

What about home communions and other Communion outside the church?

Lay people may go with Clergy to take Home Communions or to assist with Communion in residential homes, but they do need to have what is called a "General Authorisation" from the Bishop before they do so. There are Safeguarding requirements in the recruitment and training for these people. This is an important ministry and one way in which those who can no longer get to services in the church can still participate in worship and feel part of the church family.

This General Authorisation is a new requirement, and it is necessary not just for anyone who is put forward for this ministry but also must be sought for those who are already engaged in this ministry. Readers by virtue of their licence and training are able to take Communion to people in their own homes, and to take the consecrated elements to a Residential Home and lead a service there.

If you have any questions please contact

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EUCCHARISTIC ASSISTANTS **COMMUNION ASSISTANTS**

An introduction



Eucharistic Assistant / Communion Assistant

What's in a name?

The Church of England is what many call a "broad" church: that is services in different churches may appear very different, in style and feel, even though the actual shape and liturgy is unlikely to be hugely different.

Some churches refer to "Holy Communion", while other use the alternative word "Eucharist". Communion rightly highlights that in this service we are in communion with God, receiving from God in the bread and wine. Eucharist is a form of the Greek word for "thanksgiving" and reminds us that this service is a thanksgiving to God for what he gives us.

What is a Eucharistic Assistant?

We often talk about the priest "celebrating" Communion.

More precisely the priest "presides", while all the congregation "celebrate" together. Other people will take various parts in the Service, both liturgical and practical.

In essence the role of the Eucharistic Assistant or Communion Assistant is to assist the minister in the distribution of the bread and wine at the service, and equally to assist the congregation to receive from God in the sacrament.



Which way?

In recent years many churches have moved the Communion Table into the nave and the priest faces west, towards the congregation, whereas the building may originally have been designed so that the priest presided with his back to the congregation facing East and in a sense standing between the people and God.

Reserved Sacrament?

In some churches there is "reserved sacrament" which is consecrated bread and wine set aside, in others consecrated bread and wine is sometimes kept for mid-week services.

Afterwards?

In some churches the priest and assistants consume the leftover bread and wine immediately after the last people have received Communion, while in other churches the bread and wine is left on the Table or taken to a side-table till after the service where it is then consumed.

Words

Even language as we have noted varies. Communion, Eucharist, Mass, Lord's Supper: Altar or Communion Table: minister or priest. All this points to the richness of meaning in this sacrament. At its heart is the simplicity of being invited and eating; in its depth is a growing understanding of the presence of God and the grace of God poured out and offered so generously to God's people.

***"Broken for me, broken for you,
The body of Jesus, broken for me"***

History and Variety

Over the centuries and in different churches, the way Holy Communion is celebrated has varied hugely.

Bread wine wafers, grape juice .. ?

Until recently in Roman Catholic churches, it was normal for the congregation to receive only the bread. In Methodist churches, and in many Pentecostal churches grape juice is used, while in the Church of England, wine is required by canon law.

Some churches use small wafers, some have large wafers, some use slices of bread and others use a small loaf or roll. Some churches use individual little cups, some one or more chalices. In Finland, the minister pours the wine from a jug into a small cup held by the communicant.

Standing, kneeling ..?

Some kneel to receive, other stand at the rail. Some churches have various "distribution points" in the church where people gather.

Young, Old .. ?

In some churches baptised infants share in Communion, in others, children do so from the age of six or seven, while in others confirmation is seen as the gateway to Communion.

How often?

In some denominations Communion only happens three or four times a year, other traditions would have a Daily Mass. Both would say the reason for this is the importance of the service!

Who can be a Eucharistic / Communion Assistant?

The local church needs to decide who should be considered and who is needed for this role. Those to be considered need to be regular communicant members of the church, who are in good standing in the church.

It is for the incumbent and PCC to nominate and agree those who should share this role. The bishop will signify his affirmation of this Eucharistic role with a letter of confirmation to the parish.

Permissions are for a period of four years, after which they will need to be renewed.

Parishes should look to encourage new people to be considered, which may mean existing Assistants stepping back to allow others. This is a sign of a healthy and growing church.

Privilege and Responsibility

This role is both a privilege and a responsibility. As Jesus gave bread and fish to the disciples to distribute to the 5000, so we are given bread and wine to "distribute" so all are fed. Our task is to ensure others receive, at the basic level, the bread and the wine, but at a deeper level, that they receive from God.

We are necessary but should not get in the way of God working.

Practically we need to be aware of what is happening at the communion rail or the distribution point. There may be people unsure of what to do; someone may slip, a child may be without their parent.

Spiritually we should be quietly praying for those to whom we administer, that God will touch them and bless them. This means we need to be prepared for this ministry ourselves, having made time to pray before the service.

Why is Communion special?

Although theologians argue with many words and books over exactly what happens in Communion, thankfully there is some general agreement. The Church of England recognises that Jesus commanded his disciples to "do this in remembrance of him". We share in Holy Communion because Jesus commands us to do so.

Jesus shared the bread and wine with his disciples at the Passover time at the "Last Supper". He described the bread as his body and the wine as his blood. For the Jewish disciples, this would mean that he was saying he was, as it were, the sacrificial animal, killed to set the people free. Or as one of our most loved hymns puts it

***"Thou on earth
both priest and victim
in the Eucharistic feast"***

However, suggesting that we should drink blood was utterly shocking; meat for Jews should be drained of its blood; one did not eat meat with blood still in it, still less drink blood. Blood for the Jew is the life of the animal. In a way which we should still find "shocking", Jesus was inviting us to partake in his life.

We should not not-be-shocked - we should be jolted by this extraordinary act of God's self-giving.

Christians recognise that in receiving the bread and wine today, we receive much more than simply bread and wine; we might say we not only receive from God but we receive God. Words struggle at this point, but in this sacred mystery, God is at work to bless.

After the prayer of consecration – the Eucharistic Prayer – the bread and wine are "consecrated", set apart, and should be recognised and treated as such. There is a fuller treatment of the meaning of Holy Communion in an accompanying leaflet.

***"We come as guests invited,
As Jesus bids us dine"***

