

THE REPRESENTATIVE BODY OF THE CHURCH IN WALES

CORONAVIRUS – COVID19

GUIDANCE ON CELEBRATING HOLY COMMUNION

ALERT LEVEL ZERO

https://www.churchinwales.org.uk/documents/2700/Covid_19_Guidance_on_Celebrating_Holy_Communion_Alert_Level_0_March_22.docx

Introduction

At Alert Level Zero there are few legal restrictions on activities. The key restrictions are:

1. Businesses, employers and other organisations, including activity and event organisers, must undertake a coronavirus risk assessment of their premises and activities and take reasonable measures to minimise exposure to, and the spread of, coronavirus based on that risk assessment.
2. If a person tests positive for Covid-19, they must self-isolate for 5 full days and should take a lateral flow test on day 5 and another test 24 hours later on day 6. If both results are negative, it is likely they are not infectious and can stop isolating. Anyone who tests positive on either day 5 or day 6 must continue to self-isolate until they have 2 negative tests taken 24 hours apart or until day 10, whichever comes first

This guidance note seeks to help local church councils consider how they might organise holy communion and what reasonable measures they might consider to control the risk of transmission.

Background

Local churches have three options for the administration of Holy Communion.

1. In one kind (bread only)
2. By simultaneous administration by the priest
3. In both kinds with the use of the common cup.

Welsh Government has confirmed that there is no legal reason why the common cup should not be re-introduced but, equally, there is no requirement to do so – the decision to do so should be informed by each church's Covid-19 risk assessment.

The Bench of Bishops recommends that, for those churches that wish to do so after careful risk assessment, the common cup can be restored from Easter Day 2002 (assuming there is no change to the regulatory framework).

General Considerations

Local church councils (PCCs, MACs or LMACs) should review this guidance and decide what option they feel would be appropriate for the administration of holy communion.

You should consider the level of clinical vulnerability of the congregation and clergy and also their feelings and fears. Involve them in decision making. The risk assessment principle should be that options remain open, and congregations and clergy are encouraged to make decisions collectively in light of their own level of risk, which may vary in different contexts. For example, the 8.00am said service will be a different context for risk than a choral service.

Whatever option is chosen should be part of the written Covid risk assessment and this should record the reasonable measures the church will take to mitigate the risk of Covid-19 transmission. This should be clearly communicated to people attending.

- A key risk mitigation measure is to discourage people who are symptomatic or have tested positive from attending the church. This is best done by reminding people through newsletters or signage and providing an alternative on-line service.
- Risks are less for fully vaccinated people so people should be encouraged to consider vaccination.
- Covid 19 is most easily spread by breathing in aerosol and droplets from the breath of another person. Whilst social distancing and face coverings are no longer legal requirements, they remain effective ways of reducing the risk of transmission. They should still be considered as part of a risk mitigation strategy.
- Well ventilated spaces also help disperse aerosol and droplets in the air and is a key mitigation measure.

The president and other ministers should consider wearing face coverings especially when working near other people in confined spaces such as the sacristy. A reasonable alternative is to ensure they have a negative lateral flow test before services commence.

Face coverings can continue to be worn by the congregation if they feel more comfortable doing so.

People have differing perceptions of personal risk and it can be difficult to adopt a more cautious behaviour when those around you are behaving differently. Nobody should feel pressured or embarrassed by choosing to wear masks or keep their distance.

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 preside at Holy Communion or on parishioners to receive the Sacrament.

[Sharing the Peace:](#) The peace should continue to be shared but you should have a policy for it within your risk assessment. Many congregations will now be familiar with offering a sign of peace without touching one another – this does reduce risk of transmission. It is also an opportunity to encourage the use of British Sign Language (BSL) to share the Peace. If your risk assessment concludes it is reasonable to share the Peace with touch, you might consider:

- Providing badges for those who may not wish to do share the peace with touch
- Only sharing the peace with those people in one's immediate vicinity
- Asking people to wearing face coverings for this element of the service
- Providing hand sanitiser on each pew or row

Specific guidance on reasonable measures to consider for each form of communion are set out below.

Altar parties or assistants permitted: You need to think about how this is done to minimise risk of transmission. This will be more appropriate where you have large numbers of communicants. If others assist in preparing the elements before or during the service, then hand hygiene precautions should apply.

Altar rails: Altar rails can be used but this will be an area of closer contact between people and rails are hard surfaces on which the virus may rest.

The lowest risk approach is to avoid touching the rail and to maintain physical distancing, by communicants forming a spaced line to then step up to receive. It may also be possible for the priest to take communion to people in their seats.

However, depending on the layout and features of the church, and numbers attending you may be able to work out a way for communicants to kneel at the altar rail safely. You might consider cleaning the altar rail immediately before and after people come to receive and encourage people to kneel with distance between them. Face coverings might be worn immediately before and after people kneel at the rail, but the manipulation of a used face covering increases the risk of virus transfer onto hands, and if other mitigations are in use, may simply increase risk .

Option 1: Communion in One Kind (Bread Only)

This form of communion is perfectly valid and there is nothing wrong with continuing with it. It is the form of communion with the lowest risk of covid transmission.

Handling the Eucharistic elements: If it is customary for the bread and wine to be brought to the table in an offertory procession, consider how this should be done with minimal risk.

We recommend that Ministers should sanitise hands before handling the elements during preparation and should not speak over uncovered 'consumables'. In practice, this means that while the president can speak the words of the Eucharistic Prayer over bread and wine that he or she alone will consume, bread or wine that will be consumed by other communicants must remain covered until being distributed (e.g. wafers in a ciborium with the lid on or covered by a pall, or bread on a paten covered by a purificator or other cloth).

We continue to encourage the use of individual communion wafers or bread that has already been divided rather than large wafers or loaves of bread that are broken and shared, as this practice minimises the physical contact the president will have with the elements. It is also advised that, if possible, the president be the only person to handle the wafers or bread during the distribution, unless there are very large numbers, and that individual communicants should not pass around wafers or bread.

At the fraction (breaking of the bread) it is suggested that the president's portion alone should be broken with the rest remaining covered.

If the consecrated bread and wine are shown to the people, use the president's portion alone for this purpose.

Administration: Careful consideration needs to be given to the question of how the sacrament should be administered.

- The priest or assistants should sanitise their hands before administering the consecrated bread.
- The bread should be administered into the hand with care being taken by the president to avoid contact with the communicants' hands.

Option 2: Simultaneous Administration (intinction)

Whilst not the preferred approach of the Bench of Bishops, simultaneous administration of consecrated bread and wine may be practised strictly in accordance with the provisions set out below:

The simultaneous administration of consecrated bread and wine is effected by the president taking a piece of bread carefully from the paten or ciborium with an appropriate utensil (such as tongs or tweezers) and touching it briefly but carefully to the surface of the wine, allowing a small amount of the wine to suffuse into the bread. Key points are:

- The consecrated bread and wine ought to be dropped into the hand of the communicant taking care no physical contact is made.
- The president communicates last and must not drink from the chalice until this point.
- The president should sanitize hands in advance of the distribution;
- Communicants who wish to continue receiving under one kind should continue to be able to do so.
- The provisions for administration in one kind (option 1) should generally be followed
- Unless there are very large numbers, it is advised that the president be the only person to handle the bread during the distribution.
- Care should be taken so that communicants who are moving from their places maintain physical distancing, and one way procession, if possible.
- Each communicant receives Communion in both kinds simultaneously in this way:
 1. The communicant must sanitize hands prior to arriving at the place of communion.
 2. The communicant stands at the place of communion and holds out hand(s).
 3. The president takes a piece of bread with the utensil and briefly but carefully touches it to the surface of the wine, allowing some of the wine to suffuse into the bread.
 4. The president drops the bread into the communicant's hand avoiding touching the hand. In cases where receiving in the hands is not possible, such as illness or disability, hands should be sanitized before and after if physical contact is made.
 5. The president should take care to avoid the possibility of surplus wine dripping from the bread at the time of administration.
- If the president accidentally touches the hand of the communicant or any other surface, president should sanitize hands again.

- If a communicant must receive in their place, the president brings the requisite amount of bread and the wine to them, and performs step 3 above immediately before administering.
- Once all others have communicated, the president returns the remaining consecrated bread and wine to the table, and receives Communion according to the same method, using the portion of bread that remained at the table (i.e. the president's wafer/bread).
- Any consecrated bread and wine which is not required for purposes of communion is consumed at the end of the distribution or after the service.

Option 3: In both kinds with the Common Cup

With a significant proportion of the population vaccinated, the consequences of contracting Coronavirus are generally lower. Clearly, the common cup presents a greater risk of transmission than the other forms of administration but there is no scientific evidence that it is associated with spread of infection. It is not considered to be a very high-risk activity providing key safeguards are in place, but it offers a greater potential for occasions of viral spread, so is higher risk than options 1 or 2.

The general provisions set out above are fundamental parts of a risk mitigation strategy.

The following measures should be considered.

- Communicants should not feel pressured to take the common cup. Receiving communion in one kind is acceptable and this should be made clear at any service
- Develop a simple way for people to indicate they prefer to receive in one kind – perhaps holding a card or hymn book
- You must make provision for consuming the remainder of the chalice after distribution. If the cup is to be restored, someone must volunteer to do this; it need not be the minister if they are uncomfortable with doing so. If no-one is willing to do this, then the distribution of wine cannot be considered.
- The general provisions for the distribution of the bread (option 1) should continue to be applied if the Common Cup is to be shared. In particular, try to avoid speaking over consumables.
- The cup should be offered to the mouth of the recipient rather than handled by the recipient
- The cup should be turned slightly after each recipient.
- It is important that the rim of the cup is carefully wiped between each recipient. This is a key risk mitigation measure.

After the Service

Arrangements for the cleaning of the communion plate, linen and shared surfaces should be made. Linen can be washed in the normal way and plate should, after any ceremonial cleansing, be washed in warm water, being careful not to use damaging detergents or solvents.

Plan how any consecrated bread which has been reserved will be conveyed to and distributed at subsequent celebrations or home communions.

28th February 2022