welcomed as full members, from birth. This is reflected in the baptism of infants on the basis of their parents’ faith in Christ and commitment to his people. (Matthew 28.18-20; Acts 16.31-34)

*Holy Communion* is a sign of God’s grace in Christ, our faith in him, and our belonging to his family. In communion we remember Jesus’ death, we participate in the benefits of his sacrifice, and we demonstrate our unity in him; we gather together in his name, around the table, to share signs of his grace. (1 Corinthians 11.23-25 & 10.16-17)

**1.2 Ecclesiological Background**

Historical evidence suggests that during the first half of the Church’s life, up until

1200 AD, it was common practice for children to receive communion with adults.

The Church of England, at a meeting of General Synod in November 1996, authorised the admission of children to communion before confirmation, and in 1997 the House of Bishops issued guidelines for Diocese and Parishes wishing to implement this policy.

Following a decision of its Senior Staff, the Diocese of Oxford issued its own guidelines in 1997 under the title ‘We Welcome You,’ and, in a letter to the Diocese, Bishop Richard described the admission of children to communion as ‘a matter of good pastoral practice and sound theological principle.’

In May 2005 the Elders (now the Ministry Team) of St Paul’s passed on a recommendation to the Parochial Church Council of St Paul’s to pursue the process towards the implementation of children receiving Holy Communion before confirmation according to the Bishops guidelines; and in June 2005 that recommendation was accepted by the PCC. In March 2006 the PCC passed a resolution to admit children to communion before confirmation, subject to the Area Bishop’s approval.

**2. Policy**

**2.1 Programme of Spiritual Nurture and Care**

Children are admitted to communion at St Paul’s as part of an on-going programme of spiritual nurture and care for every member, and in the light of our principles for the nurture and care of children (see Principles for the Nurture and Care of Children).

Our strategy is to provide opportunities for us to encourage one another in faith, hope, and love, as we learn from the Bible, serve one another, share the sacraments (baptism and communion), and pray together (Hebrews 10.19-25; Acts 2.42-43)

Our aim is to provide services that are accessible to all ages and that include Bible teaching appropriate to all ages.

**2.2 Criteria for the Admission of Children to Communion**

The decision to baptise a child and/or to admit him/her to communion is the responsibility of the parents or legal guardians of the child, taking into account the views of the child concerned, and in consultation with the church leadership.

For the purposes of this policy, a child is defined as someone under 18 years old.

a. Children should indicate a desire to participate in communion, to come to the table and to receive the bread and wine.

b. Recognising that baptism is the primary sign of belonging to the church family, children should be baptised.

c. Parental consent, or the consent of a legal guardian, should be obtained.

d. The parent or legal guardian who gives consent should themselves be baptised and communicant members of St Paul’s. If not, a suitable sponsor should be appointed from the congregation with the consent of the parents or legal guardians.

e. When receiving communion, a child should be accompanied by a parent, legal guardian, or sponsor, to guide and assist as necessary.

f. A child’s name should be entered in the register of those admitted to communion before confirmation, and the child’s baptism certificate may be endorsed.

**2.3 Education and Support**

Teaching and support for children and young people wishing to receive communion is provided as part of our on-going programme of spiritual nurture and care for children at St Paul’s (see Principles for the Nurture and Care of Children). The church recognises the primary responsibility of parents/guardians in this matter, and in preparing children for baptism and participation in communion.

Children admitted to communion are expected to take part in the church’s programme for the teaching and nurture of children and young people, which will include relevant teaching about the significance of baptism and communion. However, it is recognised that individuals will differ in their level of development and spiritual awareness, and that the support provided by the church and by parents should be tailored accordingly.

That programme for teaching and nurture of children and young people will be kept under review by those responsible for children’s work and the PCC.

**2.4 Implications for Sunday Services**

Children are welcome to receive communion whenever it is celebrated by the church family.

At services when the Bible teaching takes place in separate age groups, children are expected to be present for the Peace and the Eucharistic Prayer prior to receiving communion.

Children receive communion accompanied by their parent, guardian or sponsor.

**2.5 The Place of Confirmation**

Children and young people are encouraged to see confirmation as an opportunity for those who have been baptised as infants to make their own, considered and public profession of faith.

**3. Implementation**

**3.1 Introduction for Families**

A meeting will be held with parents/guardians, children and young people interested in receiving communion before confirmation to discuss the relevant issues.

**3.2 Interest among Children and Young People**

The issue will be raised in the children’s groups and youth group, and with individuals, in order to gauge the level of interest and the desire among individuals to participate at communion.

**3.3 Parental Consent**

A meeting will be held with parents/guardians to obtain consent for admission, and if appropriate for the appointment of a sponsor, and parents/guardians are asked to sign a form giving the child’s name, age, address, telephone number, date of baptism, and name of sponsor if appropriate.

**3.4 Teaching and Support**

Specific teaching will be included in the children and youth programme that covers the significance of baptism and communion, within the context of personal faith in Christ and the importance of church membership.

Meetings will be provided for families considering the admission of children to communion before confirmation.

We will take into account the particular needs of individual children, including those with learning difficulties who show a desire to participate in communion.

**3.5 Record Keeping**

A register of those admitted to communion before confirmation will be kept, and the baptism certificates of those admitted may be endorsed; the register to be kept along with the forms of parental consent.

**3.6 Implications for Services**

We will ensure that the content and structure of communion services is appropriate and accessible for children and young people, and that there is sufficient time for their Bible teaching in their groups.

Parents/guardians/sponsors will be encouraged to indicate to those administering the bread and the wine whether or not the children in their care have been admitted to communion, or, in the case of the chalice, to serve them themselves.

**3.7 Other Churches**

We will uphold the principle that children admitted to communion at St Paul’s should be allowed to receive communion in other churches, and welcome children who have been admitted elsewhere to receive communion at St Paul’s.

**3.8 Confirmation**

We will encourage those admitted to communion before confirmation to consider the importance of making a public confirmation of their faith in Christ and commitment to his people.

**3.9 Annual Review**

This policy will be reviewed annually at a meeting of the Parochial Church Council.

*Approved by the PCC on 8 May 2006*

*and by Bishop Colin on 12 May 2006*

*Revised by the PCC on 14 May 2012*

*Revised by the PCC on 12 May 2014*

*Revised by the PCC on 11 May 2015*

*Approved by the PCC on 9th May 2016*

*Approved by the PCC on 11th September 2017*