

*Providing ministry, sacraments and oversight  
which we can receive with confidence*

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## Communion and Baptism

*‘Truly our communion is with the Father and  
with his Son Jesus Christ.’ (1 John 1.3)*

‘Communion’ and ‘fellowship’ are translations of the same Greek word: *koinonia* (mutual sharing or participation).

The life of God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – is an eternal communion of love. All who are baptized into Christ share in this communion.

Because our common baptism provides the basis for communion with all faithful Christians, that communion can be called ‘baptismal communion’.

‘O God, you have knit together your elect  
in one communion and fellowship  
in the mystical body of your Son Christ  
our Lord.’ *Collect of All Saints’ Day*

‘... we are incorporated into the mystical body  
of your Son, the blessed company of all  
faithful people.’ *Prayer after Communion*

## The Communion of the Church

The Church is a communion because, by the gift of the Holy Spirit, it shares in the eternal communion of the Son with the Father. It makes that communion visible on earth.

The Church is a ‘communion of saints’, embracing all the faithful (‘saints’ simply means ‘holy ones’) – both pilgrims on earth and blessed in heaven.

- ✦ They share in the ‘holy things’ – above all the eucharistic gifts – by which the unity of Christ’s body is represented and brought about.
- ✦ They are the ‘holy people’ who have been made holy by those gifts.

The communion of the Holy Trinity is a communion of love. Therefore love (*caritas* – charity), which ‘binds everything together in perfect harmony’ (Col. 3.14), always has primacy in the Church.

Our communion with God and with each other in Christ finds expression through:

- ✦ confessing the faith received from the Apostles, revealed in the Scriptures and set forth in the creeds;

- ✦ the sacraments that bind us to Christ: one baptism; one Eucharist, served by one ordained ministry; and the other sacraments of the Church.
- ✦ a life of shared concern for one another in mutual forbearance and love;
- ✦ sharing of gifts, both material and spiritual;
- ✦ shared commitment to the mission entrusted by Christ to his Church;
- ✦ proclamation of the Gospel;
- ✦ solidarity with the poor and powerless;
- ✦ acceptance of the same basic ethical values to guide us in living a Christian life;
- ✦ a shared vision of humanity made and restored in Christ, which gives us hope in the perfection of all things in heaven.

## Episcopal Ministry

A bishop is a successor of the Apostles and a father in God. His is a universal ministry of unity and oversight (*episkope*). He unites the parishes that are committed to his care in communion with each other and with the Church across the world and through the ages.

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## Full Communion

Being in full communion with a bishop is a mark of being a catholic Christian.

Parishes, clergy and people are in full communion with their bishop when they can receive the sacramental ministry of all those whom their bishop ordains.

Where this is not the case, there is no longer one Eucharist in which all can partake. This is why ordaining women as bishops and priests leaves us in a situation where communion is diminished.

Parishes where (for theological reasons) the ministry of women as bishops and priests cannot be received can pass a Resolution. If their theological conviction so requires, they will be placed under the oversight of a bishop of The Society with whom they will be in full communion.

The Society's parishes enjoy full communion with each other through the full communion of its bishops.

We pray for the restoration of full communion throughout the Church of England, and for the full, visible unity of the whole Church of Christ.

## Communion now in the Church of England

Parishes of The Society remain part of the family of their diocese, under the jurisdiction of the diocesan bishop.

Although visible communion is diminished, the communion rooted in our common baptism remains. The Five Guiding Principles challenge us to identify the highest degree of communion that principle and conscience allow, and to express this by sharing in the life of the diocese, making a positive contribution to mission and growth.

Our communion with other members of the Church of England must be characterized by the love (charity) that arises from our common life in Christ.

Normally, holy communion is received within a context of full communion. For us, this means receiving communion in Society parishes or from bishops and priests of The Society. But there can be occasions when it is appropriate (though none should feel compelled) to receive communion from other validly ordained bishops and priests. This must be a decision for the person concerned, as a matter of conscience.

# Communion and Full Communion

The ordination of women as bishops in the Church of England has prompted questions about the meaning of 'communion':

*What is the full communion that the clergy and parishes of The Society enjoy with its bishops and with each other?*

*What communion do they share with their other brothers and sisters, lay and ordained, in the Church of England?*

*What does this mean for receiving holy communion?*

This leaflet offers summary answers. For fuller explanation, see the Council of Bishops' statements on Communion, Catholicity and a Catholic Life: [www.sswsh.com/statements.php](http://www.sswsh.com/statements.php)

