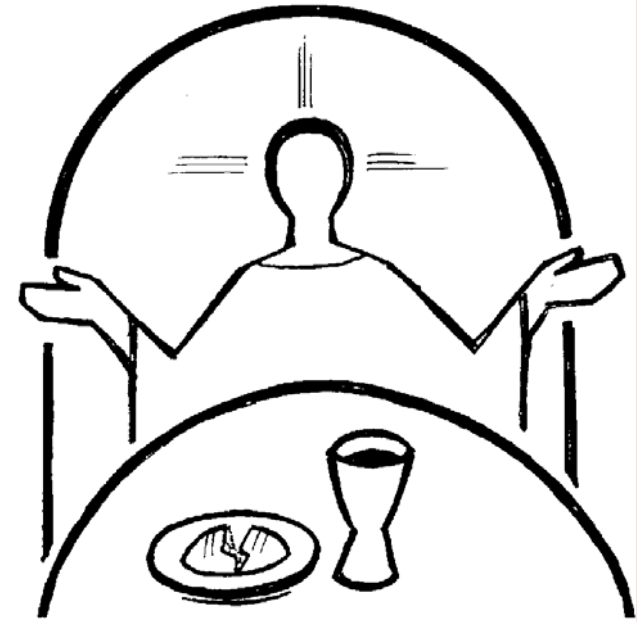


St Michael & All Angels

The Church of England in Houghton-le-Spring



Communion for All God's People

*Notes on sharing in the Meal of Holy Communion,
also known as the Eucharist and the Lord's Supper*

THE SITUATION IN BRIEF

Dear Friends

ALL BAPTIZED OR CHRISTENED PERSONS are invited to share in the meal of Holy Communion in this church, whatever their age or whether or not they have been confirmed.

If you are not confirmed, we should like to offer you a little guidance so that you can begin to appreciate who it is that invites us to share in the meal of Communion, why are we invited to do so and how we can take part. Please read the rest of this leaflet and have a word with me or with another member of staff.

It is my prayer that God will draw close to you as you take your place at the Lord's Table, enabling you to grow in faith, hope and love.

With every good wish.

Ian Wallis, Rector.

Who invites us to the meal of Holy Communion?

Jesus, the founder of our faith.

Why does he invite us?

To share with us the blessings of God.

Am I invited?

Yes, if you are baptised or christened. If not or if you're unsure, have a word with a member of the clergy.

But does that really include me?

All you need is an openness to God, a willingness to belong to God's people and a readiness to make Jesus your companion and guide.

How do I take part?

Approach the communion table with everybody else and kneel at the rail. To receive the bread, hold your hands out, palms facing upwards, and a wafer will be placed in your hand which you eat immediately. You will then be offered a sip of wine from the special communion goblet.

Babies and children who need to be accompanied will not be offered the bread and wine, although parents and guardians are free to share their portions with them.

A LITTLE MORE DETAIL

THE SHARING OF A MEAL has always been at the centre of Christian worship. Why? Because Jesus, the founder of our faith, believed sharing a meal was one of the best ways of helping people to discover the blessings of belonging to God's people and knowing God's presence in their lives.

So much of what Jesus believed was important can be communicated in the simple yet profound act of sharing a meal together in God's name: welcome and acceptance, forgiveness and reconciliation, joy and celebration, giving and receiving, generosity and thanksgiving, trust and friendship, sharing and consideration, equality and justice, belonging and commitment to one another and to God.

Jesus shared meals with everyone and anyone, sometimes hosting huge outdoor picnics and on other occasions eating not only with family, friends and followers, but also with debating-partners, opponents and those considered bad company. In fact, Jesus earned a reputation for eating with those whose

lifestyles seemed incompatible with God's way. For Jesus, it was 'open house'. Invitations were not restricted to the worthy, the upright or the initiated. In fact, there were no restrictions at all!

Why was Jesus so hospitable? Because he was acting as God's host and, as such, it was his responsibility and joy to be generous to all God's people, whatever their circumstances or situation in life. He recognised God's blessings come to us as a gift without condition or control. Where they are received with openness and gratitude, blessing follows; where they are rejected or exploited, blessing is missed; where they are demanded by right, blessing is lost.

The last meal Jesus shared with his friends was a particularly memorable one. On that occasion, he asked them to carry on hosting meals in God's name, just as he had done.

For nearly 2000 years, followers of Jesus have continued this practice and, through doing so, have come to know God's presence in their lives in a very real and life-changing way. We hope this is your experience as well!



WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT HOLY COMMUNION

WE BELIEVE that baptism symbolizes the beginning of a life-long journey of faith. In baptism, we affirm that each life belongs to God, as parents, godparents and sponsors are invited to share with all God's people the responsibility of bringing up the newly baptized within the faith of Christ and the community that bears his name.

WE BELIEVE that the church's practice of sharing a meal together originates in Jesus' hospitality and table-fellowship. Jesus appreciated how sharing a meal could be a rich source of blessing and communicate much of his vision for what it means to live as God's people.

WE BELIEVE that Jesus practised an 'open table', certainly amongst Jews, as an expression of divine generosity and hospitality. He did not discriminate on the basis of worthiness to participate or, as far as we can gather, of age. We believe that the church comes closest to Jesus' practice when an open invitation is extended to all God's people.

WE BELIEVE that to exclude someone who is ready and desirous of sharing in the eucharistic meal, whether because of age or on some other grounds, not only risks diminishing that person, but also compromises the integrity of the communion.

WE BELIEVE that Jesus' table-fellowship spawned a rich tradition of practice and interpretation spanning the Christian centuries. We recognize the importance of this heritage, whilst giving precedence to our appreciation of Jesus' understanding.

WE BELIEVE that the value and meanings of the eucharist emerge through regular participation, coupled with ongoing reflection in the context of personal discipleship and active involvement in the community of faith. In consequence, sharing in the eucharistic meal should not be conditional upon theological understanding.

WE BELIEVE that confirmation is an occasion when baptized and communicant Christians affirm their membership within the community of faith and make public their allegiance to Jesus, as they are strengthened by the prayers of God's people and commissioned by the Bishop for life-long service.

CODE OF PRACTICE

NO BAPTIZED person of whatever age who is ready and desirous of sharing in the eucharistic meal should be prevented from doing so. As far as each eucharistic celebration is concerned, participation for those children needing to be brought to the table will be at the discretion of parents or guardians. For those who can make their own way, it will depend on their desire and readiness to take part, once their parents or guardians have been consulted. Baptized and unconfirmed adults desirous and ready to share in the eucharistic meal will be welcomed to do so and, at an appropriate juncture, invited to prepare for confirmation.

ON A REGULAR basis and at least once a year, parents or guardians of children or teenagers involved in the life of the church will be informed in writing that St Michael's practises an 'open table' and that those in their care will be invited to take part unless they indicate to the contrary.

FOLLOWING this invitation, appropriate preparation will be integrated with children's and youth programmes, explaining who it is that invites us ('eating with Jesus'), why it is that we are invited ('sharing in God's good things') and how to take part appropriately ('table manners').

IN ADDITION, suitable teaching will be offered throughout the church community and on a regular basis to encourage further reflection upon the value and meanings of the eucharist.

BAPTIZED and communicant Christians will, at the appropriate stage in their journeys of faith, be encouraged to seek confirmation. In preparation for this, each year or as often as necessary, courses in discipleship will be offered.

ALL GOD'S PEOPLE will be encouraged to grow in faith through study of the Scriptures, regular prayer and worship, active involvement in church life, responsible stewardship of money, time and talents, and acts of service within the community and beyond.

IGW (22/10/2000)