The Church of England in Essex and East London
Diocese of Chelmsford

Guidance & regulations for "Communion by Extension"

Communion by Extension is neither an alternative to, nor a substitute for, Holy Communion. However, in particular and limited circumstances, it may be used as a public act of worship. The Church of England's House of Bishops has issued guidelines for Communion by Extension, requiring that its use be limited to occasions when the express permission of the bishop has been obtained.

This paper sets out the particular circumstances in which Communion by Extension may be used, and offers guidance to help incumbents and churchwardens determine how and when to seek the Area Bishop's permission. It should be read in conjunction with the House of Bishop's Guidelines (see Appendix 1), and the introductory notes to Public Worship with Communion by Extension (Appendix 2), which contain the principles it seeks to apply.

This paper replaces all previous provisions and regulations concerning Communion by Extension in the Diocese of Chelmsford, which are hereby retracted.

Introduction

Holy Communion, also known as the Eucharist, is the central act of worship of the Christian Church. It includes both the Liturgy of the Word and of the Sacrament. In the Eucharistic Prayer, the priest recites the mighty acts of God and the whole story of salvation is laid before the people, climaxing in the solemn remembrance of the words and actions that Jesus gave us on the night before he died.

The people of God must never be deprived of the fullness of Eucharistic worship. For this reason, in establishing a pattern of worship for parishes, benefices, fresh expressions, or any other form of worshipping community, it is essential that the importance of the Eucharist is not diminished. This has implications for what is known as "Communion by Extension".

While Communion by Extension is not in itself a celebration of Holy Communion, it allows a community which is unable to celebrate Holy Communion on a particular occasion to participate in an earlier celebration by receiving the reserved sacrament. It is important to note that the sacrament that is received is in no way 'second class': its status is identical to that received at a full service of Holy Communion.

While Communion by Extension offers an opportunity for a congregation to receive communion during a service of worship, it is neither an alternative to, nor a substitute for, Holy Communion. Therefore, the circumstances in which it should be used are very limited and well-defined.

From the second half of the twentieth century until the present day, many congregations have celebrated the Eucharist more regularly than at any other point in the history of the Church of England. At the same time, the number of stipendiary clergy has been decreasing and some priests have responsibility for a large number of churches. Despite these pressures, the Church of England has clearly indicated that Communion by Extension cannot

be the answer to difficulties in resourcing ministry where the availability of clergy is limited. Whatever use may previously have been made of Communion by Extension, it is essential that no congregation is dependent on it as a regular part of their worshipping life.

Other principal acts of worship

Holy Communion is not the only form of service appropriate or permissible for a principal act of worship, provided the legal requirements are met. Worship is just as valid without a priest present at the altar. One such act of worship is the Common Worship Service of the Word which can be found here. The Service of the Word allows for considerable variation and choice within a common structure. Various forms of service are available from Morning or Evening Prayer on Sunday to creating something new with flexibility and creativity. A huge variety of resources are available online from the 'Common Worship' family and beyond, including material for major festivals and for the seasons of the Church's year. These services can be led by a wide variety of people, including LLMs and churchwardens.

During the pandemic, we have experienced an unprecedented period as individuals and communities, adjusting to the reality of worshipping in very different ways, including at home, and without the regular provision of the Eucharist for some months. As hard as this has been for many, we have also experienced a richness of non-Eucharistic worship - in some cases from across the Church of England and across the world - to sustain our faith. Non-Eucharistic services can also be an opportunity to enable lay people to exercise a ministry of leading worship. This to be encouraged rather than seen as second best.

Guidance and Regulations

1. Circumstances in which Communion by Extension may be used

Communion by Extension may be permitted in the Diocese of Chelmsford provided five criteria are met:

a) it must only be occasional
b) the circumstances must be genuinely exceptional
c) the person leading the service must be licenced or authorised and have received appropriate instruction (i.e. a deacon, Reader/LLM, or licensed lay worker, but **not** those authorised to assist with the distribution of communion)
d) the Diocesan or Area Bishop must give explicit permission in advance
e) the authorised form of service must be used

Communion by Extension must not be used as part of a parish's regular pattern of worship (every fifth Sunday for example or for a midweek communion service). Nor is it permitted during a vacancy for a parish to use Communion by Extension to cover all its Eucharistic worship. A vacancy should not be considered exceptional in the life of a church.

Below are examples of individual circumstances within which Communion by Extension might be considered appropriate:

- if a priest is taken ill within forty-eight hours of a Sunday service
- if during a vacancy or period of absence or leave, it is not possible to find cover to provide a Eucharist within a benefice on one particular Sunday

- if a priest is not able to provide Holy Communion in all the parishes of a large multi-parish benefice at major festivals (specifically Christmas and/or Easter)

In situations such as these, permission for Communion by Extension may be given by the Area Bishop, provided a suitably trained, licenced or authorised person leads the service, using only the "Common Worship: Public Worship with Communion by Extension" order of service.

It is not appropriate for Communion by Extension to be used for a service where the elements are just taken from the reserved sacrament. The House of Bishops guidelines include mention of '*a minimal interval of time*' between the service when communion is celebrated and the service of Communion by Extension – this would normally mean both services take place on the same day.

2. How to seek permission for Communion by Extension

The incumbent or priest-in-charge (or during a vacancy the churchwardens after consultation with the Area Dean) must make a written request (by email or letter) to their Area Bishop detailing the date and circumstances for which permission is sought (dates, place, person leading the service, etc.) and explaining the reasons for seeking permission to use Communion by Extension. The Area Bishop will respond in writing. If permission is granted, it will apply solely to that date and those circumstances for which permission was sought, and is not transferrable.

3. Communion for the sick

It is important that provision is made to enable those who are sick or elderly and who cannot attend services in a church building to receive communion. This need should be met by use of the Common Worship service of "The Distribution of Holy Communion at Home or in Hospital to the Sick and Housebound" and the notes accompanying it. Communion by Extension should **not** be used for this purpose as it is not a public act of worship, but communion should be taken from elements consecrated at a celebration in church or from the Reserved Sacrament.

The Distribution of Holy Communion for the sick may be done by any priest, deacon, LLM, **or** by any person who has been authorised to assist with the administration of Holy Communion as detailed in the Diocesan Regulations for Eucharistic Assistants. No other permission is required for communion to be distributed in this way.

It is also important, however, that the people of God living in residential homes should from time to time be given the opportunity to participate in the full Eucharist. Therefore, occasional provision should be made for a priest from the parish to visit and preside at Holy Communion, if permitted.

The Rt Revd Dr Guli Francis-Dehqani
Bishop of Chelmsford

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Appendix 1

The House of Bishop's Guidelines on Public Worship with Communion by Extension

1 In making authorized provision for Communion by Extension, the House of Bishops has principally in mind the needs of a single cure with a number of authorized places of worship, or a group or team ministry. In such circumstances worshippers gathered in one of the places where Holy Communion has not been celebrated may receive communion by extension from a church where Holy Communion is celebrated, with a minimal interval of time between the services. The provision is intended primarily for Sundays and Principal Holy Days, but may be appropriate on other occasions. A particular congregation should not come to rely mainly upon this means of eucharistic participation, and care should be taken to ensure that a celebration of Holy Communion takes place regularly in each church concerned.

2 The practice of Communion by Extension as envisaged by the authorized service has some affinities with the communion of the sick, from elements which have been consecrated at a celebration in church. The main differences concern the public nature of Communion by Extension, and the consequent need for careful attention to the overall shape and content of the service. For this reason it is required that the service should be led only by a person who has been specifically authorized for this purpose by the bishop. Such a person will normally be a deacon, Reader or lay worker licensed under Canon E 7, and must wear the appropriate vesture. The choice of readings is governed by an authorized lectionary provision followed either by a sermon or a suitable devotional reading. Those who have been given permission (under the provisions of Canon B 12) to assist in the distribution of Holy Communion may assist in that way, but the minister who leads the service must have a more specific authority from the bishop, and be appropriately trained.

3 Communion by Extension 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. The House of Bishops recognizes the value of an occasional celebration of Holy Communion in such circumstances, when a priest must preside.

4 The service of Communion by Extension has been drawn up to make clear that it is not in itself a celebration of Holy Communion, and yet enables a worshipping community to participate in Holy Communion 'by extension'. When it is introduced to a congregation care should be taken to explain the close relationship between the two services; there is but one celebration of Holy Communion, from which the consecrated elements are brought.

5 The notes which accompany the service make clear that explicit permission must be obtained from the bishop for the use of this rite, and that such permission should relate to specific pastoral circumstances. Such permission will normally be in writing, and will be either for a particular occasion or for a limited duration. The bishop should regularly

review the use of this rite in parishes where it is used. Communion by Extension must always be regarded as exceptional and provisional, looking to circumstances when a priest will be available to preside at a celebration of Holy Communion.

6 Communion by Extension will require that special care is given to the conduct of the service, and especially that the consecrated elements are treated in a seemly and dignified manner. Those responsible for a service should ensure that the consecrated elements are adequate to meet the needs of the congregation, and that any consecrated bread and wine which is not required for the purposes of communion is consumed either during or immediately after the service.

7 These Guidelines should be read closely with, and be regarded as subordinate to, the notes and rubrics which accompany the authorized rite, which must be observed with care. They are intended to supplement and interpret the notes and rubrics in the service, and the House of Bishops will revise and reissue these guidelines from time to time.

These Guidelines are approved by the House of Bishops from October 2000 until any further resolution of that House.

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Appendix 2

Introductory notes to Public Worship with Communion by Extension

1 Explicit permission must be obtained from the bishop for the use of this rite. This permission should relate to specific pastoral circumstances, thus emphasizing the exceptional nature of this ministry.

2 In parishes or cures in which Public Worship with Communion by Extension has been authorized, care should be taken to ensure that a Sunday celebration of Holy Communion continues to take place regularly in each church. Public Worship with Communion by Extension will normally take place on Sundays and Principal Holy Days. Exceptionally, the rite may be appropriate on other occasions.

3 This service is led only by a person specifically authorized by the bishop; this may be a deacon, Reader or other lay person who has received appropriate training. Those who have permission under Canon B12 may share in the giving of communion.

3 If the minister is a deacon, Reader or lay worker authorized under Canon E7, the appropriate vesture is worn.

5 Care should be taken to ensure that those who play any part in the administration of Communion by Extension treat the elements in a seemly and dignified manner and observe the rubrics in the rite provided.

6 Proper provision must be made for the consecrated bread and wine to be brought to the church from the celebration of Holy Communion in a seemly and dignified manner. They should be placed upon the Holy Table and covered with a clean white cloth.

7 Proper care should be taken to ensure as far as possible that the consecrated elements are adequate to meet the needs of the congregation. If the bread and wine prove insufficient for the number of communicants, there can be no supplementary consecration in the course of this service.