

## UPDATED GUIDELINES FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF HOLY COMMUNION DURING COVID-19

In the section of the *Book of Common Prayer*, entitled “Concerning the Service of the Church,” the Holy Eucharist is defined as “the principal act of Christian worship on the Lord’s Day and other major Feasts... .” In our common worship life, we Episcopalians define ourselves as people of the Word and people of the Table. We are fed by the bread of Life as it is revealed to us in Scripture, in Community and in the Holy Sacrament of the Altar.

During this time of the Covid-19 pandemic, we have not been gathering for worship as normal. Consequently, many of us have engaged involuntarily in a fast from the Eucharist. We were perhaps willing to do this for a short time, thinking our time of physical and social distancing would be brief. However, as we all know, the pandemic has lingered and many of us have been without the Eucharist for months. With no end in sight, finding a way to administer the Sacrament safely to those who cannot come to church is now more important than ever.

At a recent virtual meeting the House of Bishops discussed this dilemma, and bishops were encouraged to help churches find creative and theologically sound ways to distribute the Eucharist even during pandemic restrictions. Over the last month, Bishop Susan has been meeting with and talking to clergy about their own creative ideas about how to do this. From these discussions, we have created some guidelines which are approved for the distribution of Holy Communion to everyone and especially to those who are not able to come to church.

The guidelines are as follows:

- Any elements consumed as Holy Eucharist must be consecrated by a priest within the context of communal embodied worship, with one of the prescribed Eucharistic prayers authorized by the Church. Jesus promised us that where two or three are gathered in His name, He is present. Whether the church is gathering in person with just a few or even if the priest is gathering only with a musician, a lay reader and a camera/tech person so as to record or livestream, if the elements are consecrated within that communal worship, then the Eucharist is valid.
- During this communal worship, the priest may consecrate additional elements for those who are not able to gather physically in the church. These consecrated elements may be distributed to such persons in one of the following ways:
  - Lay Eucharistic Visitors may be licensed to deliver the Sacrament to the homebound as they have normally done and may deliver it in the context of *Communion Under Special Circumstances* (BCP p. 396). Additionally, the LEV may leave the Sacrament with a trusted member of a household community who will safeguard it until the family may consume it together either within the context of *Communion Under Special Circumstances* led by that family member or within the context of a livestreamed or recorded service of the family’s worshipping community. In most instances, for example, the consecrated elements would be delivered after the service in which they are consecrated but may be held in the home until the following week when the family would be able to consume it within the context of a subsequent recorded or live-streamed service.
  - A designated member of a household may come to the church and pick up the consecrated elements which have been reserved to a sacred space. The obtaining of

these consecrated elements should be transacted communally. That is to say that we are an embodied faith and our partaking of the Eucharist is a communal action. Consecrated elements should not be left out in baskets on the church porch or drive or even in the Narthex for people to pick up, but should be reserved in a sacred space and the exchange facilitated by a person as a visible symbol of our community.

- Persons who are not able to worship communally may also come to the church at a scheduled time or make an appointment to come to the church to receive the Sacrament from the priest or from a Lay Eucharistic Visitor privately from the Reserved Sacrament in the church.
- Such delivery of the Sacrament to homes or to people who come by the church would necessarily require that there be a period of time that the Sacrament would be reserved to a sacred space for a set period of time. In the church, we already have provisions to reserve the Sacrament in this manner. Families should be instructed to designate a special place set apart in their own home where the Sacrament may be reverently placed and safeguarded until such time as the Sacrament may be consumed within the context of worship (Resources exist on the Diocesan website for the creation of sacred spaces within the home). The Sacrament should be consumed within the week after its delivery to the home. In special cases, at the discretion of a person's priest, additional Sacrament may remain in the home for longer periods of time.

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