

## **Holy Communion Assistants – Guidelines for Good Practice**

From 1<sup>st</sup> November 2023 the Bishop is making authorisation of Holy Communion Assistants who assist in the distribution of Holy Communion at the Eucharist during public worship a matter for the incumbent, in consultation with the PCC.

Those who take Holy Communion to the sick, housebound, or residential care homes will continue to be authorised by the (area) Bishop.

This paper sets out some basic guidelines to encourage good practice, and coherence across the diocese.

### **Definition**

The term Holy Communion Assistants includes (i) those who assist in the distribution of Holy Communion at the Eucharist during public worship and (ii) those who may take Holy Communion using previously consecrated elements to the sick, housebound, or residential care homes.

This local authorisation specifically excludes permission for Holy Communion by Extension whether for a Sunday or weekday celebration by a congregation not having a priest available. Permission for Holy Communion by Extension is governed by a House of Bishops' Code of Practice and must be requested separately from the diocesan Bishop. It is a permission that is given to a parish for a specific situation, and not an authorisation of a person.

### **Selection**

Normally, the primary responsibility for selecting and supporting Holy Communion Assistants lies with the parish priest. Where there is a clergy team, or wider ministry team, the selection of potential Holy Communion Assistants should be discussed confidentially within the team. Where there is no team, the incumbent will ideally have some wise churchwardens or other people who know the parish / benefice well.

Each person who is suggested for this ministry should have the opportunity to explore it with the parish priest (and others as appropriate) before deciding whether they wish their name to go forward. Once the incumbent, others who have been consulted, and the person themselves are agreed that this is appropriate, then the names of those who are proposed should go before the PCC for their consent.

The PCC should be able to have a confidential discussion of the appropriateness of the person or people concerned without them being present. It will be sufficient that the minute of the meeting simply states the decision to authorise the person or people.

If the role is confined (as it may be for those in full-time employment) to assisting in the distribution of the sacrament during public worship, no enhanced DBS check will be needed. Individuals should be recruited following the Safer Recruitment and People Management Code of Practice 2026, this will include completing online Basic Awareness safeguarding training.

If the role is also to include taking Communion using previously consecrated elements to the sick, housebound, or residential care homes, then applications should continue to be sent to the Area Bishop's Office so that the Safer Recruitment and People Management Code of Practice 2026, including an enhanced DBS check, will be followed and authorisation then given by the relevant bishop. Basic Awareness, Foundation and Raising Awareness of Domestic Abuse are to be completed prior to being given authorisation by a bishop.

**Training** In addition to safeguarding training mentioned above, training for Holy Communion Assistants has always happened at the parish, benefice or (occasionally) deanery level. The guidelines in Appendix A are intended to act as a practical checklist for developing the content of local training.

### **Authorisation**

Once the PCC has agreed the incumbent's nomination of new Holy Communion Assistants (and any appropriate safeguarding processes have been followed through to completion), then the parish priest can proceed to authorise them.

Normally authorisation should happen with prayer at a principal Sunday service in the benefice or parish where the ministry will be carried out. A simple liturgical form for authorisation, and a template for a parish certificate of authorisation are provided on the diocesan website.

As part of the authorisation the incumbent and Holy Communion Assistant will agree a pattern of review. It is strongly recommended that parishes continue the current practice of authorising the ministry for a three year period with a full review at the three-year mark of whether both parties wish for a further period of authorisation.

### **Ongoing support**

Parishes are strongly encouraged to bring together all those who participate in leading parts of the church's public worship, at least once a year, for a time that might include mutual prayer, thanksgiving and an opportunity for reflection on the worship of the church. This can sometimes feed very helpfully into further reflection by the ministry team and others. Stewards / welcomers, readers, intercessors and Holy Communion Assistants are obvious people to bring together for this reflection.

## **Appendix A**

### **Guidelines for the training for Holy Communion Assistants in public worship**

- Holy Communion Assistants are encouraged to develop structured disciplines of prayer.
- Clergy reflect with Holy Communion Assistants (and others) on being both worshipper and minister.
- While the most common form of Eucharistic ministry is administering the chalice, the authorisation is to administer the consecrated elements, both Bread and Cup. The practice of referring to “chalice assistants” should be discouraged.
- It is important to give someone the opportunity to practice – especially to practice administering the chalice – with un-consecrated wine in the chalice.
- In arranging for a practice session, those about to be authorised should be given the following practice opportunities:
  - To administer to people who are both standing and kneeling, and to someone sitting in a pew or wheelchair.
  - To administer bread both in the hand and when intincted by the administrator.
  - To administer the cup both to those who will take it, those who will part hold it, and those who will refuse to touch it.
  - To administer to those who keep their head bowed as well as those who raise it.
  - The practice administration needs to include use of the purificator. People may need educating that this is primarily to prevent wine running down the outside of the chalice, not to smear lipstick or saliva around the inside of the cup. A simple upwards wipe of the folded cloth will normally suffice.
- If a lay team is administering both Bread and Cup at (one part of) an altar rail, or other communion station, then an appropriate and simple form of words should be agreed for those who do not wish to receive: e.g. “May the Lord Jesus bless you”
- A common practice regarding words of administration should be agreed. The simplest is that whatever the president says when administering to the assistant ministers, is what they should say when they administer to others. (In those churches where the ministers receive last, a form of wording needs to be agreed for normal use.)
- Holy Communion Assistants need to be discouraged from over-personalising the administration of the sacrament. Using people’s names when the sacrament is administered is a guarantee someone will be forgotten, or a visitor left excluded. The human relationship of the minister and communicant should not overshadow the relationship of Christ with those who are receiving his gift of himself.
- Much of our practice is constrained by the geography and architecture of the building. However, as far as possible, those who come forward to take a part in the leading of worship, should only come forward for that part which they are helping with. Thus, just as those who read, and those who lead prayers come up only when they are about to minister, so those who are distributing the Holy Communion only need to come up at the point of distribution. In Common Worship the anthem “Lamb of God”, whether said or sung, makes a convenient point. While practice differs from place to place, there is normally no need to robe for this ministry.
- The Invitation to Communion is one that Christ extends to his people. The ministers should not receive the Sacrament before the invitation, but in response to it, whether before or after administering to the people.
- Some prefer to receive before administering to the people, as they first need to receive Christ’s ministry themselves before sharing his gift with others. More recently, some have preferred, as an act of humble service, to receive after serving God’s people. Whichever practice is followed, it needs to be an agreed and common practice.

- Holy Communion Assistants will need to know their parish practice on whether and how the Sacrament is reserved for the sick, and who is responsible for placing it in the aumbry or tabernacle, or where there is no aumbry or tabernacle, in an appropriate side-chapel or other location.
- Where architecture permits, it is usually easiest at the end of the distribution to take the sacred vessels straight to the credence table, and to carry out the ablutions there. There is no need to replace empty silverware on the altar table under a burse and veil. (Most contemporary liturgies assume that the communion vessels begin on the credence table without burse and veil in any case and are simply brought across to the altar table at the offertory.)
- It may be that one of the ways in which the Holy Communion Assistants can assist the president is to take responsibility for the consumption of the remaining sacrament, and the following ablutions, allowing the president to return to the chair for quiet prayer and reflection. Different churches develop different practices here.
- Completing online Basic Awareness safeguarding training is required prior to being given local authorisation.

## **Appendix B**

### **Guidelines for the further training of those who take Holy Communion to the sick, housebound or residential care homes.**

- Apart from initial training for those who are assisting during public worship, additional training for those who are taking the Sacrament to the sick, housebound and in residential care homes will be needed (including safeguarding training mentioned above). It is recommended that this training follows an apprenticeship model and happens once a newly authorised Holy Communion Assistant is accustomed to distributing the Sacrament at public worship. It is important to remember that no-one should do this before the appropriate safeguarding process has been carried out in the parish, and DBS checks completed. Ideally, a newly authorised minister will accompany an experienced minister, first to observe, then to assist, and finally to take the lead while another minister is present, before doing this on their own.
- There should be the opportunity in this apprenticeship to talk through the liturgy with the incumbent and gain an understanding of how it works. This would include how it might differ for a quite ill individual at home, to a more communal celebration in a care home.
- Where possible it is always valuable to visit the housebound or residential care homes in pairs. This provides both mutual support, and better engagement.
- It is usually helpful to develop the practice of engaging first in prayer and sacrament, and then engaging in the main pastoral conversation.
- The amount of content depends heavily on the context, and people need to be encouraged in developing the appropriate sensitivity. Where appropriate it is good to use the reading(s) of the previous Sunday, and to offer a brief summary of what the sermon was about.
- For the prayers, it is good to encourage the practice of asking the housebound communicant what they wish to pray for.
- The parish ministry team should have a common mind on what circumstances (if at all) taking communion to the sick should or should not include the laying on of hands. In many parishes, where there was a perceived need for this, or for anointing, the parish clergy would expect to be involved.
- The Holy Communion Assistant should have a clear idea of appropriate boundaries of confidentiality, and whether and how any pastoral information was to be communicated to the parish priest (or pastoral co-ordinator), and how to raise any safeguarding concerns with the Parish Safeguarding Officer.
- Basic Awareness, Foundation and Raising Awareness of Domestic Abuse are to be completed prior to being given authorisation by a bishop.