

Appendix A

Extended communion in the Diocese of Bath and Wells - guidelines for clergy, Readers and PCCs

The Eucharist is at the heart of Christian worship. It unites and is celebrated by Christians around the world. In the Eucharist, God invites us to his table to share a foretaste of the heavenly banquet which he has prepared for people of all nations and cultures. The Eucharist (also known as Holy Communion, the Mass, or the Lord's Supper), can take many different forms across the Church of England, and it is understood by Christians in different ways.

Outwardly, the Eucharist takes the form of a shared meal of bread and wine. A priest presides at the service in the name of all who are gathered, remembering and giving thanks for all that God has given us in Christ. At a celebration of the Eucharist, the community gathers, asks God's forgiveness for its shortcomings, listens to readings from the Bible and prays together. The community receives the consecrated bread and wine and is sent out into the world as a 'living sacrifice' to live and work to God's praise and glory. The Eucharist is, therefore, something that is done together by the whole Christian community, with a priest presiding. When a priest presides at the Eucharist, this is an action not only of a particular local Christian community, but of the whole Church. There are, however, circumstances when this basic pattern and understanding are not able to be followed.

Distribution at home or in hospital

There are occasions when some are not able, because of illness, to be present when the community celebrates the Eucharist together. In these cases, there are well established ways of administering the sacrament to those who are sick or housebound in their homes using the Common Worship liturgy for the [Distribution of Communion at home or in hospital](#). In some churches, and other settings such as hospitals, this will mean using 'Reserved Sacrament' previously consecrated by a priest and often stored in an Aumbry or Tabernacle.

In other settings, this will mean the taking of the consecrated bread, and sometimes wine, out from the shared celebration to the homes or bedside of those who wish to share with the Christian community in this Sacrament. In the Diocese of Bath and Wells, those who hold a Paton and Chalice Licence from the Bishop, as well as LPAs, LWAs, Readers, chaplains and clergy are authorised to exercise this ministry. This ministry is for local discernment by incumbents and PCCs. For more information about this, and to obtain a Paton and Chalice licence, please [email penny.gibbs@bathwells.anglican.org](mailto:penny.gibbs@bathwells.anglican.org).

Lack of priestly cover

There are, regrettably, also circumstances in which a priest is unable to be present to preside at a Service of Holy Communion. We are hugely blessed in this diocese by many gifted and generous retired clergy who hold the Bishops' Permission to Officiate (PtO) and are ready and willing to step in and assist with services as required. Area and Lay Deans will be able to provide details of clergy with PtO in each deanery.

In rare and exceptional cases, no such priestly cover may be available, and, in these cases, serious thought should first be given as to whether the service needs to be Eucharistic. Non-Eucharistic services may, of course, be led by Readers, Lay Worship Assistants, Churchwardens or others authorised to do so. Canon Law, under which all churches within the Church of England operate, requires that Holy Communion be celebrated within a benefice (or within parishes held in plurality) each Sunday. So long as there is one service of Holy Communion within a benefice (or parish held in plurality) each Sunday there is no requirement that additional services are Eucharistic.

In rare and exceptional circumstances, a Bishop may waive the requirement for Holy Communion to be celebrated within a benefice on a Sunday. Please contact the Bishops' Chaplain if you would like the bishops to consider such a request.

A Service of Communion by Extension

A Service of Communion by Extension allows for bread and wine, consecrated at a service of Holy Communion to be shared at another service as an 'extension' of that prior celebration. An authorised service called '[Public Worship with Communion by Extension](#)' is led by a deacon or licensed lay minister, having received appropriate instruction. Such a lay minister will normally be a Reader/LLM or licensed lay worker. The PCC should be in agreement.

The Bishop's permission would ideally be sought well in advance, usually via the Bishop's Chaplain, and the authorised form of service must be used. Care should be taken to explain that it is not a celebration of Holy Communion, and yet enables a worshipping community to participate in Holy Communion 'by extension'.

We recognise that, on occasion, situations arise at short notice; priests may be taken ill, and last-minute cover may be difficult to find. There may, exceptionally, be occasions where cover for clergy holidays cannot be found or where finding cover for a particular service during a vacancy is not possible. In these cases, please do email or phone the Bishops' Office or local Archdeacon for advice.

For parishes in vacancy, permission may be given by the Bishop for occasional use of Communion by Extension by authorised persons for a period of up to one year. This could be reviewed after a year should the vacancy continue.

Whilst Communion by Extension can be valuable in rare and particular circumstances, it should not be used as a way to avoid necessary conversations around issues such as unsustainable service patterns and must not be used as a regular part of a benefice's programme of worship. Similarly, it should not be regarded as a means of introducing a

sacramental element into the life of home groups or other parish groups, whether on an occasional or a regular basis.

[Read the House of Bishops Guidelines for Communion by Extension](#)