

## CHILDREN AND HOLY COMMUNION (1987)

The Conference of 1984 directed the Division of Education and Youth, in consultation with the Faith and Order Committee, to bring proposals to encourage the fuller participation of children in the sacrament of Holy Communion.

The Division set up a working party which included the convenor of the Faith and Order Committee and the convenor-elect of that Committee; the draft report of the working party was submitted to the Faith and Order Committee in January 1986, prior to its consideration by the Executive and the Board of the Division.

The Conference of 1986 received the report and directed 'the Division of Education and Youth to bring it for decision to Conference 1987, with the comments and recommendations of the Faith and Order Committee, and its response to those comments and recommendations'.

The Convenor of the Faith and Order Committee sent to the Division copies of the written comments of individual members of that Committee, prior to its meeting. We are grateful that two representatives of this Division were invited to attend the Faith and Order Committee, for this business. After the meeting the Committee recorded the following minute, which was sent to the Division as its 'comments and recommendations'.

**'The Faith and Order Committee resolved:** that the DEY be asked

- (1) to maintain with the Faith and Order Committee the theological principle that baptism is a precondition for communicating participation in Holy Communion;
- (2) to recognise, as does the Faith and Order Committee, that in the pastoral application of this principle, for both children and adults, there is need from time to time for flexibility, in order that in the end the principle may be maintained;
- (3) since neither age nor mental capacity are themselves adequate criteria for determining who may receive the bread and wine in Holy Communion, to ensure that the report states clearly what measure of faith and understanding is required from any person before communicating participation;
- (4) to describe a practical illustration of ways of approaching the pastoral practice where a person desiring to communicate is not baptised;
- (5) to redraft section VII, to make clear which parts are descriptive and which are specific guidelines;
- (6) to strengthen the idea, already expressed in paras. 32 & 39, that the responsibility in this area of the church's life, for decisions taken in the light of the guidelines contained within the report, lies with the Church Council.'

The Division's 'response to those comments and recommendations' is offered in the form of an amended version of the Report that was presented last year, out of a conviction that this will enable the Conference to form its judgement better than by following the strict terms of the direction. A draft of the amended version was seen by the Executive of the Faith and Order Committee which approved it with certain minor emendations which have been incorporated.

Clauses 1 and 2 of the Faith and Order resolution are met by Guidelines A and B; clause 3 by Guideline C; clause 5 by taking guidelines out of section VII (The Way Ahead) as a new section VIII and within that section separating off the Guidelines, underlined, from a paragraph of further comment and clarification; clause 6 by re-writing paragraph 32 and guidelines E and D.

With regard to clause 4 of the resolution, the Guidelines set out how to deal with a child and meet the spirit of this clause. A practical illustration that would be possible within the compass of this Report could not adequately indicate the variety of ways of approaching the pastoral practice, which must be in the hands of the Church Council in the light of local and personal circumstances. More detailed and practical help will be offered by the Division if the Report is accepted – see resolution 1(c) below.

## **REPORT: CHILDREN AND HOLY COMMUNION**

### **By way of Definition**

We have used '*children*' to cover the whole age range of the Division of Education and Youth's Children's Work Section, ie, under 13's. This does not preclude older young people from our proposals.

We have used '*workers with children*' to cover the many different terms used throughout the Connexion, ie, Junior Church Leaders; Sunday School teachers; Shell Group Leaders; Junior Youth Club Leaders, etc.

We have used '*The Lord's Supper*' as a designation for the service itself as this is a widely used term and was the name preferred by Wesley.

### **I Preamble**

1. The 1984 Methodist Conference directed the Division of Education and Youth, in consultation with the Faith and Order Committee, to bring proposals to encourage the fuller participation of children in the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

2. Previous reports on this subject were presented to Conference by the Faith and Order Committee in 1973 and 1975. A period of flexibility and experiment was proposed, but without any constitutional action which might impose excessive rigidity in these matters.

In the past decade many churches have seen an increased participation in morning worship by children, and this has led to a reconsideration of their place in the church. Alongside this there is a growing tendency for children to be present in church at the celebration of the Lord's Supper. In some of the churches the children receive the bread and wine as full worshipping members of the community. In other situations children share in the Lord's Supper simply by being present. Other

churches invite the children forward at an appropriate point to receive a blessing. There remain some churches where there is no involvement of children in the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

3. Surveys and enquiries in a number of Districts have revealed the diversity of practice reflected in the above remarks. Those who involve children fully in the Lord's Supper are working in many different situations; some are actively engaged in all-age worship as a regular feature of their worshipping life; some are working in ecumenical situations; some are forging closer links between the 'Sunday School' and the church; some are working in new towns or on council housing estates; some are in large suburban churches, others in rural or small-church situations; others are involved in projects of mission which have resulted in whole families coming to join in worship.

4. We acknowledge the work done by the Faith and Order Committee in its previous reports and we endorse their judgement:

'Holy Communion has been experienced as a means of grace in a wide range of human situations. Similarly many responses to it have been possible, touching at different times and different levels the intellectual and emotional elements in the person who receives it. A young child, or even an adult, may not bring to it a great deal of the intellectual understanding that may be possible at a further stage in his development, yet he can make an appropriate response according to his capacity at that particular point in his development. The child may thus be admitted to communicant membership on the basis of his Baptism plus the faith of which he is capable. John Wesley himself went further than this in seeing Baptism giving 'union with the Church, a share in all its privileges' (Works X 191) and consistently ignored confirmation. A child thus introduced into the sacramental life of the Church can grow through it to that form of commitment we associate with 'conversion' and take on the responsibilities of membership of Society.'<sup>1</sup>

In framing our proposals we have been mindful of the discussion document by the Division of Ministries, 'Church Membership and Christian Nurture' and the Faith and Order Committee's document 'Christian Initiation'. We believe that our proposals are in harmony with the principles underlying these reports.

5. Our proposals develop the findings of the Conference report on Initiation in 1985: 'Baptism is the one essential rite for entry into the Church and those who have received it are entitled to their place at the Lord's Table, though it may be expedient for this to be delayed.' - Section C4(iii), 1985 Agenda, p624.

## **II Our Understanding of the Place of the Child in the Church**

6. Within the New Testament distinctions are made between father and children (Ephesians 6:4); older and younger (1 Timothy 5:1f); mature and immature (1 Corinthians 13:11, 14:20); fathers and young men (1 John 2:12f). There are specific references to infancy and babyhood (eg. Matthew 21:16).

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<sup>1</sup> Methodist Church - Faith and Order Committee, Minutes of Conference 1975 p51

Against the background of the position of the child in the first century, we must also take note of Jesus' dealings with children as they are recorded in the gospels. The most significant reference comes from Mark 10:15 (=Matthew 18:3; Luke 18:17; John 3:3-8). These passages are telling us more about the nature of God than the nature of children. He is a God who graciously gives his Kingdom to children.

Hans-Ruedi Weber in 'Jesus and the Children' suggests that Jesus' attitude to children as recorded in the gospels was both 'deeply Jewish' and 'radically new'. Thus Jesus' actions of receiving children reflect the custom of children asking for the blessing of a famous rabbi. In Jewish culture, however, the child was the learner who 'had to be formed into a fully human being'. So when the disciples posed their question about greatness and Jesus replied by setting a child in their midst, the teaching/learning situation had been reversed. This was new, as was a rabbi identifying himself with children: 'this identification of Jesus with children again confirms the special kind of love which is at the heart of the biblical God.'<sup>2</sup>

Jesus' readiness to welcome children has been taken by the Church through the ages as providing support for the practice of Infant Baptism and for the care and nurture of children and the young.

7. The Christians of the New Testament period were aware not only of the words and actions of Jesus but were also familiar with Jewish rites of initiation into the fellowship of Israel. Circumcision held an important role in Jewish initiation ceremonies and was traced back to the covenant with Abraham. It was practised for both Jews and Gentiles and for both it marked entry into the Covenant people and was unrepeatable.

The contemporary Jewish background also included the baptism of proselytes and their families which again was a once and for all event.

There is evidence that the early Christians did see their whole family as being 'converted' at the same time as the father. Examples are given of Bishop Polycarp (160 AD) who 'served the Lord for eighty six years'<sup>3</sup> and Justin Martyr who talks of men and women who were 'disciples of Christ from childhood'<sup>4</sup>.

8. Rev David Holeton, in a chapter entitled 'The Communion of Infants and Young Children'<sup>5</sup> suggests that infant communion was the norm in the Christian West until around the thirteenth century. The current 'tradition' of receiving first communion following Confirmation in early adolescence is of a much later origin, indeed Confirmation was unknown in some countries before the nineteenth century. The traditional sequence of Baptism for babies, Sunday School for children. Confirmation and first Communion for adolescents and the full diet of worship for adults is still the understanding of many. However, the position of the child in the community of the faithful is now attracting renewed interest. This has led to attempts to restate the place of the child in the Church and has led some churches to conclude that there ought to be universal participation by all the baptised in the Lords' Supper itself, without distinction of age, intellect or social status. The

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<sup>2</sup> Hans-Ruedi Weber: *Jesus and the Children* p51

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by Neil Dixon: *Troubled Waters* p31

<sup>4</sup> Ditto

<sup>5</sup> In '...and do not hinder them', ed. G Muller-Fahrenholz, WCC 1982 (F & O Paper 109)

alternative position of denying children a place at the Lords' Table would suggest that they are not part of the church, despite their baptism.

9. Society's understanding of children is constantly changing. Thus during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, children were often 'seen and not heard' in society. The phrase is not much heard today. The International Year of the Child (1979) tried to make people more sensitive to both the needs of children and their capacity to contribute to the quality of family and community life. Children today are encouraged to speak and mix with adults and to make their contribution to the community to which they belong.

10. The 1969 Inter-Divisional paper 'The Lord's People on the Lord's Day' reached this conclusion: 'All our thinking about worship on the Lord's Day flows from our basic conviction that the Lord's people belong together on the Lord's Day, their worship is a corporate offering'<sup>6</sup>. This we affirm. In the service of Infant Baptism, we boldly declare that we wish to receive children into our midst. Our concern is to see how children may be encouraged to take a fuller part in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Children are welcomed into the Church for what they have to offer. In such situations children learn by doing. We believe that it is important that children learn of the sacraments 'by doing and belonging' within a caring and loving atmosphere.

### III Some Understandings of the Lord's Supper

11. From the birth of the Church to today, Christians have found their faith sharpened and deepened as they have celebrated the Lord's Supper. By the middle of the second century (or earlier) a complete service of word and sacrament had been devised. The structure for this grew more elaborate as the years passed. The work of modern liturgical scholars has enabled the Church to rediscover and express the centrality of the Lord's Supper, so enriching faith both for the individual Christian and the gathered congregation.

12. Apart from a similarity to some Jewish meals the Lord's Supper is exclusively Christian. Within the simple and yet profound action of the breaking and sharing of bread and the pouring and drinking of wine, stand a great foundation of history and tradition leading back to the Last Supper of Jesus and his disciples in the Upper Room. The Lord's Supper is a *memorial* of the death and resurrection of Christ. The Hebrew origins of the word memorial include power and excitement. To remember is so to relive the past that the power and meaning of the event become part of the experience and conviction of the one remembering. When Christians eat and drink 'in remembrance' they share an act which is faith-creating and faith-enriching.

13. The Lord's Supper is also a *communion*. This is demonstrated and symbolised as participants share in one loaf and so witness that they are part of one body.

The bread we break is a sharing in the body of Christ. Though we are many, we are one body because we all share in the one loaf.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Methodist Church - DEY, DSR, etc. *The Lord's People on the Lord's Day* p4

<sup>7</sup> Methodist Service Book pB14

As they have communion with the one to whose body they belong, they have communion with one another. To exclude any member is thus to destroy the symbol of the one loaf.

14. The Lord's Supper is a *eucharist*. Christians have fellowship with the crucified and risen Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit they are enabled with all God's people to rejoice in the glory of God's redeeming love for all mankind. This is their vision and at the same time their experience and foretaste of the life of Heaven when Christ's people are finally one in the oneness of God their Father. In this spirit of rejoicing they offer themselves to God's praise and glory.

The Lord's Supper is not only a declaration of God's redeeming love, it is also an affirmation that God's self-giving love is at the heart of creation. Children have an affinity with creation reflected in their capacity to respond in wonder, joy and appreciation. Adults and children sharing bread and wine together can help each other to a richer experience of the fullness of God's love in both creation and redemption.

So Christians celebrate the Lord's Supper and the presence of young and old assists the thanksgiving and rejoicing. The celebration is communicated through words and symbolic actions which combine to reveal the mystery of divine grace. Age is not the dominant factor for grasping this experience. We need all ages together to know the fullest revelation of fellowship, acceptance, joy, forgiveness and love in the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

15. As Christians participate in a ceremony which is so rich with meaning there is clearly room for people to respond at many different levels mentally, spiritually and emotionally - however inadequate some of these responses may seem to others. Children or perhaps adults may not bring to the service a great deal of intellectual understanding which may depend on a further stage of their development, but such persons will be making an appropriate response of faith according to their capacity at that particular point.

We now acknowledge that children bring their own experience and understanding to worship. This is not to expect an adult's awareness but an entirely valid experience of the child's personal faith and commitment. To children our actions speak louder than words. Participation in Holy Communion is more than eating and drinking - it is the power of symbol; the significance of drama; the sharing of memory and the passing on of story; it is the offering of all our senses in gratitude to God for the blessings of the Gospel of his love for us revealed in the life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

#### **IV Our Traditions**

16. There is not a single Methodist tradition with unbroken continuity from Wesley to the present day. From Wesley's own writing and practice different conclusions have been drawn and it is possible on the issue of children and the Lord's Supper to argue opposite points of view from our traditions. Within the history of the Methodist Church there is little by way of historical evidence regarding the practice of children sharing in the Lord's Supper. This should not be taken as indicating a deliberate attempt to bar children, but rather it reflects the place of the child in nineteenth and twentieth century society. As Methodism

developed, children were catered for in separate institutions which in time led to the growth of the Sunday School movement. This represented a radical new approach to children, with the church leading the way for the rest of society in caring for their education and well-being. There are, of course, exceptions to every assumption which is made in a historical study and biographies of some Methodist 'worthies' indicate that they became members of societies at an early age, some soon after birth.

17. There is little reference to the Lord's Supper at all in many of the biographies but this may well be accounted for by the infrequent celebrations (at best quarterly). The Lord's Supper usually followed the preaching service. This rested upon the conviction that the preaching service was the grand gathering whose prime purpose was the conversion of the unconverted. When it was over, the uncommitted withdrew and allowed the committed to proceed with the Lord's Supper. This notion that the Lord's Supper belongs to the inner core would seem to be contrary to the lifelong conviction of Wesley. He held a consistently high estimation of the Lord's Supper as 'the grand channel whereby the grace of His spirit was conveyed to the souls of all the children of God'.<sup>8</sup> For Wesley the Supper was one of the means whereby the faith that brings salvation is conveyed to those who before it had none. The scope of the Lord's Supper thus became widened for Wesley as a result of his strong evangelical conversion. After his Aldersgate experience the Lord's Supper was not only a 'sanctifying ordinance' for those who had the assurance of salvation but also a means whereby those who were only nominally Christian might be converted. The Lord's Supper became an evangelical instrument, as was preaching. Thus Wesley invited to the table the unconverted along with the converted. His main guidance for admission to the table was evidence of a degree of faith. There can be no doubt that the Lord's Supper played an important part in the Wesley revival.

18. Wesley held a tension between evangelical and catholic standpoints. Subsequently Wesley's understanding of the sacraments has suffered at the hands of those who have exaggerated or minimised the place of the Lord's Supper in his belief and customs. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries an extreme 'memorialist' view of the Lord's Supper prevailed with stress on the subjective devotional aspects of the sacrament. The Lord's Supper proclaimed the death of Christ on the Cross and provided the most solemn occasion for the self-examination of those taking part.

But for the Wesleys the Lord's Supper was more than simply a remembering of a past event, it was an anamnesis, a bringing into the present of a moment from the past in a richer connotation:

'By faith we see thy suffering past,  
In this mysterious rite brought back'.<sup>9</sup>

There is in John Wesley's thought the idea that the Lord's Supper is the pledge of the glory of heaven, 'a foretaste of the heavenly banquet'<sup>10</sup>. Essential to his understanding was the idea that the Lord's Supper could be a converting ordinance and there are many testimonies in biographies to support this view.

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<sup>8</sup> John Wesley *Letters* Vol 2 p315 (London: 1909 Curnock ed.)

<sup>9</sup> John and Charles Wesley *Eucharistic Hymns* No. 123

<sup>10</sup> Methodist Service Book pB17

19. During most of Wesley's lifetime, involvement in the Lord's Supper (for Methodists) was at the local Parish Church. On special occasions Wesley would hold great celebrations and he recorded the large numbers taking part. Even allowing for enthusiastic counting, they were significant events. Essential to both the 'Preaching Service' and these special services was Wesley's desire to call people to Christian commitment either through the word or the sacrament or both. For Wesley the Lord's Supper was a means of grace to be used at the beginning of the Christian pilgrimage. It becomes most precious to those who are deeply committed Christians. This led to Wesley's strong pleading<sup>11</sup> for its use before conversion. This view was based on his understanding of the practice of the early Church and his belief that the Lord's Supper is the sacrament through which one enters into a covenant relationship with God. Wesley never wavered in his understanding that we are admitted to the Church by baptism and are consequently members of the body of Christ.

Whilst Wesley quite clearly believed that the Lord's Supper could be a converting experience, he also expected an increase of faith in seekers after assurance. He presupposed a 'degree of faith' in those who were not yet converted. He sought 'evidence of faith' rather than confirmation as the entry qualifications for any who came to the table.

20. From the earliest days of the Holy Club in Oxford Wesley maintained a passionate interest and concern for the well-being of children and his writings record occasions when he gave Communion to children at his own services. In his early days he regularly communicated children in America, meeting with them in preparation and after a probationary period allowing them to partake of the elements.

In England there are records of children being admitted to Methodist Societies as young as nine and ten, therefore presumably able to communicate as members of the Society. Nevertheless there is no evidence of widespread general administration of the communion to children as a matter of policy. It is of interest to note that Wesley received Communion himself as a child from seven years of age. From his Oxford days he attempted to communicate at least weekly, and daily in his preparation for the great Christian festivals, especially Christmas.

21. Wesley always insisted upon some evidence of an awareness of the significance of salvation - however basic a child's understanding of this concept might be. To search for some evidence might be truly our concern too but we have an added problem in that many of the children in our congregation may not be baptised. This may be either because their parents have decided to leave baptism until later years or that the parents have little or no church involvement.

## **V The Pressure for Change**

22. Patterns of church life and worship are always changing. Within living memory the normal pattern for church attendance was two services plus afternoon Sunday School. Most Christian families today attend one act of worship each week. There is now greater congregational participation in worship. Many churches have been rediscovering for themselves the centrality of the Lord's Supper in Christian

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<sup>11</sup> Journal Vol 2 (360-361) quoted by Colin Williams *John Wesley's Theology Today* p164

life and worship. The development of 'Family Worship' in recent years has enabled adults and children to become more aware of one another as members of the worshipping community. This has increased the sense of solidarity in worship. The Church is perceived as a whole family which includes people at every stage of life. To these developments is now added the widely debated issue of the place of children and young people at the Lord's Table.

23. In common with other Churches there has been a growing awareness and appreciation of the Lord's Supper in the Methodist Church. Thus it is becoming a more common practice for all those present at worship to take part in the service, though not all will communicate. Children are now regularly found at the Lord's Supper gathered round the rail as part of the Christian family. There is also an increasing emphasis on Festival Days as opportunities for a special celebration of the Lord's Supper when children are present throughout.

After such occasions as these children sometimes ask why they cannot receive the bread and wine and some express dissatisfaction at receiving only a blessing. Some ministers, parents and workers with children are finding themselves less and less satisfied with the traditional answer 'when you are old enough to understand'. It is our conviction that the correct approach is to tell the gospel to such young enquirers in ways appropriate to them and then to invite them to share in the Lord's Supper if they desire it. The guidelines give more details of the procedures for admitting children to share in the Lord's Supper.

## **VI The Ecumenical Dimension**

24. While examining this question we have been aware of the thinking and decision of other major Churches currently considering the issue. We instance three.

25. a) The Uniting Church in Australia after considering the issue has adopted the following as the basis for its policy concerning children's participation in the Lord's Supper.

- '(i) Baptism is basic to our understanding of membership and participation in the church.
- (ii) Our understanding of Baptism makes it appropriate for all baptised persons to participate in Holy Communion. It would be inappropriate to prevent any baptised person participating in the Holy Communion.
- (iii) Children do have capacity to participate in Holy Communion, even though their appreciation of the sacrament may be different from that of adults.
- (iv) Confirmation is an important step in our faith pilgrimage, but it should not be seen as the rite of entry either to the church or to the Holy Communion.'

26. b) The Church of Scotland has given considerable thought to children's participation in the Lord's Supper and state the following as their conclusion: 'they (children) belong to the Church and the Church belongs to them. They are not only to be taught but to be ministered to; not only to be educated but to be nurtured; not

only to learn but to worship; not only to receive but to give; truly to be part of today's Church'<sup>12</sup>. Arising from this conclusion the following scheme has been suggested in their publication, 'The Lord's Supper and the Children of the Church':

- (i) Normally the children of the Church would have the right to share in the Lord's Supper by virtue of their Baptism.
- (ii) There would be no question of prescribing a lower age limit.
- (iii) Children would begin to participate in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper at the discretion of their parents.
- (iv) In exceptional circumstances, non-baptised children (or adults for that matter) should be permitted to take the Communion provided that steps are taken to usher the child (or adult) to Baptism thereafter.
- (v) In severing the link between eligibility for Communion and 'joining the Church', the effect would be to stress the significance of both Baptism and Confirmation.'

These guidelines were adopted by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. The matter was referred under the terms of the Barrier Act to local presbyteries where it did not receive the required support to go ahead. The matter therefore lies in abeyance.

27. c) In Britain a working party of the General Synod Board of Education of the Church of England presented its report on 'Christian Initiation and Participation in the Eucharist' to the General Synod in November 1985. Its detailed recommendations are based on conclusions that Confirmation is not a necessary prerequisite for admission to Holy Communion and that baptised persons be admitted to Communion before Confirmation. A final decision would follow consultation with the diocesan Bishop, the Parish Council and the local incumbent who must be satisfied that such children receive Christian Education appropriate to their age.

The Synod 'took note of' the report which was sent to the house of Bishops for further consideration.

28. The Lima Document contains major sections on Baptism and Eucharist. It states that baptism gives to Christians 'participation in the community of the Holy Spirit' and looks toward Christian growth, which involves Christian nurture.

The commentary on the text<sup>13</sup> raises the question of how a further rite can be placed between baptism and the Lord's Supper. It invites Churches who have adopted this practice to ponder whether they have fully appreciated the consequences of baptism. In the section on Eucharist the commentary notes that many Churches are currently discussing 'the inclusion of baptised children as communicants at the Lord's Supper'.

The document will be a resource for Methodist congregations discussing the issue.

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<sup>12</sup> Church of Scotland Report: *Children - the Challenge to the Church* p6

<sup>13</sup> *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* WCC 1982 p5

## VII The Way Ahead

29. Having considered our own tradition, the pressure for change and developments in other Churches, we must address ourselves to the way ahead for the Methodist Church.

We need to develop the thinking in the Faith and Order Reports of 1973 and 1975, and widen our present practices. Christian discipleship is the act of following Christ in a pilgrimage of faith, sharing the experience with others who are engaged in the same venture. A child can be a follower of Jesus and share in the life of the Church from infancy. The Church thus becomes a community of all ages where each contributes to the enrichment of all in being and becoming Christian together. The Sacraments are a sign of God's free grace. They testify to God's initiative in offering himself to us and invite our response in terms of Christian living and personal commitment. Baptism introduces us to the life of the church where at the Lord's Table we are nurtured in faith and encouraged to find and receive the means of grace. Our response which is best made in fellowship with God's people is expressed through sharing in worship, fellowship and service.

30. The children attending Methodist Churches differ considerably in their background. There are churches where virtually all the children attending worship are from the homes of families active in the church. In other churches the majority of children are from non-worshipping families, and this is often the case at Parade services. Whilst some children are regular worshippers, others may be present very occasionally, though at times coinciding with the Lord's Supper.

There are already some churches where children receive the bread and wine at the Lord's Supper, but other churches take quite a different approach, believing wisdom lies in the more traditional view of delaying full participation until confirmation and church membership. These variations already cause increasing problems as families and ministers move.

31. It is important for the practice of the local church to be derived from a policy agreed by the Church Council so that developments at local level do not depend on the views only of the Minister or of an influential minority. This report is for guidance and encouragement. It is for the Church Council to decide that church's policy in the light of the local circumstances, of the guidelines in this report, and of the principles and doctrines of the Church to which attention is drawn in this report and elsewhere.

32. It is also important that policies and practice are kept under review both in the local church and Connexionally. The Faith and Order Committee and the Division of Education and Youth will need to be informed by the experience of local churches as to the usefulness and appropriateness of the Guidelines, and the churches are encouraged to write to the Division of Education and Youth on that as well as on other aspects, as experience develops.

### VIII Guidelines

**A. It is expected as a theological principle that a child to be admitted to communicant participation in the Lord's Supper will have been baptised**

The Faith and Order reports, 'Children and the Sacrament of Holy Communion' in 1973 and 1975 take this for granted. It is also the presupposition of those who believe that baptism is itself sufficient for communicant participation in the Lord's Supper, especially in worshipping Christian families where parents and children communicate together.

Others hold the view that not only is Baptism essential, but the child should also show some evidence of faith, expressed in a desire to communicate and awareness, appropriate to the child's age and experience, of the significance of the Lord's Supper.

**B. If, from time to time, it is judged appropriate for unbaptised children to be admitted to the Lord's Supper, it is expected that, after due consideration, Baptism will follow**

This is first of all a pastoral matter which will involve consultation with children and parents. There should be a sensitive and flexible approach, encouraging a growing faith and not barring anyone who loves the Lord Jesus Christ from his table. No-one who comes in faith, irrespective of age or intellectual ability, should be turned away from the means of grace. We should welcome the faith of children and look forward to its further expression in the sacrament of Baptism.

**C. The Church Council should satisfy itself that the child shows an awareness of the significance of the Lord's Supper, and the faith response appropriate to the child's age and experience**

This should be done informally. It will include consultation between the child, the parent or parents, the minister, and those who work with the child, and it will require evidence of desire on the part of the child to communicate. This should be seen as a part of the normal nurture and teaching programme of the local church.

**D. The Church has a responsibility to discriminate and test, but this must not become the opportunity for adults to deprive children of the means of grace simply because they are children**

This too calls for great sensitivity. Issues of conscience and of deep conviction should be recognised and understood by all concerned. The final responsibility lies in the decisions of the Church Council and the practices of the local church, but we believe the time has come to move forward and encourage children to participate fully in the Lord's Supper.

**E. Children should be encouraged to express their spiritual awareness but they should not be forced to do so.**

They may wish to use the framework provided by their religious upbringing, but are equally free to reject it. Similarly some welcome the opportunity that full participation in the Lord's Supper provides to make their faith and a desire for growth a public witness. However, any excess of encouragement or demand to participate must be avoided.

**F. It is essential that there should be sufficient explanation and preparation, in relation to age and experience, before the child first communicates**

There should be the widest possible involvement of parents, workers with children, the congregation, ministers and children so that the children may be adequately prepared. There should also be adequate continuing support so that the child may grow in understanding of the Lord's Supper.

**G. Children participating in the Lord's Supper should have the support of a regular worshipping community**

For some this will include their own family, and the nurturing process begun in the worship will be continued and strengthened in the home. For others, whose families do not worship, the church will need to provide this support through adult friends and/or those who work with children.

**H. All who receive the bread and wine should be encouraged to grow in a fuller and deeper commitment to Christ and his Church.**

Along with John Wesley we believe that the Lord's Supper is a powerful evangelistic opportunity where the gospel is proclaimed in word and symbolic action. Widening the invitation to include children will be in line with the Methodist emphasis on conversion and Christian experience.

**J. When a policy has been decided and acted upon in the local church, it is important to keep it under review, and to take account of new children and families joining the church**

*(Agenda 1987, pp.78-93)*

**RESOLUTION**

The Conference

- a) adopts the report on Children and Holy Communion and, commends it to the Church, and invites local churches to use the Guidelines actively to encourage the fuller participation of children in the Lord's Supper.
- b) directs that, in view of the complexity of the issues and the different views held conscientiously by ministers and members of the church, the matter be kept under regular review by the Division of Education and Youth and the Faith and Order Committee.
- c) directs the Division of Education and Youth to publish this report, and such supporting material as it deems appropriate, including teaching material on the Lord's Supper.
- d) directs that the Guidelines in the report be printed in the Minutes of Conference.