

March 10, 2022

A Momentous Change in our COVID Protocols

Receiving Communion during the age of endemic COVID.

We are clearly entering a new phase of the pandemic. The number of cases is in sharp decline. Protocols are being relaxed. The CDC made a substantial change in the way we assess the risk level in a particular geographic area to focus more on hospital capacity and less on infection rate metrics. This new assessment means that portions of our diocese are now in a green status.

None of this means that we can let down our guard; we must remain vigilant, as we know that this virus and its spread can change in an instant. Each congregation should continue to carefully monitor local conditions and make decisions about safety protocols that faithfully care for parish and community, especially for those most vulnerable.

The only *diocesan* restriction that had not been lifted—until now—was the prohibition of distributing the wine at communion via the common chalice.

The Health Advisory Panel has determined that now is the right time to remove that restriction.

Congregations may resume sharing communion in both kinds, following these new guidelines:

1. Communion directions and teachings continue to include our doctrine that receiving communion in only one kind is fully receiving communion.
2. If offering intinction, a separate station should be set up for that purpose; under no circumstances should intinction be allowed from the same cup from which communicants are taking a sip of wine.
3. For those who are not ready to resume use of the common chalice but would still like to receive Communion in both kinds, the practice of consecrating and offering a few prepackaged hosts and wine (which was done as part of our pandemic protocols), may be continued.

Receiving in one kind only

Since the Middle Ages, after movements to *prohibit* reception in both kinds and counter-movements to *require* reception in both kinds, the Anglican tradition has held (as in so many theological debates) a middle view that we, as much as possible, permit reception in both kinds while acknowledging that reception of only the bread or only the wine is fully receiving communion. We recognize that varied circumstances necessitate a pastoral flexibility for communicants to share in the grace of the sacrament, even as we remain grounded on the foundational integrity of sharing both bread and wine as the sign of our unity as the Body of Christ. (See page 457 in *The Book of Common Prayer*)

Intinction

The practice of dipping the consecrated bread in the consecrated wine has centuries of precedent. The Episcopal Church has generally held to the essential importance of the common cup to the fullness of eucharistic theology. *The Book of Common Prayer* allows for reception “in both kinds simultaneously, in a manner approved by the bishop” (BCP p. 408), but the rubrics clearly prefer reception in both kinds separately. Moreover, research has consistently affirmed that the risk of disease transmission through the common chalice is very low. Intinction, rather than diminishing the risk, actually raises the risk because the hands often carry and transmit germs. Sipping from the common chalice is safer.

However, for those congregations desiring to offer communion by intinction, arrangements must be made to have a separate station with a chalice or cup expressly for that purpose, not used for administration to those who take a sip of wine. At that station, the minister—not the communicant—must be the only person dipping the host and placing it either in the hand or on the tongue of the communicant. Should you have further questions or need clarification, please contact the office at bishop@diosova.org.

As each congregation envisions how best to move forward with this new guidance, I expect clergy and/or vestries to consult with their parish Health Coordinator or Health Equity Team and to prayerfully consider how best to announce this change, to instruct parishioners, to train Eucharistic Ministers, and to implement this change liturgically.

I believe this change in our protocols provides the most joyous evidence yet that we are re-emerging from our two-year long pandemic life. As we (finally!) share the common cup, let us pray for the grace to be strengthened for service to our community by proclaiming Good News, by caring for those who are suffering or in need, and by welcoming all people into our houses of worship with gladness and joy.

Blessings and peace,
Bishop Susan