

Thanks for the memory

A good practice guide to celebrating the eucharist in schools



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Introduction

Anyone reading the Gospels can hardly fail to notice how often the meal table figures in Jesus' ministry. He attends a wedding feast, he eats with Zacchaeus and Matthew and other 'tax collectors and sinners', he enjoys the hospitality of Mary and Martha, and he accepted invitations even from those Pharisees who were trying to catch him out. There were countless other occasions of course when he sat down to eat with his disciples to teach and encourage those who would lead his Church after his ascension. Jesus enjoyed his food!

Of course for the Jew, every meal was 'holy', and not a thing was eaten without prayer and thanksgiving to God. So it was absolutely natural for Jesus to give thanks over bread and wine, and in so doing consecrate it for the use of his company of friends. But on the night before he died he gave to this familiar even routine act of taking, blessing, breaking and sharing, a new and profound significance. In effect, he took the brethren beyond the table of the Upper Room to the hill outside Jerusalem where, the following day, he would 'offer his life as a ransom for many'. From that night, 'until he comes again', the bread and wine were to be connected with his body and blood.

The disciples were obedient to Jesus' injunction that they remember him in the 'breaking of bread'. It is absolutely clear that along with teaching, prayer and fellowship, this was simply and mysteriously part of what the earliest Christian community did when they gathered. The New Testament tells us that before long believers were meeting together for the primary purpose of sharing the Eucharist and the prayers, and so important did 'Holy Communion' become that many Christians carried the consecrated bread around with them so they could 'communicate' with Jesus daily, just as they communicated with him in their praying. Because the death and resurrection of Jesus was and is at the heart of the Good News, so the meal at which that most costly of sacrifices and glorious of victories was remembered and experienced afresh was and is at the heart of the Church's life

I am really delighted and grateful that our Board of Education is offering this resource to schools as they seek to introduce children and young people to all the gifts that the Lord has entrusted to us. It is just unthinkable that anybody could even begin to understand what it means to be Christian without being gently and lovingly introduced to the experience of the Breaking of Bread. Not everyone will be able to receive the bread and wine at the celebrations proposed here and not everyone will want to. Not everybody attending a football match is on the pitch, but all can be caught up in the action! As our children explore the riches of the Eucharist there will be valuable lessons to learn about commitment to the Lord and what it means to belong to his family, the duties as well as the joys. There is every hope that as we understand more and more of what the Lord offers us at his table we will see more and more of what we must offer him in our lives.

As children are encouraged to share in this experience my hope is that their curiosity will be aroused, they will be led to wonder, and that along with exploring the Bible they will come to understand that this is what Christians 'do' because this is what 'happened' to Jesus, the One who feeds us with his love in Word and Sacrament.

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1 Why celebrate the eucharist in schools?

- The first and simplest reason is that Jesus commanded his disciples to 'do this in memory of me' (Luke 22.19), and therefore it is something that every Christian community should value and explore.
- The eucharist has been a distinctive mark of the worshipping church since its beginnings (Acts 2.46); the earliest written record we have of Jesus is of his last supper with the disciples (I Corinthians 11.23-27).
- Down through the ages Christians have celebrated the eucharist in every generation and every circumstance.
- By celebrating the eucharist in school there is a powerful message that Christians are part of a world-wide community of faith for whom the eucharist provides a central focus for worship.
- The church school should seek to reflect in its common life what it means to live as a community centred on the sharing of word and sacrament in the eucharist which can lead us to a living faith in Christ.
- The eucharist provides a good link with the local church family which can be involved in the planning and leading of eucharists in the school.
- The eucharist celebrated within the life of the school can involve those families and members of the local neighbourhood who otherwise would be untouched by the life and work of the church.
- The experience of being part of the congregation at a eucharist will enhance children's understanding of what the service means for Christians.
- Celebrating the eucharist will enrich the school's programme of worship and so contribute to the spiritual development of the school.
- The eucharist (which means thanksgiving) is an outward sign of a spirit of thanksgiving to God for the whole of life that should be at the heart of the ethos of a church school.

One meal, many names

Throughout the Christian world the meal shared by Jesus with his disciples on the night before he died has been given many names.

Breaking of Bread	This draws on what happened in the early church (Acts 2.42)
Lord's Supper	This emphasises the link with the last supper of Jesus
Holy Communion	This refers to the personal experience of receiving the bread and the wine as part of a worshipping community
Eucharist	This is the Greek word for thanksgiving
Mass	This draws on the Latin words at the end of the service which send God's people out into the world to proclaim the kingdom
The Liturgy	This is the word used most frequently in the Eastern Orthodox churches

In this guide we have chosen to use the term **eucharist**, as it is widely accepted by Christians of many different traditions.

2 Introducing the eucharist in schools Frequently Asked Questions:

Who should start the dialogue about introducing a eucharist in school?

It is probable that a number of people connected with the school would be pleased to explore the prospect of having a eucharist. The idea is most likely to get off the ground, though, if the head teacher and incumbent are both enthusiastic.

Who needs to be included in the dialogue?

It is to be hoped that governors, staff and the local church community will all wish to support the introduction of the eucharist. It is often easier for the dialogue to be centred around the planning of a particular service drawing out the issues, rather than in the abstract. There will undoubtedly be a range of ideas and beliefs that will need to be respected. Some involved will find it important to explore theological issues; others will be more absorbed in organisational aspects. Careful briefing for parents with clear explanations of what is planned should be provided in good time. It is important that this dialogue is conducted in a positive and collaborative spirit.

Where should the eucharist take place?

This needs to be discussed between the head teacher and the parish priest. It is probably best to have the first eucharist in a place where the children are used to experiencing worship. Usually, this will be in the local church or at the school. Local circumstances will need to be taken into account such as accessibility, facilities, safety, musical resources, etc. If the service is to be held in the school, consideration will need to be given to the creation of an atmosphere that helps children enter into worship.

How often should the eucharist occur?

This decision needs to be made by the incumbent and the head teacher together. It is best to take one service at a time, but, once introduced, many schools like to have the next service fairly soon after the first, to consolidate and build on the practice and principles established in the first service. Schools having regular eucharists have varied in practice from once a year to once a week, though the commonest pattern seems to be termly.

When should the eucharist be held?

Eucharists are often linked to special aspects of the school's life, or to the Church's calendar. In many schools the eucharistic worship arises naturally out of the curriculum themes or the whole term's worship pattern. Most schools have their eucharists during the school day, maybe at the normal school worship time. They tend, therefore, to involve whole groups of children. Some schools have their eucharist at lunchtime, or before or after school. This means that those children and parents attending have chosen to attend.

Who should come to the eucharist?

The decision needs to be made whether the eucharist will be for the whole school or for a particular year or key stage grouping. Similarly, a decision must be made about whether it is

possible to include parents and other family members and the wider parish. It is important that invitations to any services are given publicity in good time. In some places the eucharist in school serves as the eucharist for that day in the parish.

Who presides at the eucharist?

Though this will often be the incumbent, there are schools that serve multiple parishes that will need to agree how local clergy are to share in presiding at eucharists. Where visiting clergy are asked to preside it is essential to consult the local incumbent. It is important to recognise that not all incumbents find it easy to lead worship with children.

How should children be prepared for the eucharist?

Before introducing the eucharist for the first time, there needs to be a planned educational programme leading to a level of understanding appropriate to the age of the children. This needs to range from the beliefs lying behind the service to the way the liturgy is structured.

Before any eucharist, but especially the first, it is good to rehearse the words. With primary children it is often best to learn these by providing regular practice, as books and sheets can be very distracting. It also helps if children have some familiarity with the parts of the service used most frequently including prayers, responses and music.

Is a service sheet desirable?

Some schools have developed their own service and hymn sheets. Sometimes these are produced for the service; in others they use a standard format on card. Creative use of overhead projector and PowerPoint displays can be helpful. It is important that accessible language is used.

How long should the service be?

It is important that the length of the service be appropriate to the age of the pupils present. For this to be achieved, preparation must be done well so that things run smoothly. It is also helpful to make a time plan for the sections of the service. Some parts can be achieved quickly while others, according to the theme of the worship, may need to be developed at greater length.

How can music be used in the worship?

Music can make a powerful contribution to worship and needs careful selection. This will be affected by the resources and abilities that are available. Music might be used in some or all of the following ways:

- quiet singing or recorded music to create the mood as the children and others assemble
- a familiar song at the beginning, possibly for a procession
- a song reflecting the theme of the sermon/presentation
- a hymn or song while the table is being prepared
- quiet, reflective singing during communion
- a lively final hymn or song

How can children participate?

It is good practice for children and others present to be involved in the worship in as many ways as possible, providing music, prayers, readings, etc. They may also be involved in setting up the worship area and welcoming the congregation, as servers (where appropriate) and in bringing the bread and wine to the table. It is important that the congregation is able to see and hear everything that takes place. Care should be taken that this involvement does not slide into being a 'performance' rather than worship. It is essential that any children involved know exactly what they are required to do and where to sit so that they may participate naturally and with confidence.

How can the eucharist be made inclusive for all pupils, whether they receive communion or not?

At the centre of the eucharist is God's love and forgiveness which is unconditional and open to all.

How the bread and wine is to be distributed needs careful consideration. Some people present (both children and adults) will normally receive the bread and wine in their own churches, others will be used to receiving a blessing. Clear instructions should be given on how to receive communion or a blessing. It is also important to affirm those who have had no previous experience of the eucharist and may prefer to remain in their places during the administration. Where a school serves different parishes, sensitive consideration should be given to their various practices.

During the administration of communion, music, projected images or the suggestion of an idea to think about may be helpful as a focus for concentration.

Careful consideration needs to be given to the policy of the parish about the admission to communion of those who have not yet been confirmed. In particular, great sensitivity is needed where children from a variety of parishes (perhaps with different approaches to this issue) are involved.

A checklist for preparing for a eucharist

- How is the worship space to be arranged?
- Can music or artwork be used to help create the right atmosphere?
- How will the seats be laid out?
- What will be used for the table/altar? Will there be a cross and candles on it?
- Where will the bible be read from? Can the reader be seen and heard?
- Will a sound system be needed? Who will control it?
- Are service sheets or hymn books to be provided?
- Will an OHP or video projector be needed? Who will operate this?
- Who will choose and lead the music? Where will any musicians be placed?
- How will any drama or other activity be arranged?
- Who will provide bread, wine, candles and any other liturgical items?
- Who will administer the bread and wine? How will this be arranged?
- Will any children be involved in reading, leading prayers or as servers? When will they rehearse?

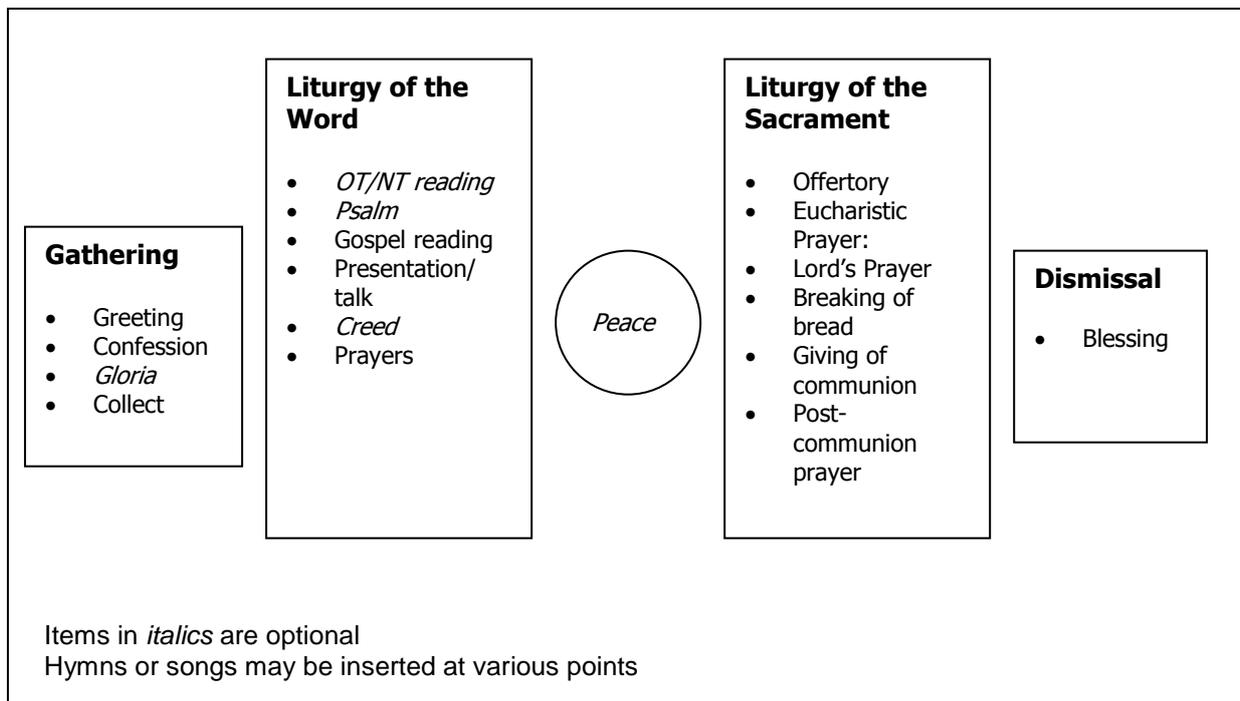
3 Understanding the Eucharist

Introduction

This section provides guidance on the meaning and practice of the service. It is designed to help teachers and clergy discuss together the way the eucharist can be developed in school. It is good practice for such discussions to occur regularly, not just when the eucharist is first introduced into the school's life, but also in later reviews of its development. More extensive material can be found in the resources listed at the end of these guidelines.

It is important to recognise the wide range of practice in celebrating the eucharist; indeed, *Common Worship* authorises and encourages this. The development of a eucharist in a school provides an ideal opportunity for a parish to reflect on how effective its own 'style' of worship is. The involvement of children should bring in a creative force to contribute to lively worship.

The shape of the eucharist is best seen as having two main parts: the **Liturgy of the Word**, which focuses on the Bible, and the **Liturgy of the Sacrament**, which focuses on the bread and wine. These two sections are preceded by a preparatory section to enable the congregation to gather together and followed by a concluding section looking outwards to the lives of the participants. In every eucharist it is important that there is a balance between the word and the sacrament.



1. Preparation

The celebration of the eucharist should have a clear beginning. A hymn or worship song can serve this purpose during which the presiding priest (president) and any assistants may process in formally.

- The opening words and greeting should remind those present of the way Christians understand and experience God. The dialogue between the president and those gathered should establish a unity of purpose under God. To create familiarity such words may well benefit from being used in other contexts in the school's worship.
- The president or children may introduce the theme of the service.
- The **confession**. It is important that in confession we recognise that God is a God of love and forgiveness. There are personal matters we will need to say sorry for, but there are also injustices committed between nations, exploitation of God's creation, and things in our society that are wrong. We need to submit all of these to God's love and forgiveness. God's forgiveness is expressed in words said by the president.

In thought and word and deed

Some suggestions for imaginative ways of introducing children to confession

In acknowledging failings and shortcomings and then expressing penitence it may be helpful for children to do something; individually (in the case of a class or year group) or on behalf of others within a larger group. These actions done together may also help children to see how the consequences of our individual choices contribute to a negative effect on us all.

- A candle is lit representing for example each child or class symbolising the light of God's grace within us. As each failing is highlighted a candle is extinguished to show how sin mars the brightness of God's image in us.
- Each child or class writes down particular failings on a piece of paper which is presented at the appropriate time. After the Act of Confession these are burnt in a small brazier as a sign of God's forgiveness in our desire to start afresh.
- Each child/class/year group presents a stone or another object which represents failings already identified. These are laid down below a cross or in front of the altar table. At an appropriate time they are removed from sight symbolising the grace of God's forgiveness.

- In response to the assurance of God's forgiveness it is appropriate to sing a song to God's glory and praise, though in Lent and Advent this is usually omitted. Several sung settings of the **Gloria** are available, or an alternative song can be used.
- The **collect** is a prayer that relates to the theme or the season. A time of silence can precede it. The collect can be either from an authorized text or one that has been prepared by the children.

2. The Liturgy of the Word – directions for the journey

In this section the Bible is read and celebrated as the Word of God. After the reading there is opportunity for **reflection** (as it is explained) and **response** (in the creed and intercessions).

- A copy of the Bible, obviously displayed, can form a focus for this part of the service.
- The **scripture readings** and the translation used will need to be carefully chosen taking into account the theme of the service and issues of accessibility. A variety of creative and imaginative ways of presenting the words of the Bible may be used to capture the interest of the hearers and to bring the ideas to life. Imaginative ways to give particular emphasis to the reading from the **gospels** may be used such as the use of candles, sung responses or waving of banners.
- A **presentation** of some kind should be given. It may be a short talk or the children could be involved in preparing their own interpretation of the theme of the readings. This could be dramatic or visual in some way.
- The **creed** is a summary of the faith of the church. Sensitivity will have to be exercised in deciding whether to include a creed and in what form. Various versions of the creed are available: spoken or sung, or using questions and answers.
- In the **intercessions** (prayers for ourselves and others) we offer to God the needs of the church, the world and our local community (school or geographical). Though personal prayers can be offered at this time, it is important that those gathered for the celebration think outwardly to the needs of all humanity. Sometimes silence is the best way to offer such prayer, but it is important to introduce this with some ideas of what to pray for. A 'prayer activity' or the lighting of candles can be helpful in establishing the right reactions; quiet music (eg from Taizé) between or behind spoken intercessions can be helpful.

3. The Liturgy of the Sacrament – food for the journey

In this section bread and wine are placed on the altar or holy table to recall the last supper of Jesus, his death and resurrection, his presence with us here and now, and our hope for the future. 'Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again' is the Christian proclamation.

At the Last Supper Jesus does four things:

- he **takes** the bread and wine
- he **thanks** God for them
- he **breaks** the bread and pours out the wine
- he **shares** the bread and wine with disciples. (1 Cor 11.23-24).

These four actions provide the shape for all eucharists. Jesus' invitation to do this in memory of him is at the heart of this part of the celebration. Our response is to offer up our thanksgivings with all that we have and are.

- The sharing of the **peace**. This reminds us that Christians are part of a worldwide family; that they have a shared life together and that they must also be at one with each other.

The sharing of the peace needs to be handled sensitively but not necessarily solemnly. Being the family of Christ should be a joyful thing.

- The **offertory** is the first of the four-fold actions; it is when the gifts of bread and wine are brought forward to show that 'all things come from God and of his own do we give him'. Gifts of money or children's creative work may also be presented as signs that our whole lives are offered to God and of our concern for the needs of others.
- The **eucharistic prayer** is the great prayer of thanksgiving for all that God has done for us in his Jesus. *Common Worship* provides a number of alternatives, of which prayers D, E and H may be the most appropriate for use in schools. They all contain a number of common elements:
 - Responses at the beginning and at other points to allow participation by the whole people of God
 - A thanksgiving for what God has done for his people, leading them to freedom
 - 'Holy, holy, holy ...' - the song of the angels Isaiah heard in his vision of the worship of God (Isaiah 6.3)
 - The narrative of the last supper
 - A prayer for the Holy Spirit to come on his people and the gifts in communion

Consideration should be given as to how this prayer is to be presented so that it is seen as one integrated prayer involving both words and actions. Various musical versions of the congregational responses are available.

- The **Lord's Prayer** was given by Jesus (Matthew 6.9-13) as a result of being asked a question about prayer. It has become a worldwide prayer for all Christians. In it we ask that God's kingdom may be established here in our world. The prayer can be said or sung.
- The **breaking of bread** is the third of the four-fold actions and should be clearly visible to all present. It is an action with powerful imagery. It speaks of the brokenness of Jesus as he offers his life on the cross, and also of the brokenness of human lives and the nations of the world. Such human frailty is brought to the very centre of our worship as the bread is broken for the sins of the world.
- The **giving of communion** is the final action of the eucharist. It can raise important issues about inclusion which need to be discussed carefully by both school and parish. Clear guidance on how to receive the consecrated bread and wine or a blessing needs to be given.

Draw near with faith

A case study of good practice from Bishop Luffa Secondary School

There is a eucharist celebrated in each year group in this church secondary school in Chichester once a year. At the point in the service where the bread and wine are distributed the students are given three clear options:

- Come forward to receive the bread and wine [if they normally do so in their own church]
- Come forward for a blessing [signalling this by carrying their service booklet]
- Remain in their seat [showing respect to those who are going forward]

This choice is included in the process of preparation for the service and is also included in the service booklet and mentioned at the time. It is a real choice with significant proportions of both students and teachers taking each option. It is also clear and easy for those wishing to receive a blessing to do this in a relaxed way.

4. Conclusion

This section brings to an end the celebration of God's word in the Bible and of God's action on the cross. It provides a necessary bridge between what has happened in the service and the rest of the school day and beyond. Their encounter with the risen Lord sends the community of faith out into the world 'to live and work to God's praise and glory'.

- The **post communion prayer**: the prayer after the sharing of communion is a thanksgiving for the work that Christ has done among us. This thanksgiving prayer should embrace both those who have received the consecrated bread and wine and also those who have participated in other ways. The celebration ends with the president asking God to bless everyone present before they depart.
- The **dismissal**: though rather formal in tone, these final words direct our thoughts to the world around us. If we have been changed in some way by this celebration the proof is in the way we live, behave towards others, and proclaim our faith. This whole eucharistic celebration has really been about the way God transforms us through the power of his Spirit.

Useful Resources

- **New Patterns for Worship**
Church House Publishing
- **Common Worship Today**
Mark Earey and Gilly Myers
Harper Collins
- **Grove Booklet W174: Common Worship in Church Schools**
Ian Dewar
Grove Books
- **Using Common Worship - Holy Communion:
A Practical Guide to the New Services**
Beach, Mark
Church House Publishing
- **Video**
A video produced by the National Society is available on loan from Diocesan Church House

For further resources please consult the fuller list in the Collective Worship section

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