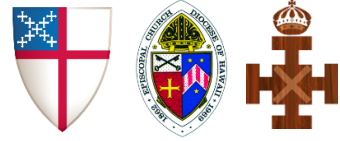


From the Bishop

The Right Reverend Robert L. Fitzpatrick
The Episcopal Diocese of Hawai'i



THE CURRENT COVID REALITY AND HOLY COMMUNION

May 9, 2023

The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared that COVID-19 no longer represents a "global health emergency." Likewise, there are no State or County restrictions. I generally now leave it up to each congregation to discern local practices regarding reception of Holy Communion and other fellowship activities. There is currently no set Diocesan policy in force about worship in relation to the pandemic.

I do assume that our congregations have returned to the use of a common cup and that no congregation uses small individual cups to administer the Sacrament. A large common cup (chalice) is an important symbol of our unity in Christ. The use of small individual cups is not part of the practice or tradition of the Episcopal Church. Such practice should generally be avoided.

The Episcopal Church teaches the efficacy of receiving the Sacrament in one kind (the bread and/or the wine) when necessary for reasons of personal health or well-being, or because of personal piety and practice. There may also be times when, for communal health or well-being, receiving the Sacrament in one kind is appropriate. These are special (and hopefully rare) cases, and communication with the bishop is a prerequisite of a priest making this decision for their entire congregation.

As Bishop, I assume that the rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer will be followed in Episcopal Churches, but this is especially the case for those in ordained ministry and have promised to "solemnly engage to conform to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of the Episcopal Church." So, for example, "The ministers receive the Sacrament in both kinds, and then immediately deliver it to the people" (see The Book of Common Prayer, page 365) makes it clear that the Presider will receive the Sacrament before administering to others.

In the Episcopal Church, all baptized Christians are invited to receive Holy Communion (we practice "open communion" across Christian denominational lines, but not "communion of the unbaptized"). In our tradition, communion is offered in two kinds: the bread and the wine. The bread (either as a wafer host or as a small piece of loaf bread) is offered first and is typically placed in one's open palm and is administered with the words "The Body of Christ, the Bread of Heaven" or "The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ keep you in everlasting life" (or the equivalent phrase of administration in the language of the liturgy). The Sacrament is then immediately

consumed (with the understanding that during a health emergency, as has been the case, individuals may be wearing masks and need to consume the Sacrament away from others and after removing their masks). The chalice with wine is then offered with the words "The Blood of Christ, the Cup of Salvation" or "The Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ keep you in everlasting life" (or the equivalent phrase of administration in the language of the liturgy). The Sacrament is then consumed taking a small sip of wine from the chalice. In the Episcopal Church, this is the most typical and generally preferred means of taking the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

Because of personal piety, a few people prefer to receive the host directly on the tongue. Though less common in the Episcopal Church, the practice is part of the Church's tradition. It is preferable to receive in this manner when a wafer host is used rather than "loaf" bread. One should extend the tongue when receiving in this manner, so the Minister does not have to place the host deep into or touch the inside of the mouth. Considering our COVID experience, this practice should generally be avoided.

Likewise, a person may choose to receive by intinction. Please note that it is preferable to receive in this manner when a wafer host is used rather than loaf bread to prevent crumbs from accumulating in the bottom of the chalice.

There are two practices of intinction:

(A) In some congregations, intinction is when one dips a small corner of the host in the wine and then placing the slightly moistened host into one's own mouth. Please note that if this is practiced, the person needs to be careful not to put fingers into the wine or touch the inside of the chalice, and to only dip a very small portion of the host in the wine. One should avoid placing the whole host into the wine or allowing the wine to soak the host.

(B) It should be noted that some congregations practice a form of intinction in which the communicant holds the host in the palm of the hand and the Eucharistic Minister (or Clergy) takes the host, dips it slightly in the wine and then places it onto the person's hand to then be consumed. This is the practice at Canterbury Cathedral.

Either (A) or (B) is acceptable in this Diocese and should be determined by the congregation's Clergy with appropriate direction and teaching. When young children (under the age of five) receive by intinction, they should have the assistance of an adult and form (B) is often preferable. For many in the Episcopal Church including me, intinction is usually considered to be an exceptional practice and not normative.

I am increasingly concerned that receiving the Sacrament by intinction when the communicant dips the bread themselves into the cup of wine is the least sanitary means of receiving Holy Communion. I therefore recommend that congregations stop practicing option (A) for sanitary reasons. In the age of the COVID and other viruses, and especially during the flu season, clergy and parishioners are urged to rethink intinction by parishioners themselves. Our hands are often very unclean and many hands dipping into a common cup is less sanitary than a simple sip from a common cup or following the option (B) noted above.

What do I suggest?

1. If a communicant wishes the wine, then take a small sip from the common cup. In the Episcopal Church, this is the most typical and generally preferred means of taking the Sacrament of Holy Communion. There is no particular evidence connecting transition of the viruses through the common cup.
2. If intinction is maintained, then please consider moving to option (B) above. In this case the Eucharistic Ministers should sanitize their hands before and after administering the Sacrament to God's people.
3. If intinction using option (A) is maintained, the Eucharistic Ministers must be particularly instructed to carefully lower and tip the chalice so the communicant can clearly see the wine. As noted above, the person needs to be careful not to put fingers into the wine or touch the inside of the chalice, and to only dip a very small portion of the host into the wine. One should avoid placing the whole host into the wine or allowing the wine to soak the host. Chalices with wide bowls are best for intinction.
4. As I noted, the use of small individual cups is not part of the liturgical tradition of the Episcopal Church. During the time of COVID-19, a few congregations have adopted the practice on an emergency basis. It was an emergency expedient and now should generally be discontinued.
5. If one is concerned in any way, it is recommended that the communicant just receive the bread when taking the Sacrament foregoing the cup altogether (as noted below). The Sacrament's validity and efficacy is total. If one feels ill, it is best to not to come to public worship.

Again, as often noted in the news, our hands are the most likely means of sharing most contagions (noting well that COVID-19 has largely been airborne). Watching multiple fingers dipping into the Chalice (sometimes up to the knuckle) by the congregants themselves is unsanitary and unsettling.

While the normative practice in the Episcopal Church is to consume the bread and then to share the wine from a common cup (chalice), a person may receive the Sacrament in one kind (just the bread or, more rarely, just the wine) when necessary for reasons of personal health or well-being, or because of personal piety and practice. Typically, this is practiced by taking the bread alone and then crossing one's arms over the chest when the wine is offered. This practice has become common in a time of COVID-19.

Those who are not baptized, or who are baptized but decide not to receive the Sacrament for personal or spiritual reasons, are invited and encouraged to come for a blessing, indicated by placing crossed hands over the chest.

Please contact me at ["Ask the Bishop!"](#) if you have any questions or concerns.

Blessings!
Bishop Bob

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The Episcopal Church in Hawai'i