



# Working On Worship (6)

## Celebrating the Eucharist in school

### What is the Eucharist?

**The Eucharist** is one of the names given to the service at which Christians obey Jesus' command to 'remember him' in bread and wine. Jesus gave this command at the last meal he had with his followers before he died; the bread and wine represented his body and blood about to be offered as a sacrifice for them. The service may also be called Holy Communion, the Lord's Supper or the Mass and, for most Christians, receiving 'bread and wine' at this service is an important part of regular worship.

In the Anglican church this service is the most important act of worship and takes place on a regular basis. Children in Anglican churches generally wait until being 'confirmed' in their faith before taking the bread and wine themselves but the move towards communion before confirmation is gaining ground. Catholic children take 'First Holy Communion' at about seven years of age and children in Orthodox churches from baptism onwards.

### Should we celebrate Eucharist in a Church school?

Pupils in all schools should learn about Eucharist or Holy Communion as part of their RE programme. They may visit a church to find out about a communion service or have the chance to ask local clergy about the service, explore its symbolism and so on.

In a church school, which has to provide an act of Christian worship each day which reflects their Anglican character, there is the possibility of celebrating a Eucharist, in church or in school itself. Such a celebration might follow a variety of patterns, for example, children and staff could join a regular mid-week celebration at the parish church, or the priest could hold a service in school. In

some schools a Eucharist takes place on special occasions such as Easter or Leavers' Day, in others a weekly, monthly or termly celebration is normal.



In schools where Eucharist is celebrated, the priest, staff, governors and pupils themselves should be involved in discussion so that what is offered is of good quality, honouring to God and both nurturing and challenging for the worshippers. Regular opportunities should be taken to review practice and determine the impact of this act of worship.

If a decision is taken to investigate holding a school Eucharist for the first time, good preparation is essential.

If participating in a Eucharist is deemed unsuitable for pupils, then the head, staff and governors should undoubtedly ensure children learn about this central act of worship in the life of the church.

### **What about those who do not take communion?**

If a school holds a Eucharist, the majority of children, and possibly staff, may not take communion for a variety of reasons. The effect of this can be negative if the only reason for attending the service is seen as taking the bread and wine.

The booklet 'In Memory of Me', points out that at a football match the point is to be on the pitch, playing and scoring goals but not everyone at the match will do so!

At a Eucharist, the point is to be part of the celebration and thanksgiving, to remember Jesus, to recognize him in the bread and wine, as well as to eat. There are opportunities for praising and confessing, learning and proclaiming, singing and praying, making peace, receiving a blessing and offering gifts – each of these can be inclusive in some way when their importance is stressed and they are well-prepared.



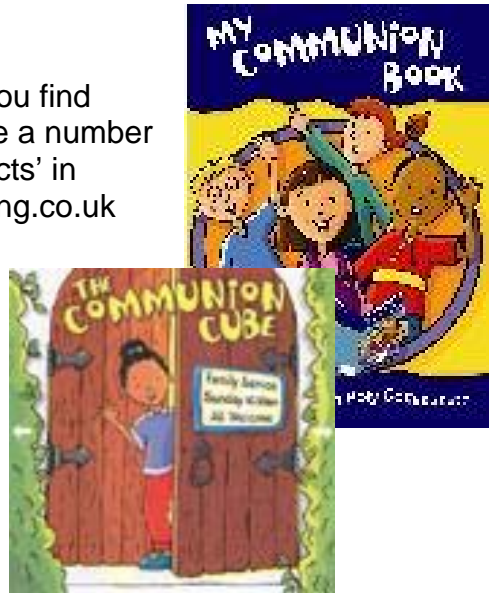
Holding a Eucharist in school also relates to national debate about children being admitted to communion. Traditionally being allowed to receive bread and wine, follows Confirmation. However, many parishes now admit children to communion earlier, following a period of preparation and permission from the Bishop. Local practice should be followed in a school Eucharist with regard to children who normally attend an Anglican church but advice should also be sought from the Diocesan Children's Officer because a variety of other considerations may need to be taken into account!

### **What resources are available to help schools?**

[www.reonline.org](http://www.reonline.org) and other RE websites can help you find resources for teaching about Eucharist and there are a number produced for churches which can be used as 'artefacts' in school e.g. the communion cube by [www.chpublishing.co.uk](http://www.chpublishing.co.uk)

Several dioceses produce materials to help when considering celebrating Eucharist in a school.

- **Chichester Diocese** has a short downloadable document on their schools' website called 'In Memory of Me'. This offers a good rationale for holding a Eucharist in school, gives thought-provoking questions to discuss and makes useful practical suggestions.
- **Gloucester Diocese** produces a pack which can be used in schools to prepare children for the Eucharist. Each year group has a different part of the service to learn about and contribute to so that over a number of years they grow in understanding of the Communion service. The pack also contains discussion notes for staff and governors who wish to introduce a Eucharist and an official service outline for schools in the diocese.
- **Worcester Diocese** holds a regular arts day (JC 2000) for Year 4 pupils culminating in a Eucharist at the cathedral. Children spend the day learning about and preparing for the service. Some of the resources they use can be found on the Worcester Diocesan website.



*African-style drums were pounding in the cathedral as nearly 500 children from 15 primary schools from around Worcestershire celebrated Christian faith at JC Today, an arts-based workshop day. Drumming was just one of the activities offered. Children also learnt a liturgical dance, a rap-based drama or songs to be used as part of the afternoon's Holy Communion service. Each school also made a unique banner to represent their individual school.*

*The days were organised by the diocesan education team and the programme is now in its seventh year. Children's Officer, Lesley Towey explains: "Learning about Christian worship and about the Eucharist in particular can be quite hard when you are only eight years old. Even adults find it hard to understand. It's much easier if you can sing it, act it, dance it, drum it and create it. By joining in with JC Today, the meanings and experiences of the Eucharist are made real."*

*The days were open to Year 4 pupils from Church of England primary schools and were two of a series of five days being held across the Diocese of Worcester. Parents, Governors and friends of the school are all invited to take part in the Holy Communion service, making it a very special occasion for all the children.*

## What help is available from the Church of England nationally?

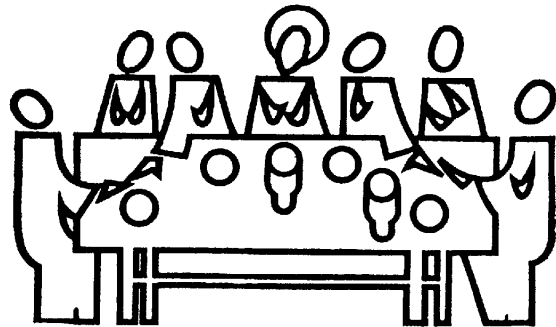
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The National Liturgical Commission report on 'Transforming Worship' writes encouragingly about worship in the school context. It suggests there are moves afoot to offer substantial support in this area, including new Eucharistic Prayers specifically for use when substantial numbers of children are present.

The report says:

*'Many church schools have regular (if not always frequent) celebrations of the eucharist. The growth in the admission of the baptized to communion will have a growing impact on this. There is a need to resource eucharistic worship in schools so that, within an acceptable framework, it is creatively-planned, well-conducted and appropriate to the school community.'*



## Help?

If you want to talk to someone about the issues raised in this brief document, feel free to contact your local Diocesan School's Adviser or the Children's Officer.



We can tell you which schools in your diocese celebrate Eucharist and how to contact them if you would like to talk to them about their experiences. For example, several have outline services or commentaries which can be used alongside the service. Also there are other products which can be used to help children understand more about Eucharist.

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