

BLESSING CHILDREN AT HOLY COMMUNION (1978)

In recent years there has been a tendency in Methodism to make the Holy Communion more comprehensive and to encourage families, including those with young children, to attend and sit together. This trend is to be welcomed. Families whose members share a common faith, albeit at different levels of understanding, should share, as far as possible, in common worship. Some have suggested that children, whether confirmed or not, should receive communion, and this matter has been discussed in Conference (see Minutes, 1973 pp. 50-1, 1975 pp. 49-53). Others think it more appropriate that children who are not full members should be given a blessing at the communion rail (see *Methodist Service Book*, General Direction 23, p. B4).

Conference, without making further judgement about the former practice, makes the following comments about the latter:

1. It is fitting if, at the climax of the service of Holy Communion, the family remains undivided and the children accompany their parents to the communion rail rather than being left in the pew.
2. It is appropriate that, as there is a word and a sign for the parents, there should be a word and a sign for the children. Children must be treated with the same seriousness as is shown to adults.
3. The Act of blessing is ancient and scriptural. In the laying on of hands the recipient is precisely specified. A good example is the action of our Lord in blessing the children in Mk. 10:16. By means of this action, our Lord offered his gracious power to those in need and offered it in an act of personal relationship that left no room for confusion or misunderstanding.
4. The one who presides at Holy Communion speaks the words and performs the actions that belong to our Lord. If the child is also addressed by name, both word and sign particularize the child. The words can be confidently declaratory, 'Sarah, the Lord Jesus gives you his love'. 'Robert, God gives you his blessing', etc.
5. It is important that an action that takes place at the climax of the most solemn service should be explained to both adults and children when opportunity allows, especially as this particular action can be understood in many different ways, some of them quite foreign to Methodist tradition and belief.

(Agenda 1978, pp. 56f)

Two further reports (1987 and 2000) on Children and Holy Communion are to be found in Volume 2, pp. 163-188).