

# General Synod – Admission of Children to Holy Communion Canon 1985 Adopting Ordinance 1997

## Explanatory Statement

### Admission of Children to Holy Communion

1. In 1995 the Synod resolved (49/95) -  
"This Synod requests the Standing Committee to bring to the next Synod a bill to enable the General Synod Canon for the Admission of Children to the Holy Communion (Canon 6/85) to be considered."
2. The first reading of this bill took place at the 1st session of the 44th Synod in October 1996. The second reading was referred to the 2nd session of the 44th Synod.
3. In Sydney the Archbishop customarily requires candidates for confirmation to have reached 14 years of age or at least be in Year 8 at school. This means the rubric at the end of The Order of Confirmation in the Book of Common Prayer, which says that "there shall none be admitted to the Holy Communion, until such time as he be confirmed or be ready and desirous to be confirmed", ordinarily precludes children from receiving communion.
4. The Admission of Children to Holy Communion Canon 1985 (the "Canon") authorises the admission of a child to Holy Communion, where the child has not been confirmed, if -
  - (a) the child has been baptised;
  - (b) the minister is satisfied that the child has been adequately instructed, gives evidence of understanding the nature and meaning of the Holy Communion and has fulfilled the conditions of repentance and faith; and
  - (c) the child, with the sponsorship of his or her parents or of other confirmed members of the congregation, seeks admission while awaiting confirmation.
5. The Canon expressly provides that it affects the order and good government of the Church within a diocese and does not come into force in a diocese unless and until the diocese by ordinance adopts the Canon. Accordingly, the Canon does not come into effect in Sydney until it is adopted by the Synod by ordinance.
6. The Canon has been adopted by all dioceses in the Anglican Church of Australia, except the Diocese of Sydney.
7. The Canon, if adopted, permits the Synod, by ordinance, to regulate the practice and procedure in relation to the admission of children to Holy Communion under the Canon. In addition, the Archbishop will have power to make regulations, not inconsistent with such ordinances (if any) made by the Synod, concerning the practice and procedure in relation to the admission of children to Holy Communion under the Canon.
8. Information has been sought from all other dioceses about whether they have made any regulations under the Canon. Only the Diocese of Tasmania has adopted regulations by way of ordinance. Of the other 21 dioceses, 16 operate under regulations of the bishop and 5 have no regulations at all.
9. The bill does not propose that the Sydney Synod make regulations at this time to regulate the practice and procedure in relation to the admission of children to Holy Communion.

### Background

10. In 1987 the Standing Committee reported to the Synod on the Canon. The report, after setting out the text of the Canon, stated -  
"Since 1985, the question of the admission of children to the Holy Communion has been canvassed widely within the Diocese of Sydney by the Diocesan Education Commission (*Is the Holy Communion for Children?* and *Communion for Children? The Current Debate*, and a *Study Guide*) and by a committee appointed by the Standing Committee. From the full report of that committee, based in part on results from a survey, the following matters have been noted.
  - (a) A statement from Archbishop Robinson [as he then was] giving his current requirements re confirmation and the age of candidates.

'... it is my desire that candidates should have normally reached the age of 14 years, or at least be in Year 8 at school. I am happy to consider certain departures from this, and occasionally have agreed to the confirmation of candidates who will turn 14 in the year in which they are confirmed. I have also modified the advice in special circumstances where a candidate may have come from another diocese and be about to return to it, where the requirements may be somewhat different.

While I do not consider I have any right to override the confirmation rubric itself about candidates being 'ready and desirous of being confirmed', I am also conscious that the Bishop is required to 'approve' of those who are presented to the Bishop to be confirmed and that this gives the Bishop some discretion as to the fitness of those so presented.'

- (b) The committee reported nine detailed conclusions from the evidence before it, and especially from the survey of clergy opinion across the Diocese, including the following conclusions.

'The question of admitting children to Holy Communion before confirmation is not a pressing issue in the Diocese of Sydney at this time.

There is no evidence of any widespread desire for change in the current diocesan policy and practice in relation to primary school age children and below.'

'Any additional flexibility in the administration of confirmation or any slight variation in the customary age at which candidates are acceptable to the Archbishop already lies within the scope of the rubric.'

'Consequently the General Synod Canon does not appear capable of making a useful contribution to the order and good government of the Church in the Diocese of Sydney at this stage or in the immediately foreseeable future.'"

11. The Synod resolved (7/87) -

"Noting ..... the Standing Committee's Report [on the Canon], this Synod hereby declines to adopt the General Synod Canon for the Admission of Children to Holy Communion. Synod commends the booklet *Communion for Children? The Current Debate* to the clergy and lay people of the Diocese for ongoing study and requests the Diocesan Education Commission to prepare additional material developing the issues raised in the final section of the booklet under the heading *Some Practical and Pastoral Considerations*, and in the related terms of reference which the committee appointed by the Standing Committee did not have time to consider."

12. In 1993 the Synod resolved (23/93) -

"Synod noting the article *The Lord's Supper for the Lord's Children* published in the *Reformed Theological Review*, (50/1, 1991) requests the Standing Committee -

- (a) to refer the said article to the Diocesan Doctrine Commission and the Board of Education for consideration; and
- (b) to seek the opinion of those bodies as to whether the theological arguments of the article and any perceived related matters warrant a recommittal of the General Synod Canon for the Admission of Children to Holy Communion (Canon 6/85) to a later session of this Synod."

13. In 1994 the Synod received a report which brought together reports from the Anglican Education Commission (formerly the Board of Education) and the Diocesan Doctrine Commission made in response to resolution 23/93. The Anglican Education Commission expressed the view that there was sufficient evidence to warrant a recommittal of the Canon. The report received by the Synod is set out on pages 368 and 369 of the 1995 Year Book.

For and on behalf of the Standing Committee

MARK PAYNE  
*Legal Officer*

20 August 1997