



The Diocese of  
Southwark



## Permission to lead a Service of Communion by Extension

2020 version

### Introduction

In the exceptional circumstances created by the COVID-19 outbreak, The Bishop of Southwark has provided for Readers and Licensed Lay Workers to undertake a simple process of preparation and assessment to permit them to officiate at a Service of Holy Communion by Extension at this time.

This simple set of materials provides preparation and an application process to allow Readers and Licensed Lay Workers to lead a service of Holy Communion by extensions during COVID-19 outbreak. It should take 2-3 hours to complete.

The Bishop of Southwark's permission is required for a lay person to lead a service of this kind. It is given on the following basis

- The officiant must be licensed under Canon E7 or E8
- Permission related only to services of public worship and not for house groups, residential homes etc.
- It must be clear throughout that the service is not a Eucharist.
- The officiant must be vested according to Canon Law.
- The Guidelines on Communion and Covid apply to such services, so that at the time of writing Communion is given in one kind only, and with suitable care over administration.

Incumbent and Reader or Lay Worker are asked to read this material and the accompanying documents and discuss them, so that local practice is agreed between you.

An application form to be completed by the incumbent is provided with this document together with a list of supporting documents required.

Please send your application together with supporting materials to me in the first instance (further details at the end of this document).

Once the application has been checked, you will be sent authorisation authorising your Reader or Lay Worker to officiate at services of Communion by Extension for 12 months from 24 July 2020 (the date of the Bishop's *Ad Clerum*).

# 1. What is the essence of Holy Communion?

Since the earliest days of the Church, Christians have gathered together to bless, break and share bread and to bless and share a cup of wine in obedience to the Lord's command, given on the night before He died, to 'do this in remembrance of me.' The Church of England which emerged from the upheavals of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, has maintained in its 'historic formularies' the centrality of the Eucharist in its account of Christian living. Along with Baptism, the Lord's Supper, or Holy Communion, is a 'Sacrament ordained of Christ' (Article 25) and 'a sacrament of our redemption by Christ's death.' (Article 28).

The Canons of the Church of England teach the importance and centrality of the Eucharist. Canon B14 requires the celebration of the Holy Communion in at least one church in every benefice on all Sundays and principal Feast days, as well as on Ash Wednesday and Maundy Thursday. Canon B15 teaches that it is the duty of all who have been confirmed to receive the Holy Communion regularly, and especially at Christmas, Easter and Pentecost.

However during the Covid 19 pandemic, it has not been possible for most people, to receive Holy Communion. The church, in the shape of our bishops and clergy, have responded in different ways to this situation. So, for example, although rubrics at the end of the BCP Communion office plainly state that 'there shall be no celebration of the Lord's Supper except there be a convenient number to communicate,' it has been the practice in many places for the priest to celebrate the Eucharist with one or two others present, either in church or elsewhere, and for the congregation to participate online by live streaming or Zoom. During this period the Bishop of Southwark has given clergy in the diocese permission to celebrate the Eucharist even when no-one else is physically present. It is clearly understood that such permission is given only in response to exceptional circumstances at this time.

Where congregations have been able to participate in services that have been shared over social medial or sharing platforms, they have been signposted to the concept of "Spiritual Communion" which is described as follows:

" The term 'Spiritual Communion' has been used historically to describe the means of grace by which a person, prevented for some serious reason from sharing in a celebration of the Eucharist, nonetheless shares in the communion of Jesus Christ. The form of prayer below offers Christians an opportunity to give thanks for their communion with him, particularly at times when they would ordinarily be present at the Eucharist.

The Book of Common Prayer instructs us that if we offer ourselves in penitence and faith, giving thanks for the redemption won by Christ crucified, we may truly 'eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ', although we cannot receive the sacrament physically in ourselves.

Making a Spiritual Communion is particularly fitting for those who cannot receive the sacrament at the great feasts of the Church, and it fulfils the duty of receiving Holy Communion 'regularly, and especially at the festivals of Christmas, Easter and Whitsun or Pentecost' (Canon B 15). The Church of which we are members is not defined by the walls of a building but by the Body of Christ of which we are members. In making our communion spiritually, we are joining with Christians everywhere to be nourished by the one who tells us, 'I am the Bread of Life'."

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/Guidance%20on%20Spiritual%20Communion%20and%20Coronavirus.pdf>

Now that attendance at a service of the Eucharist is once more possible, with some limitations, churches are able to make a decision about re-opening and celebrating the Eucharist corporately again. However, the Bishop of Southwark has made it clear that this is permissive guidance, and not an instruction. Clergy and their PCC's will want to take into account the character of the parish, the capacity of clergy, and the sustainability of both online and shared worship in their context before making a decision.

The need for social distancing that will restrict the numbers able to attend any single act of worship, and the need for some clergy to remain shielded, may both be factors putting pressure on the clergy resource to provide Eucharistic services in their parishes. For this reason, exceptional permission may be sought for the use of Extended Communion is being offered by the Bishop of Southwark.

A licensed lay person officiating at a Service of Communion by Extension must be clear in their own understanding of the Eucharist and in what they will say in explaining this service to the congregation, particularly in dispelling any thoughts of lay presidency, for example.

It will be helpful also to have thought through the options currently available, so that the incumbent can give encouragement to the congregation to participate in this service, rather than, for example, continuing to share in online services and Spiritual Communion.

Thinking theologically, you will need to reflect on the way in which the congregation are encouraged to return to participation in the Eucharist, while not down grading their experience of prayer, spiritual communion and growth during lock down.

You will also need to do some thinking about proximity in space and time. The Church of England guidance makes it clear that where communion by extension takes place the participants are sharing in the Eucharistic worship of the Body of Christ in the parish, not in a separate celebration. How will you articulate that this is different from celebrating online, or receiving the sacrament at home?

Jesus was incarnated in a flesh and blood Jewish body in 1st century Roman occupied Palestine. The sacrament is a physical embodiment of that incarnation that took place in a particular time and place. As such the sacrament involves human bodies speaking words and sharing the physical elements in particular times and places, yet a direct physical connection between the priest, the elements, and every member of the congregation is not required. It is accepted that during the liturgy the priest does not touch every wafer, for example. Many congregations may be used to the idea of the “reserved sacrament” but you might be surprised by the number who do not know what happens to the bread (and wine) placed in the aumbry at the end of a service, or why it is kept.

What do you think is the difference between a celebration of the Eucharist and a service of Communion by Extension? What is the same? What is different? Different traditions within the Church of England will use different language to describe what is happening, but we might all speak about thanksgiving for the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, of sharing in his life and work as the Body of Christ, of our mutuality and interdependency.

How is a community defined? It is not simply a matter of geography, but of our mutual solidarity with each other. How do we build up that solidarity? Not only in the sharing of worship, but in the acts of love and service that worship encourages and resources.

Does it matter that the words of institution are not heard by the participants in a service of Extended Communion? While we might argue that God’s Word and promise are efficacious when proclaimed and received in faith and that distance or means of transmission does not diminish the efficacy of God’s Word, we ought also to ensure that the congregation is reminded that the words of institution have been said, in another place and at another time.

What is made clear is the proclamation of God’s promise “for you” and the presence of those particular elements of bread and wine. It is in the proclamation of those words given by Jesus that the elements are transformed by the Word and work of God for the salvation of those in whom faith has been formed by the grace of God through the Holy Spirit.

If it helps you to think through these issues rigorously, you might write an article for the parish newsletter, website or blog describing the theology of the Eucharist as we might experience it in a service of Communion by Extension.

## 2. Liturgy

The Authorised rite for the Public Administration of Communion by Extension is attached to this document. You will see that the rite can be combined with any of the elements of a Service of the Word.

Please read through the up to date guidance on the celebration of Holy Communion from the Church of England which contains further theological reflection as well as important practical information.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-07/Coronavirus%20Advice%20on%20the%20Administration%20of%20Holy%20Communion%20v3.0.pdf>

Incumbent and Reader or Lay Worker must ensure that the following points have been considered.

Why is Extended Communion needed in this instance? Would a Service of the Word be just as effective in building up the congregation?

Where such a service is to be held on a regular basis it should always be in addition to the celebration of the Eucharist somewhere in the benefice. Where will the principal celebration of the Eucharist take place and what will be the arrangements for collecting, transporting and (if necessary) storing the sacrament?

How will you ensure that Communion from the Reserved Sacrament does not become the sole service in any single church over an extended period of time?

What is the time period for review of this decision or practice?

How will this service be clearly advertised and described, making plain that it is not a celebration of the Eucharist?

What will the officiant wear?

How will reverent, secure and permanent ways of reserving the sacrament be found for each church offering such services? Please remember that any permanent arrangement for an aumbry requires a faculty and that the sacrament should not usually be kept at home for any length of time.

Once these matters have been discussed, an Order of Service should be drafted for use in your parish or benefice. The elements for inclusion are listed on the next page.

It should include:

1. Introductory words explaining the nature of the service
2. Confession
3. Collect
4. Readings (usually the lectionary readings for the day)
5. A sermon or reflection
6. A Creed
7. Intercessions
8. The additional reading which recalls the Eucharist and its meaning
9. A blessing prayer
10. The Lords Prayer
11. Distribution of Communion
12. The Post Communion Prayer
13. The Grace and Dismissal

It may also include

1. Prayers of Preparation
2. The Gloria
3. An invitation to the Peace
4. Additional prayers before distribution

The lay officiant should write an informal introduction to the service, which lays out simply some of the theological and practical rationale for the service.

There is a provision for an order of service in Common Worship, of which a PDF is attached.

### 3. Making your application

Please see the application form attached to this document.

In addition to the form, please provide the following

- The risk assessment for returning to worship in your parish or benefice
- The order of service you will use
- Any other materials that you have created (such as articles for the parish newsletter or website, your informal introduction to the service, any other reflections) that would support your application.

Send these documents to

Mandy Ford [mandy.ford@southwark.anglican.org](mailto:mandy.ford@southwark.anglican.org)  
if completed before 28 August 2020

Or to

Raewynne Whiteley [Raewynne.whiteley@southwark.anglican.org](mailto:Raewynne.whiteley@southwark.anglican.org) after that date.

If you have any questions, please do get in touch.