COVID-19 Advice on the Administration of Holy Communion

Issue Date Version Issued by 9th June 2020 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 and is for planning purposes only until present restrictions are lifted. 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.

This advice note seeks to enable Holy Communion to be celebrated in a safe and appropriate way. It includes practical steps in the administration of Holy Communion, as well as guidance on the practice of Holy Communion provided by members of the Liturgical Commission and the Faith & Order Commission.

Where either priests or parishioners have concerns about participating in a service of Holy Communion, it is important that no pressure is placed on priests to celebrate Holy Communion or on parishioners to receive it.

General advice on cleaning church buildings and on the conduct of public worship should also be observed.

Q. When can we celebrate Holy Communion with our congregations in church buildings?

A. This will only be possible once our church buildings are re-opened for public worship.

Q. Are we able to share the Peace?

A. Unfortunately, in order to minimise risk, there should be no sharing of the Peace physically.

Q. What hygiene measures should the priest follow when preparing the elements?

A. The president (and anyone who prepares the elements) must sanitise their hands before touching the elements, and again after the president has administered them to him/herself and before offering the bread to communicants.

If others assist in preparing the elements, then hand hygiene and physical distancing precautions should apply.

Q. What elements can be offered to communicants?

A. At present, Communion should be administered in one kind only with no sharing of the common cup. The president alone should always take the wine, consuming all that has been consecrated; other communicants should receive the bread only, in the hand. As the Liturgical and Faith and Order Commissions have made clear, this is still ‘complete communion’.

In order to minimise overall risk, intinction (dipping the bread into the wine) should not be practised.

2

Version 1 – issued 9th June 2020

Q. When should the priest and communicants sanitize their hands?

A. The priest should sanitise his/her hands before administering the bread.

Each communicant should also be encouraged to sanitise their hands before receiving the bread.

Q. Should the altar rails be used?

A. We suggest that in order to avoid touching it and to maintain physical distancing communicants should not come to kneel at the altar rail, but instead they should form a line maintaining twometres distance to receive the bread from the priest. The details of how this will be enacted will depend on the local situation, particularly the layout of the building.

Q. How can the priest maintain physical distancing when administering the bread?

A. We recognise that it will not be possible to maintain the normal two-metres distancing for the brief time that the priest administers the sacrament. However, the risk associated with this is relatively low. Some benefit might be gained, if face-coverings are worn or a form of separation such as a perspex screen is used (though as noted below, the evidence on face coverings is not strong).

Q. What about face coverings?

A. The evidence on face coverings is not strong and suggests that the benefit is not to the wearer but to others for any potential infection by the wearer. However, it is very possible that Government will advise that, as a precautionary measure, face coverings should be worn by both communicants and the priest when administering the sacrament.

Q. How can we clean the chalice and paten?

A. If the priest is the only person who will touch the chalice and paten both during the service and after, then they can be cleaned in the normal way.

If others may touch the chalice and/or paten, either during the service or after, then they should either be washed in warm water with liquid soap, or if this is not possible, stored safely on their own for at least 72 hours before using again, in case they have been infected with the virus. Further advice on cleaning historic items is available from Historic England:- https://historicengland.org.uk/coronavirus/historic-places/cleaning-historic-surfaces/

Q. Can we reserve the Sacrament?

A. Churches which reserve the Sacrament may do so. The priest should place the hosts in the vessel for reservation. They should not be consumed or distributed for 72 hours by anyone other than the priest who reserved them.