



**This paper outlines the Bishop of Durham's agreement to delegate the power to authorise lay people to distribute Holy Communion to the Incumbent or Priest in Charge of a parish. From September 2017 parishes will no longer be required to obtain authorisation via the Bishop's Office, but will be able to grant authorisation locally.**

### Introduction

- Currently if a parish wishes to authorise lay people to distribute Holy Communion either in church, in people's homes or in care homes / hospitals, the parish, having obtained the agreement of the PCC, is required to send their names to the Bishop's office and ask the Bishop to grant authorisation for each person.
- This authorisation is valid for a period of 3 years.
- This authorisation does not require a DBS check (in fact, it is not permissible to carry out a DBS check for the role of "Communion Assistant").
- However, if such lay people are visiting people in their own homes on a regular basis, and the adults they are visiting are vulnerable (due to age, illness or disability) and in receipt of personal, social or health care, they will qualify as pastoral visitors. They **must** have an enhanced DBS check. Following receipt of the DBS check, authorisation can be granted.
- The above arrangements are governed by Canon B12.3 and, up until 1 October 2015, by the Regulations on the administration of Holy Communion made by the Church Assembly in November 1969.
- The Bishop expects that all who are authorised for this ministry undertake appropriate training overseen by the Incumbent / Priest in Charge.

### What has changed?

- In July 2015 the General Synod resolved that Amending Canon No.35 be made, promulgated and executed. The effect of this is to amend paragraph 3 of Canon B12 such that the requirement for the Bishop to grant authorisation to distribute Holy Communion is removed. See link below:

<https://churchofengland.org/media/2011067/gs%201964%20-%20draft%20amending%20canon%20no%2035.pdf>

- To govern these new arrangements The Administration of Holy Communion Regulations 2015 were made by General Synod, and came into force on 1 October 2015. See link below:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/media/2248936/gs%201992%20-%20holy%20communion%20regulations.pdf>

### What does this now mean for the Diocese of Durham?

- In short, **the Bishop has decided to delegate the power to authorise lay people to distribute Holy Communion to the Incumbent or Priest in Charge of a parish.** This means that **from September 2017** parishes will no longer be required to obtain authorisation via the Bishop's Office, but will be able to grant authorisation locally.
- There are, of course, some guidelines which parishes need to follow, based on the 2015 Regulations:
  1. A person to be authorised to distribute communion must be a regular communicant of the Church of England and **be in good standing**.

2. A person may not be authorised unless the Incumbent / Priest in Charge has obtained the consent of the Parochial Church Council (PCC) (unless the person to be authorised is a pupil of a church school requesting authorisation for distributing communion at services in the school. In this case the consent of the head teacher is required).
3. **A child\* may be authorised**. However, this is only after he/she **has been admitted to Holy Communion** in Accordance with the Admission of Baptised Children to Holy Communion Regulations 2006. To minimise safeguarding risks, children are only able to be authorised to distribute communion in church and school, and not for home communions.
4. A person should not be authorised where the person granting the authorisation is aware of safeguarding concerns relating to him or her (e.g. if the person is subject to a safeguarding agreement).
5. If there is a wish to authorise an adult to distribute the sacrament at home Communion or in institutions, before authorisation the House of Bishop's practice guidance on Safer Recruitment must be complied with.
6. Authorised adults who will be visiting vulnerable people **should be aware of relevant safeguarding policies, have undergone appropriate safeguarding training and have an up to date DBS before authorisation is granted**.
7. When authorisation is granted, this should be marked liturgically in the main Sunday service of Holy Communion. An order of service is attached to these guidelines.
8. The Incumbent or Priest in Charge must keep under review the authorisations given in the parish. The simplest way to do this is to make authorisations time limited. The Bishop expects that people will be authorised for 3 years at a time. (The Incumbent or Priest in Charge may wish to present the authorised person with an appropriate certificate, stating when authorisation comes to an end.)
9. Proper records should be kept of those who are authorised, and parishes should complete an annual return at the end of each year, detailing authorisations granted. A form is attached to these guidelines, and should be returned to the Bishop's Office – Auckland Castle by 31 December each year.
10. In a **vacancy**, the authority of the Incumbent / Priest in Charge to grant authorisation passes to the Area Dean.
11. In the case of the Cathedral, the authority to grant authorisation rests with the Dean, with the consent of the Cathedral Chapter.
12. As previously, the Bishop expects that all who are authorised for this ministry will undergo appropriate training overseen by the Incumbent / Priest in Charge.

*\*Please note the definition of a Child is a person under the age of 18 years.*

### **A note on DBS checks**

- General Synod November 2015 group of sessions. Bishop Paul Butler's response is below:
 

*"In short, an individual engaged in the act of giving communion will not be eligible for a DBS check even if the ministrant is privately giving communion to someone who is housebound or in a care home. That said, if, for example, the ministrant is visiting the housebound or care home frequently (once a week or more) or intensively (4 times or more in any 30 day period) and whilst he/she is giving communion he/she gives advice or guidance, he/she would be eligible for an enhanced DBS check. Alternatively if, as part of the role, the ministrant helps with shopping or handling money he/she would be in regulated activity and therefore, eligible for an enhanced check (together with a check of the barred list.)"*
- As previously (see Introduction), the Bishop expects that the majority of people who take communion to the housebound / care homes will qualify as pastoral visitors, and will require an enhanced DBS check.





**An Order of Service for  
the Commissioning of Lay Ministers of Holy  
Communion**

*This short service is intended to be used during the celebration of the Eucharist, either after the sermon or before the peace. Those who have been chosen to assist in the administration of Holy Communion come forward to be commissioned.*

*The priest says*

Dear friends in Christ,  
our brothers and sisters *N* and *N*  
have been chosen from among us  
and authorised to be ministers of Holy Communion.  
Is it your will that they now be commissioned to exercise this ministry?

**All It is**

*The priest says to the candidates*

As ministers of Holy Communion  
you are called to be worthy examples of Christian living.  
You must strive to grow in holiness through this sacrament of unity and love.  
Remember that, though many,  
we are one body because we share the one bread and one cup.  
As ministers of Holy Communion  
be therefore especially observant of the Lord's command to love your neighbour.  
For when he gave his body as food to his disciples, he said to them: "This is my commandment, that you should love one another as I have loved you."

Are you willing to undertake the office of giving Holy Communion to your brothers and sisters, and so serve to build up the Body of Christ, which is the Church?

*N.* I am.

Are you resolved to administer Holy Communion with the utmost care and reverence?

*N.* I am.

*The candidates kneel. The priest invites the people to pray*

Dear friends in Christ,  
Let us pray with confidence for our brothers and sisters.

Merciful Father,  
creator and guide of your family, bless these our brothers and sisters.  
May they faithfully give the bread of life and the cup of salvation to your people.  
Strengthened by this sacrament may they come at last to your table in heaven.  
This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**All Amen.**