

From the House of Bishops : the Administration of the Holy Communion

From time to time, during and since the Covid 19 pandemic, the bishops have sought to offer counsel to the wider church particularly concerning the manner of the administration of the Holy Communion. In all our statements, we have sought to combine seemliness and safety and to take the best professional advice available to us.

It is approximately a year now since we encouraged the restored use of the common cup at Holy Communion. This is the traditional Anglican practice in relation to the administration of the sacrament, and is enshrined in the formularies of the Book of Common Prayer. The sharing of the Cup of the Lord is rich in meaning and value for the communicant, and only in the most extraordinary medical emergency could we take it upon ourselves to advise that the cup should be withdrawn, or that the consecrated wine of the Eucharist should be administered by other temporary means such as individual vessels.

We recognised a year ago that it would take some time for the cup to be restored across the whole church, that there would for a while need to be a degree of variety of practice, and that the position of those who remained nervous about receiving from it should be respected. Nevertheless, cognisant of the present situation in terms of public health, and mindful of professional wisdom which indicates the extremely low risk associated with the transmission of infection via a shared silver vessel containing the fermented fruit of the vine and used in an ordered liturgical context, we have all agreed to provide the following directions to the church. We believe we are doing this in a situation where in fact the common cup has already been largely restored around the parishes of the Church of Ireland.

- specific permissions given by individual bishops for the use of individual vessels at Holy Communion will lapse after Pentecost Sunday 2023
- Thereafter the administration of the consecrated wine at Holy Communion in our churches should involve the common cup only
- Those who remain for their own reasons nervous about receiving from the common cup should be respected, and they should receive in one kind only, with an assurance that the Church teaches that the sacrament can be fully received in one kind
- People who are obviously the victims of infections that involve coughing and sneezing should probably think twice before coming to church, and certainly out of courtesy to others should show temporary gracious restraint in not seeking to receive from the common cup
- We ask that communicants do not themselves intinct (dip) the consecrated bread they have received in the wine. This is based on clear medical advice - intinction can spread infection from fingers to the wine, and crumbs of bread left in the wine can be problematical for other people who wish to receive it, eg coeliacs
- Chalices should be kept scrupulously clean, and washed with very hot soapy water after services before being put away. Defects on chalices e.g. torn lips should be professionally repaired
- It is generally held that noble metal rather than pottery vessels can be used more hygienically
- It is really important that chalices be wiped fully using clean cloth (preferably linen) purificators. The use of tissues can spread infection ; the use of proper cloth purificators significantly diminishes it.

In issuing this guidance we are concerned that communicants feel safe, that they conduct themselves with mutual courtesy, and that above all the supper of the Lord is administered with reverence and with joy. The long period during which the common cup had to be withdrawn only served to remind us of how precious a thing it is, how full of Scriptural resonances, how it speaks to us of our utter equality before God as we gather in sacramental unity, how the beauty of its meaning must never be taken for granted. In that spirit we pray that the full restoration of the common cup, surrounded of course by care and courtesy, can be for the whole Church of Ireland a matter of the greatest joy.