

## **BAPTISM and CONFIRMATION**

As a church we have two defining elements which are directly from Jesus himself as shown in Scripture –

These are crucial to our faith, and the mediation of God’s grace in the world –

1) **The Lord’s Supper**, Holy Communion, or The Eucharist, {Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:19-20; John 6:25-59; 1 Cor. 11:23-33} Canon B12 ff, especially B15A 1(a)

2) **Baptism** – {Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 2:41; 8:26-39; 9:17-19; 10:44-48; 16:13-15; 16:30-34} available to infants and those of riper years, dipped in water, or poured upon. Through the water of baptism and faith we share in Christ’s death and resurrection and all other benefits of his passion, Canon B21 ff.

Confirmation is seen as a lesser sacrament not to be counted as a Sacrament of the Gospel – a laying on of hands upon those that are baptized and come to years of discretion (this is of course open to debate) – to renew the solemn promise and vow made in their name at their baptism, ratifying and confirming the same in their own voice. Canon B27

## **Baptism**

What we believe and hold to be true as a Church, may be different from what we understand and hold as individuals. Nevertheless as we look at this vital area of our Christian lives I want us to consider not only the doctrinal and theoretical but also our own experience as parents. What has helped us in sharing our own faith with our children because this is at the heart of the issue of ‘communion before confirmation’. Have we been/are we able to raise our children in the knowledge and love of God Almighty as exhorted in the Wedding service, – has Church policy enabled us to raise up the next generation of Christians, given that God the Father has no grand children – or is this whole exercise missing the point: Would ‘communion before confirmation’ have made a difference 40 years ago or should we look elsewhere for answers to decline?

Given that we are looking at a specific area of Church life and therefore Church order I would like us to endorse this change of policy, as having merit, but not to neglect our duty and responsibility to evangelise, to teach and to make new disciples, who will in turn make disciples (Matt. 28: 18-20)

Taken from the ancient ‘Apostolic Tradition’ AD 215

*‘At the time the cock crows first let prayer be made over the water...Baptize the little ones first. All those who can speak for themselves shall do so. As for those who cannot speak for themselves, their parents or someone from their family shall speak for them.’<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Celebrating the Anglican Way H&S 1996 ed. I Bunting p.104

We need to consider the false belief that so long as they are baptized people are automatically Christians, irrespective of repentance and faith and the gift of the Holy Spirit –whereas in the NT all three elements figure in Christian initiation. The elements of renunciation, the sign of the cross, the Apostles Creed as central Trinitarian belief and water are also in general practice around the Anglican Communion. Candles and oil are also in use as added drama/symbol of the transition from old life to new, from death to life.

As the entry point into the Body of Christ baptism provides access to the other Christ ordained sacrament of The Lord's Supper. The earliest churches along with the Eastern Orthodox Church today admitted baptised children to Communion as infants (the use of the spoon no doubt helps).

However in the Western Church during the Middle Ages baptism and Communion became separated as the understanding of the nature of the bread and wine became elevated to transubstantiation (where the bread and wine turn into Jesus flesh and blood) an extra-Biblical and non-Anglican position I would suggest to the exclusion of a spiritual/real understanding as enshrined in the BCP words of invitation page 256/7. The elements were moved away from the laity by the more intentional introduction of the rite of confirmation between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. It was in 1281 that Archbishop John Peckham introduced the rule in the Church of England that, 'admission to Holy Communion should normally follow confirmation.'<sup>2</sup> The laity were also denied the cup until the Protestant Reformation and much later for the Roman Catholics after the Second Vatican Council of the 1960's when both elements were offered once again.

The practice of a bishop laying hands on or anointing a person after baptism has had an assorted history given local variations in the West, but was as can be seen from the earliest NT times linked to the Holy Spirit. Various other practices and names for example Baptism of the Spirit, Second Anointing have been adopted by other churches. Here in the Anglican Church the idea of stepping into the life of the institution, with confirmation as a rite of passage gained credence in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century with the expansion of Anglo-Catholic and Evangelical wings of the Church.

The tension between the charismatic and the bureaucratic in mission of the Church continues and the place of confirmation is part of this challenge. Various reports have sought to explore and unpack the nature and links between baptism, confirmation and communion.

Currently as the Community of the Baptised, as a covenant people we baptise the children of those who believe, even if that belief is not fully articulated nor lived out, with a generous welcome and a hopeful expectation of growth into the fullness of Christ – it is part of the old idea of Christendom, and all those who seek baptism in their parish church are to be welcomed (Canons B21 &22).

The Bishops Guidelines (1997) which say that "since 'communion before confirmation' is a departure from our inherited norm", have now become Regulations (2006) and as a parish in this diocese we are requested to formalise our approach and practice. I am aware of the need to regularise what we do, but would like to leave it a bit messy with the space for God the Holy Spirit (cf Acts10:44-48).

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<sup>2</sup> Celebrating the Anglican Way H&S 1996 ed. I Bunting p.105