THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

1 December 2020

**To all the Clergy of the Church of England**

Dear Friends in Christ

We are writing to give some advice relating to Holy Communion and its distribution as we move towards the Christmas season.

We want to stress the priority to keep safe in all that we do and to realise that given the current situation some of our normal practices cannot be maintained and we need to be careful and pragmatic. We encourage all of us to use our common sense and always to ensure we are caring for each other.

A key difficulty this year is the deprivation of the sacrament of Holy Communion. We are aware that for many Christians this is a significant and painful absence.

It is our hope and expectation that at the end of the current lockdown it will be possible for public worship in church buildings to continue. It will of course need to be in a COVID secure environment and we want to stress that we are aware that many clergy and laity will not feel able to re-start public worship and they should not feel under any pressure so to do.

In the Church of England (and indeed across the Anglican Communion) it is expected in normal times that Holy Communion will be received in both kinds.

Within the Church of England, we know that we seek to be one Church, loving and caring for one another with pastoral sympathy and accommodation. Even in normal times the practice of distribution of communion varies from place to place.

The Bishops are involved in working to find an appropriate way to ensure Communion in both kinds is possible. We attach with this letter guidance from a working group who have been commissioned by the House of Bishops. We commend this to you. We hope that what they outline will be helpful for many as we plan what our practice will be over the coming weeks.

The House of Bishops is committed to working further on this matter. However, the outcome of their discussions will take some time. The guidance attached is therefore interim and further information will be sent once the work has been done in the new year.

These matters do touch on deeper principles for us as a Church and we do need both to be sensitive to each other and to work hard to ensure the issues we are debating, and their consequences are understood by all involved.

We are clear on three essential points:

- The president at every service of Holy Communion must be an episcopally ordained priest with the appropriate authority from their bishop.
- The elements are to be bread and wine and no other substance.
- With regard to the consecrated elements used for Holy Communion the rules that have been in existence since the Book of Common Prayer are clear: As it now says in Common Worship, 'any consecrated bread and wine which is not required for purposes of communion is consumed at the end of the distribution or after the service.'

Different understandings of the Eucharist are beautifully and carefully observed and respected in the Church of England. It is a key part of our history and life together. We don't want this to change.

Therefore, in the period between now and any further decisions on these matters, we encourage you to act, using the advice and direction given by your Diocesan Bishop, after discussion with the PCC, in accordance with their consciences, provided that the three principles set out above are strictly and invariably observed.

In so doing we observe our Anglican traditions and we ensure that in our actions we do not cause others to stumble.

With every blessing,

The Most Revd & Rt Hon Justin Welby
Archbishop of Canterbury

The Most Revd & Rt Hon Stephen Cottrell
Archbishop of York

# COVID-19 Receiving Holy Communion in both kinds by simultaneous administration

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| 1 December 2020 | 1.1 | The House of Bishops Recovery Group |

*The Recovery Group has been set up to support the Church of England as government guidance changes through the COVID-19 pandemic. This document has been prepared with information available by the issue date. It will be kept under review and updated as the situation develops, with each update issued as a new version. The current version will always be available to download from the Church of England website via the Coronavirus FAQs page.*

**Context for this Guidance**

Since churches have re-opened, congregations have received Holy Communion under the form of the consecrated bread alone. This practice continues to be recommended for use in most contexts.

Recognising the ongoing nature of the pandemic, and a longing in some churches to receive Holy Communion in both kinds, this document offers a procedure for simultaneous administration of the consecrated bread and wine in a manner that seeks to minimise the possible health risks. Bishops may wish to invite the clergy in their diocese to use this procedure. Before doing so, it is recommended that clergy discuss it with the PCC.

This procedure seeks to minimise the COVID risk from receiving Communion in both kinds, although it will not remove it entirely. Nevertheless, we are satisfied that this is the best way of doing so, and that the straightforward principles in the Key Points below help to keep the risk as low as possible.

**Practice**

The simultaneous administration of consecrated bread and wine is effected by the president taking a piece of bread carefully from the paten or ciborium with the fingers and touching it briefly but carefully to the surface of the wine, allowing a small amount of the wine to suffuse into the bread.

**Key points**

- **The president communicates last and *must not drink from the chalice* until this point.**
- **The president must sanitize hands in advance of the distribution; each communicant must sanitize their hands before receiving.**
- **Communicant and president must both be wearing face coverings, and the communicant must move away from the communion station before removing their mask to consume the consecrated bread and wine.**
- **Communicants who wish to continue receiving under one kind should continue to be able to do so.**

*Before the Service*

- If loaves or large pieces of leavened or unleavened bread are used, these should be divided into individual pieces in a hygienic way before the start of the service. Hand hygiene and physical distancing precautions should apply.
- The bread and wine to be received by communicants should be covered at all times before the distribution.

*Before the Eucharistic Prayer*

- Offertory processions where the bread and wine are brought to the table are not recommended at this time.
- When the president takes the bread and wine before the Eucharistic Prayer, it is recommended that this takes place in silence. If words are said when the bread and wine are taken into the hand, only the bread that the president will receive and a covered cup are taken (the other elements being covered).
- The president should consider how much wine will be necessary in the chalice, probably much less than usual.

*During the Eucharistic Prayer*

- The bread and wine to be received by communicants other than the president should be covered at all times, including during the account of the Lord's Supper.

*At the Breaking of the Bread*

- At the breaking of the bread (the 'fraction') – whether this takes place during the Eucharistic Prayer or afterwards as a separate action – only the consecrated bread that the president will consume at the end of the distribution is broken. The remainder of the bread remains covered. If other consecrated bread needs to be broken before it is administered, this must be done after the president has sanitized their hands, in silence or while the Agnus Dei is said by the congregation.

*At the Giving of Communion*

- Unless there are very large numbers, it is advised that the president be the only person to handle the bread during the distribution. If there are large numbers of communicants, the procedures for the president at the distribution, below, should be followed carefully by all who are assisting to distribute Holy Communion. In any case, care should be taken so that communicants who are moving from their places preserve physical distancing.
- At the invitation to communion, it is recommended that only the bread that the president will receive be shown to the people. The words of distribution ('The body and blood of Christ' or 'The body and blood of Christ keep you in eternal life' or another suitably adapted authorized form) are spoken to the whole congregation immediately after the invitation to communion, and all who intend to receive say, 'Amen'.
- The president puts on a face covering and sanitizes their hands.

- Leaving the uncovered consecrated bread for the president's later consumption on the holy table, the president carries the consecrated bread and wine in their covered containers (a covered chalice and either a ciborium or a covered paten) to a table or other surface from which Holy Communion will be distributed. It should be arranged so that the president can have access to each element, but should not allow the president or other communicants to stand directly over them or face them.
- The president uncovers the bread and wine and takes the ciborium/paten in their hands.
- Each communicant then receives Communion in both kinds simultaneously in this way:
    1. The communicant must sanitize hands prior to arriving at the place of communion.
    2. The communicant stands at the place of communion and holds out hand(s).
    3. The president takes a piece of bread with their free hand and briefly but carefully touches it to the surface of the wine, allowing some of the wine to suffuse into the bread.
    4. The president places the bread in the communicant's hand in silence *without touching the hand.* In cases where receiving in the hands is not possible, such as illness or disability, hands must be sanitized before and after.
    5. The president should take care to avoid the possibility of surplus wine dripping from the bread at the time of administration.
    6. The communicant moves away from the place of communion, removes face covering with free hand, consumes the bread, and replaces the face covering.
    7. If the president accidentally touches the hand of the communicant or any other surface, both president's and communicant's hands must be sanitized again.

- If a communicant must receive in their place, they should still sanitize their hands. The president brings the requisite amount of bread and the wine to them, and performs step 3 above immediately before administering.
- Once all others have communicated, the president returns the remaining consecrated bread and wine to the table, and receives Communion according to the same method, using the portion of bread that remained at the table (i.e. the president's wafer/bread).
- Any consecrated bread and wine which is not required for purposes of communion is consumed at the end of the distribution or after the service.

*Note:* The procedure given above could be adapted for use in churches where it is the norm for someone other than the president, or several such people, to distribute Communion, where all involved take care to observe the precautions noted above.