



Sharing Communion in the Time of Pandemic

Guidelines Effective September 13, 2020

These guidelines are approved for the distribution of communion at outdoor services of worship. Any congregation that has received approval for outdoor worship may distribute communion according to these guidelines, without having to seek additional permission.

If a congregation does not have approval for outdoor worship, the priest and vestry must first receive such permission before communion may be distributed. Directions for the simple process of obtaining such permission can be found [here](#).

When a congregation has moved into Phase II and is gathering for worship indoors, these guidelines must be followed in an indoor space.

No priest or congregation is required to provide for the distribution of communion during this time of pandemic. Some choose not to gather in-person for worship until the entire congregation can gather safely; they continue a fast from communion for the time being. Some clergy will choose to provide for the distribution of communion at only one service per day or one service per month. Some clergy, lay leaders and parishioners should not be a part of in-person worship because of health vulnerabilities. **The decision to gather in person and/or to distribute communion will be made by the clergy in each congregation in accordance with diocesan guidelines. No priest will be penalized in any way for the decision to distribute communion or not to distribute communion.**

The specifics of these guidelines may be enacted in ways that are consistent with the size of the congregation and the size and layout of the place of worship.

Guidelines

1. Place of worship – OUTDOORS

Until a congregation meets all requirements for indoor worship, the distribution of communion may only happen outdoors. Because this virus is so easily aerosolized, infection most frequently occurs through the inhalation of contaminated respiratory droplets. The fresher the air, the better.

2. For the health and safety of everyone present:

- a. All in attendance must wear a **mask** at all times, except that the mask may be lifted to place the wafer in the mouth.
- b. **Physical distance** of six feet or more in every direction must be kept by everyone at all times except that family groups may remain together. The ground and seating must be marked in such a way as to guide the distancing of worshippers as they sit, stand or wait to receive communion.
- c. The Celebrant and all who receive communion must **sanitize** hands, as outlined in detail below.
- d. All who have a leadership role in worship, including clergy, ushers, lectors, intercessors, musicians, should have their temperature checked before the service and display a **normal temperature**. Individuals with a temperature of 101.4 degrees or higher may not participate.
- e. A **record of everyone in attendance** at each service must be kept to facilitate **contact tracing** by local health authorities, should it ever be necessary.
- f. **Choirs will not sing** during worship since choral singing has proven to be one of the prime methods of spreading respiratory droplets. The congregation will not sing during worship, either. A **soloist** who is properly distanced from the congregation may sing.
- g. **The Peace** will be shared with a bow or wave or peace sign and will not include handshakes, hugs or other physical touch.

3. Preparing the altar

- a. Communion may be distributed in **one kind only – the bread**.
- b. **Individual wafers** should be used instead of loaf bread. If a congregation prefers a loaf of bread, the celebrant may break a loaf, but distribute wafers only.
- c. The wafers may be placed in individual cups – cupcake cups, medicine cups, dixie cups or the like – and placed on the altar. Alternatively, wafers may be placed on a tray with some distance between them. In either of these situations, communicants come forward at the time of distribution and pick up their wafer in

- a cup or from the tray. If one of these options is chosen, the altar should be set accordingly.
- d. There is no material or safety difference between individually wrapped wafers and unwrapped wafers.
 - e. A **chalice** with a small amount of wine should be placed on the altar. It will be consecrated and may be consumed only by the celebrant. The celebrant, however, is not obliged to consume the wine.
 - f. The wafers and wine should be **protected by a cover** during the Eucharistic prayer. The priest host may remain uncovered, provided it is consumed by the celebrant alone. The priest host should be of a small size, since breaking and sharing a large host would create unnecessary risk.
 - g. The fewer people involved in preparation of the altar, the better. **Altar Guild** members and others who set the altar should wear masks, sanitize hands and wear examination-grade gloves.
 - h. Care should be taken by Altar Guild members to remain physically distanced from each other while working. In many churches, this effectively means that only one person should be in the **sacristy** at a time.

4. Regarding the celebration

- a. The celebrant must wear a mask throughout the Eucharistic prayer. The celebrant may wear a face shield in addition, but not a face shield instead of a mask since aerosolized droplets easily escape a shield.
- b. The celebrant must sanitize hands before the Eucharistic prayer, again after the prayer and before the distribution of wafers, and any time hands come in contact with any person.

5. Regarding the Distribution

- a. Before the distribution begins, the celebrant should remind communicants to maintain at least six feet of distance from one another at all times, including while coming forward for the sacrament. Marks on the ground indicating six feet of distance are recommended.
- b. Communicants must sanitize their hands immediately before receiving or picking up a wafer. A hand sanitizer station near the altar or distribution station will expedite this.
- c. Given the outdoor setting, it is best for communicants to receive the wafer while standing, if they are able to stand.

- d. Communion may be distributed in one of three ways.
 - 1. In small, disposable containers which have been laid out for communicants to pick up, as described under the section on preparing the altar. If there is not adequate room on the altar, the wafers may be placed on a table next to or in front of the altar.
 - 2. Laid out on a tray, with enough distance between each wafer that communicants will not touch more than one in the process of picking one up.
 - 3. From the celebrant's hand, as long as the celebrant does not touch the hand of the communicant. If contact is made, the celebrant must immediately re-sanitize hands before resuming distribution. The communicant whose hand was touched should also re-sanitize hands. This option requires particular care and carries the most risk.
- e. A celebrant should not place a wafer in a communicant's mouth. This type of distribution offers no protection for the celebrant or the communicant.
- f. When properly distanced from others, communicants may draw down or raise their mask momentarily in order to consume the wafer. They should replace their masks immediately after consuming the wafer.
- g. A blessing may be offered to anyone who comes forward and seeks a blessing instead of the wafer, but it may not include physical contact.
- h. The Prayer for Spiritual Communion may be included in the bulletin to accommodate those who choose to stay in the seats as communion is distributed.

6. After Worship

- a. There should not be a reception or greeting line after worship.
- b. Those who handle the vessels and remaining wafers and wine after the service should wear masks and gloves to protect themselves.
- c. If cups of any kind were used for the distribution of the wafers, they should be gathered up and recycled.

7. Final Notes

- a. When you have questions or suggestions about these guidelines, you may send them to bishopsoffice@thediocese.net.
- b. Let us know your experience of the distribution of communion, or of your decision not to exercise this option, also by sending your story to bishopsoffice@thediocese.net.

The Task Force on Eucharist

The guidelines were developed and approved by the Rt. Rev. Susan E. Goff, based on the recommendations and fine work of the Task Force on Eucharist whose members are: The Rt. Rev. Porter Taylor, Chair, The Rev. Shearon Williams, The Rev. Benson Shelton, The Rev. R. Ellen White, The Rev. Leonard (Lee) Gandiya, The Rev. Dr. Charlie Dupree, The Rev. Whitney Z. Edwards

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