

DIOCESE IN EUROPE

THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

The Bishop in Europe:
The Right Reverend Dr. Robert Innes



The Suffragan Bishop in Europe
The Right Reverend Dr. David Hamid

21st March 2022

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

We write to you in this holy season of Lent and at a time when the world crisis of Covid-19 appears to be eclipsed at least in Europe by the humanitarian catastrophe of Ukraine. Nonetheless, several people have raised with us the question of whether our guidance on responding to Covid will be revised and relaxed, particular in relation to the common cup, and it is about this that we are now writing.

In the guidance we issued in September 2021, we set out guidelines ('Appendix A') under which the common cup could be re-introduced. We are now updating these guidelines, in light of the fact that Covid does not at the moment pose the same threat to our corporate health and wellbeing that it did last year. The situation across Europe is that while coronavirus is present in most communities, we have populations where previous infections and national vaccination programmes mean that the majority of people have some immunity, and if they catch Covid are likely to experience milder symptoms. We are moving from a pandemic to an endemic situation where emergency measures are not required.

The sharing of bread and wine at holy communion has been the norm in the Church of England since the Reformation, as set out in the Sacrament Act of 1547. Withdrawal of the common cup has only been recommended in exceptional circumstances where public health is at risk.

In each chaplaincy, the responsibility for deciding on matters of liturgical practice rests with the Chaplain (or churchwardens and Area Dean in a vacancy) in consultation with the chaplaincy council. At this point, we are moving from a position where public health usually demanded that the common cup should be withheld, to a point where a Chaplain would need to have good reason to withhold the cup believing there to be exceptional circumstances that justify this.

We re-iterate that the Church's teaching is that the body and blood of Christ may be completely received in one kind only. Nobody should feel under pressure (theological, moral, social or psychological) to receive the cup if they are uneasy with this. In every situation there are likely to be a range of feelings about risk, both to ourselves and to others, and these need to be accommodated. Within the Church we believe that everyone is known and loved individually by God, and that as many members within one body we are called to be responsible to and for one another, respecting the more vulnerable whose suffering is our suffering (1 Cor 12:12-27). Every Chaplain will be navigating their own local situation, conscious of their environment, of the constraints of their national or regional law (which must be respected), and of the demographics and sensibilities of their community.

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We recognise the difficulty of making these decisions. We encourage you to consult with the Area Dean and/or Archdeacon. There will be differences of view within communities, and we urge kindness, compassion and understanding as those differences are navigated. Online worship continues to provide opportunities for some, and different practices within a service or between services may accommodate different groups of people.

To be clear then about what we are proposing.

1. Each Chaplain (or churchwardens in a vacancy) should consider whether – exceptionally – the common cup must continue to be withheld or whether the normal practice of administering the chalice to all communicant recipients who wish to receive it should be resumed.
2. This decision should be taken in consultation with the chaplaincy council, in order to gauge the overall readiness of the congregation for the return of the chalice. However it must be understood that responsibility for the decision on these matters rests with the Chaplain.
3. As part of the decision-making process, the Chaplain should consult the Area Dean and/or Archdeacon, particularly in regard to regional or national legal provisions, which must be respected.
4. If the decision is taken to resume the administration of the common cup, then proper provision should be made for those who do not wish to receive it. In particular this means such individuals do not feel under pressure to receive the cup, and that the Church's teaching that the sacrament is received fully in the consecrated bread alone is re-iterated.

Of course, in all our practice, the highest standards of hygiene around the administration of the elements of holy communion must be sustained. This means that the practice of the communicant intincting (dipping) the consecrated bread into the chalice is **NOT** permitted, on hygiene grounds. Of course, it also should be noted that it is the return of the *common* cup that this letter addresses. Individual communion cups are not legally permitted in the Church of England.

If you have any questions as to what this guidance means for you, please do contact your Archdeacon.

This comes with our renewed thanks to you all for your sustained efforts in providing worship and pastoral care in what continue to be very difficult times.

Yours in Christ,

+ Robert Gibraltar in Europe

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+ David

+David Hamid

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