

Local Authorisation for Eucharistic Ministers – Guidelines for Good Practice

From Easter 2017, the Bishop is making authorisation of Eucharistic Ministers a matter for the incumbent, in consultation with the PCC. This paper sets out some basic guidelines to encourage good practice, and coherence across the diocese.

Definition

The term Eucharistic Ministers includes those who assist in the distribution of Holy Communion at the Eucharist, and those who may take Holy Communion using previously consecrated elements to the sick, housebound, or residential care homes.

This local authorisation specifically excludes permission for Holy Communion by Extension whether for a Sunday or weekday celebration by a congregation not having a priest available. Permission for Holy Communion by Extension is governed by a House of Bishops' Code of Practice, and must be requested separately from the Bishop. It is a permission that is given to a parish for a specific situation, and not an authorisation of a person.

Selection

Normally, the primary responsibility for selecting and supporting, Eucharistic Ministers lies with the parish priest. Where there is a clergy team, or wider ministry team, the selection of potential ministers should be discussed confidentially within the team. Where there is no team, the incumbent will ideally have some wise churchwardens or other people who know the parish / benefice well.

Each person who is suggested for this ministry should have the opportunity to explore it with the parish priest (and others as appropriate) before deciding whether they wish their name to go forward. Once the incumbent, others who have been consulted, and the person themselves are agreed that this is appropriate, then the names of those who are proposed should go before the PCC for their consent.

The PCC should be able to have a confidential discussion of the appropriateness of the person or people concerned without them being present. It will be sufficient that the minute of the meeting simply states the decision to authorise the person or people.

If the role is confined (as it may be for those in full-time employment) to assisting in the distribution of the sacrament during public worship, no DBS check will be needed. If, however, it is envisaged that the minister will also take Holy Communion to the sick, then they will need to complete the appropriate safeguarding processes with the parish representative. As for all safeguarding applications, they will need to apply through the Parish for the appropriate DBS checks to be made. **They should not receive authorisation in the parish until this process has been properly completed.** (NB Please contact the Diocesan DBS Administrator on 01905 732811 for more help or look at the Safeguarding pages of the Diocesan website for more details regarding safer recruitment policies and guidance.)

Training

Training for Eucharistic Ministers has always happened at the parish, benefice or (occasionally) deanery level. It will continue to do so, but if there is sufficient demand for support, the Ministry and Discipleship Team can organise occasional training evenings, with additional reflective input. The guidelines in Appendix A are intended to act as a practical checklist for developing the content of local training.

Training for taking Holy Communion to the sick and housebound, and in care homes.

Apart from initial training for those who are assisting during public worship, additional training for those who are taking the Sacrament to the sick will be needed. It is recommended that this training follows an apprenticeship model, and happens once a newly authorised Eucharistic Minister is accustomed to distributing the Sacrament at public worship. It is important to remember that no-one should do this before the appropriate safeguarding process has been carried out in the parish, and DBS checks completed. In

addition, there would be an expectation that Eucharistic Ministers attend diocesan safeguarding training within the first 12 months of receiving authorisation. The Diocesan DBS Administrator can be contacted for more information about the training and booking onto it. There are additional guidelines in Appendix B.

Authorisation

Once the PCC has agreed the incumbent's nomination of new Eucharistic Ministers (and any appropriate safeguarding processes have been followed through to completion), then the parish priest can proceed to authorise them.

Normally authorisation should happen with prayer at a principal Sunday service in the benefice or parish where the ministry will be carried out. A simple liturgical form for authorisation, and a template for a parish certificate of authorisation are provided on the diocesan web site.

As part of the authorisation the incumbent and Eucharistic minister will agree a pattern of review. It is strongly recommended that parishes continue the current practice of authorising the ministry for a five-year period with a full review at the five-year mark of whether both parties wish for a further period of authorisation.

Ongoing support

Parishes are strongly encouraged to bring together all those who participate in leading parts of the church's public worship, at least once a year, for an evening that might include mutual prayer, thanksgiving and an opportunity for reflection on the worship of the church. This can sometimes feed very helpfully into further reflection by the ministry team and others. Stewards / welcomers, readers, intercessors and Eucharistic Ministers are obvious people to bring together for this reflection.

Deanery celebrations of ministry, which have typically happened annually, should still be occasions of affirmation, celebration, mutual support and developing a sense of participation in the wider mission and mission of the church in the locality. While it will no longer be necessary for Rural or Area Deans to sign people's authorisations, this can be an opportunity to focus the celebration more on relationships and collaboration in ministry, and remove a burden of administrative bureaucracy.

Appendix A

Guidelines for the training for Eucharistic ministers in public worship

- Eucharistic ministers are encouraged to develop structures disciplines of prayer
- Clergy reflect with eucharistic ministers (and others) on being both worshipper and minister
- While the most common form of Eucharistic ministry is administering the chalice, the authorisation is to administer the consecrated elements, both Bread and Cup. The practice of referring to “chalice assistants” should be discouraged.
- It is important to give someone the opportunity to practice – especially to practice administering the chalice – with un-consecrated wine in the chalice.
- In arranging for a practice session, those about to be authorised should be given the following practice opportunities:
 - To administer to people who are both standing and kneeling, and to someone sitting in a pew or wheelchair.
 - To administer bread both in the hand and on the tongue.
 - To administer the cup both to those who will take it, those who will part hold it, and those who will refuse to touch it.
 - To administer to those who keep their head bowed as well as those who raise it.
 - The practice administration needs to include use of the purificator. People may need educating that this is primarily to prevent wine running down the outside of the chalice, not to smear lipstick or saliva around the inside of the cup. A simple upwards wipe of the folded cloth will normally suffice.
- If a lay team is administering both Bread and Cup at (one part of) an altar rail, or other communion station, then an appropriate and simple form of words should be agreed: e.g. “May the Lord Jesus bless you”
- A common practice regarding words of administration should be agreed. The simplest is that whatever the president says when administering to the assistant ministers, is what they should say when they administer to others. (In those churches where the ministers receive last, a form of wording needs to be agreed for normal use.)
- Eucharistic ministers need to be discouraged from over-personalising the administration of the sacrament. Using people’s names when the sacrament is administered is a guarantee someone will be forgotten, or a visitor left excluded. The human relationship of the minister and communicant should not overshadow the relationship of Christ with those who are receiving his gift of himself.
- Much of our practice is constrained by the geography and architecture of the building. However, as far as possible, those who come forward to take a part in the leading of worship, should only come forward for that part which they are helping with. Thus, just as those who read, and those who lead prayers come up only when they are about to minister, so those who are distributing the Holy Communion only need to come up at the point of distribution. In Common Worship the anthem “Lamb of God”, whether said or sung, makes a convenient point. While practice differs from place to place, there is normally no need to robe for this ministry.
- The Invitation to Communion is one that Christ extends to his people. The ministers should not receive the Sacrament before the invitation, but in response to it, whether before or after administering to the people.
- Some prefer to receive before administering to the people, as they first need to receive Christ’s ministry themselves before sharing his gift with others. More recently, some have preferred, as an act of humble service, to receive after serving God’s people. Whichever practice is followed, it needs to be an agreed and common practice.
- Eucharistic ministers will need to know their parish practice on whether and how the Sacrament is reserved for the sick, and who is responsible for placing it in the aumbry or tabernacle, or where there is no aumbry or tabernacle, in an appropriate side-chapel or other location.

- Where architecture permits, it is usually easiest at the end of the distribution to take the sacred vessels straight to the credence table, and to carry out the ablutions there. There is no need to replace empty silverware on the altar table under a burse and veil. (Most contemporary liturgies assume that the communion vessels begin on the credence table without burse and veil in any case, and are simply brought across to the altar table at the offertory.)
- It may be that one of the ways in which the Eucharistic Ministers can assist the president is to take responsibility for the consumption of the remaining sacrament, and the following ablutions, allowing the president to return to the chair for quiet prayer and reflection. Different churches develop different practices here.

Appendix B:

Guidelines for the further training of those who take Holy Communion to the sick.

- Ideally, a newly authorised minister will accompany an experienced minister, first to observe, then to assist, and finally to take the lead while another minister is present, before doing this on their own.
- There should be the opportunity in this apprenticeship to talk through the liturgy with the incumbent, and gain an understanding of how it works. This would include how it might differ for a quite ill individual at home, to a more communal celebration in a care home.
- Where possible it is always valuable to visit the housebound or residential care homes in pairs. This provides both mutual support, and better engagement.
- It is usually helpful to develop the practice of engaging first in prayer and sacrament, and then engaging in the main pastoral conversation.
- The amount of content depends heavily on the context, and people need to be encouraged in developing the appropriate sensitivity. Where appropriate it is good to use the reading(s) of the previous Sunday, and to offer a brief summary of what the sermon was about.
- For the prayers, it is good to encourage the practice of asking the housebound communicant what they wish to pray for.
- The parish should have a common mind on what circumstances (if at all) taking communion to the sick should or should not include the laying on of hands. In many parishes, where there was a perceived need for this, or for anointing, the parish clergy would expect to be involved.
- The Eucharistic Minister should have a clear idea of appropriate boundaries of confidentiality, and whether and how any pastoral information was to be communicated to the parish priest (or pastoral co-ordinator).