

DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS AND THEOLOGICAL OPINIONS (DSTO)

VOLUME 1 E. THE SACRAMENTS

The blessing of children at the altar

Adopted by the Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations, February 1986.

1. In evaluating the practice of blessing children at the altar, we need to consider why parents bring their children to the altar during the distribution of Holy Communion. Some may do it for purely practical reasons: The children cannot be left alone. Others may do it for the specific purpose of having their children receive a blessing. If the latter is the case, there should be consistency in practice in bringing the older as well as the younger.
2. Some see value in the practice, inasmuch as children come or are brought forward as part of a worshipping family, and it can develop in them a close awareness of what is happening when the Sacrament is being distributed and received.
3. Some see danger in the practice, on the grounds that the act of blessing children at the altar during the distribution of Holy Communion may come to be regarded as something approaching a sacramental act, both by the children themselves and by the congregation. This would detract from the Sacrament of the Altar as it really is and why it is administered.
4. If all children come to the altar when their parents commune, the pastor will need to be careful that he communes only those children who have been admitted to the Sacrament. This may be a difficult assignment for a visiting pastor.
5. Since the blessing of children at the altar is not a sacrament, prominence should not be given to this practice by those who adopt it. Where the practice receives undue importance, it should be discouraged. If it is adopted, as is necessary with every ritual associated with public worship, there needs to be teaching, so that all involved in public worship know what the practice involves, who is involved, and what is the purpose and benefit of the ritual.