

at the time we were close to taking this view but in the end we didn't.

The obvious objection to admitting babies is that they can't understand what's going on, but this concern stems from the old way of thinking, which was that you had to qualify for Holy Communion by taking a course and being Confirmed. The whole point about admitting children was that it involved the Church in changing that view. No longer did we see Holy Communion as something you had to qualify for. Now we understand it to be a free gift from God for all who were Christ's disciples. This change was quite radical and in my experience it was when we took that step in our thinking that we decided to admit children to Communion.

I actually do think a little intellectual understanding is needed, so I didn't go down the path of recommending admission at Baptism. However I think that the intellectual understanding required is minimal; that whenever we begin, it changes and deepens as we grow, and that, even as adults, we must beware of assuming that we have a full understanding of what is happening when we receive Holy Communion.

All of this leads me to the view that we should be prepared to admit children as soon as they are ready. How do we know when they're ready? We don't, but they do. If they can express a desire I'd like to be in a position to welcome them.

4. **I'd like us to think again about when the preparation sessions take place.** Having it during the Liturgy of the Word at the Parish Eucharist has obvious advantages.
- 1) We have a captive audience; they're committed to being there anyway.
 - 2) It doesn't rely on being able to arrange another time and on parents being able to bring them at another time
 - 3) It fits conveniently with the idea of keeping the children in Sunday school groups. However it also has its downside.
- 1) The time available is very short indeed. The preparation material we use is, in my view, excellent, but it's quite full and it's very difficult to do it justice to it in the time available.
 - 2) It would make Sunday school organisation awkward if First Communion preparation groups were drawn from more than one Sunday school group.

I know that the prospect of having it at another time raises logistical problems but the course is quite brief, only ten sessions; and it is very important. Is it entirely unreasonable to ask people to make a commitment for a brief period for something of such significance? I don't know the answer to that, maybe it is, but we've usually managed it for Confirmation so what about First Communion preparation?

It seems to me that our current arrangement is convenient but I do wonder whether it's the best way to prepare the children. Inevitably our decisions will, as always represent a trade off between perfection and convenience but It's a question we need to ask ourselves.

And finally...I'm delighted that welcoming children to Communion has become so established and so natural and I don't think I'm recommending any fundamental changes. I'll look forward to hearing people's views on these suggestions in the coming weeks.

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