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# Home Communion

Lay Ministry Training Courses – Pastoral Visitor

*Written by Revd Canon Jeremy Harris*



# Home Communion

## Guidance for Pastoral Visitors

*“Holy Communion brings a tangible expression of the greatness and love of God and the transforming power of Christ into the centre of our life and situation.”<sup>1</sup>*

Since the early years of the church, Christians have ministered to the housebound, ill and dying by taking them Holy Communion/the Eucharist at home. Christians are a community of people who are united in their faith in Jesus Christ; whilst meeting together is an important aspect of that community it is recognised there will always be those who for very genuine reasons are unable to do so. Pastoral Visitors and clergy who administer communion to people in their homes or care/nursing settings provide an important pastoral and sacramental expression of the worshipping community; a living reminder that the sick and infirm are integral parts the worshipping community, which is the body of Christ. The Pastoral Visitor represents not only the body of Christ to those they visit but also bring with them the elements of Communion/Eucharist which are Christ's gift of his body and blood to humanity. The Pastoral Visitor therefore represents the wider church, a living symbol of the worshipping community's care, support and concern for its sick and infirm.<sup>2</sup>

Holy Communion/the Eucharist is at the heart of Christian worship, a memorial of the death and resurrection of Jesus and a means through which His followers recall His presence and open their lives to the Holy Spirit. It's important that those unable to attend the Eucharist in person are given an opportunity to receive and the Pastoral Visitor is in the privileged position to represent the church in performing this important ministry. The bread and wine will be consecrated by a priest at a service in church and 'reserved' for the purpose of home communion so that those who receive communion in this way at a later time and in a different place are still linked to the body of the congregation and the main act of worship.

<sup>1</sup> Carolyn Headley 'Holy Communion a practical guide', Grove Books, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Beth Wickenberg Ely 'A Manual for Eucharistic Visitors; Morehouse, 2005.



Each ministry area will have its own systems for the administration of home communion to the sick and housebound:

- e.g. whether the visit should be by a member of the clergy team or lay person;
- who organises pastoral visiting;
- should pastoral visitors work in pairs;
- the frequency;
- how communion is administered;
- where to collect the consecrated 'elements' (i.e. the bread and wine) from etc.

The following is provided as a guide to further equip the Pastoral Visitor in the administration of Communion. This is intended to supplement to guidance provided in the diocese's '*Pastoral Visitor, Lay Ministry Training Course*'.

## Preparation

If you haven't taken the person communion before it would be helpful to try and find out a little about them from a member of the clergy team before you visit:

- Where do they live?
- Are they ill or housebound?
- Do they live alone or might family/carers also be present and also wish to receive communion?
- It's also useful to know if any of those who wish to receive communion have any allergies which mean they need to receive gluten-free bread, problems with swallowing or receiving alcohol.

Always organise the visit in advance. This may need to be done directly with the person you are due to visit or through a member of the family or carer. Consider your safety and ensure that someone knows who/when you will be visiting.

Be Prepared! You should be a regular communicant; spend time before the visit in prayer; try not to have to rush to arrive on-time and allow sufficient time for the visit so you don't have to rush to leave. Those who receive communion, should also be encouraged to prepare prayerfully to receive communion.



Collect the consecrated bread and wine from the church where it is reserved. Only bread and wine consecrated by a priest should be used to administer home communion.

Ensure you have the 'kit' you require. Practice may differ between ministry areas and so ensure you are aware what's required. Some ministry areas will use 'home/sick communion' sets containing all that is required; including:

- cruets containing the consecrated wine and another with water;
- a pyx (a small box for carrying the bread);
- a paten (small plate for serving the bread) – optional;
- a chalice (cup from which to administer the wine);
- a corporal (linen used beneath the vessels when setting up the table);
- a purificator (linen used to wipe the chalice after each person has drunk);
- a candle and or cross/crucifix – optional;
- a suitable container/case to carry everything in.

Other ministry areas may administer communion from a pyx alone, where a small drop of wine is placed onto the bread. You'll also need to take sufficient copies of the order of service, Bible readings and any prayers required.

## When you arrive

Greet the person you are visiting, and any others present and if you haven't visited before introduce yourself and explain what will happen during the service. Remember you are a guest in another person's home and so be respectful of their wishes and personal space.

If you are visiting a care/ nursing home ensure that staff are informed of your arrival. Staff will generally gather residents together and let you know of anyone who might require communion in their room.

Whilst it's important to create a relaxed and friendly environment from the outset it may better to try (if possible) to wait until after communion for a longer and more detailed chat!



Find a table, sanitise your hands and set up the communion 'kit'.

The following diagram might help.



Ensure that any gluten-free bread is kept separate and, if necessary, check if the person has any problems in swallowing or consuming alcohol. Family or carers might be able to advise where necessary.

If you are administering from a 'pyx' alone then you might wish to place that on a 'corporal' with a candle and/ or cross beside it.

When all is ready encourage a few moments of stillness and then begin the service.

## During the service

You may sit or stand for the service but wherever possible try and keep at the same level as the person you are visiting.

Lead the service using the words provided (some sample services are included in the appendix). The service includes a Collect (special prayer for each Sunday/Holy day), Bible reading/s and suitable prayers as required. You might find it helpful to use one of the Bible readings that were used in church on the previous Sunday; this helps provide a further link to the local worshipping community and avoids passages that may place too much of a focus on illness. If appropriate, you might wish to ask the person you are visiting to read. In general it is advised to keep the service relatively short so as to avoid tiredness and lack of concentration from the communicant.

Prior to administering communion sanitise your hands again.

Do take communion alongside those you are ministering as this further emphasises the sense of community.



Wherever possible communion should be administered using bread and wine. If the person has difficulties in swallowing then just a small fraction of bread might be used dipped in wine and placed on the persons tongue. If the person is unable to receive either bread or wine then communion may be administered in one kind only. If the person is unable to receive communion at all then emphasise that the person receives 'by faith' and makes a 'spiritual' communion.

If the service is interrupted by a visitor then they could be invited to join in, to sit quietly or to call back later. If the phone rings it could be left to go onto answerphone or a message taken to call back later. It may be best to respond to callers rather than cause family, carers etc to panic wondering why there's no answer. If the person you are visiting becomes distracted, falls asleep or is in discomfort then you might need to pause and sympathetically wait until you can resume.

Afterwards cleanse the vessels using water and dry with the purificator.

Once the service is over take time to chat and to listen. Remember the guidance provided in the pastoral visiting course!

## After the visit

Pause and reflect for a few minutes on how it has gone and on the privilege God has given you in exercising this ministry.

If there is anything during the visit that has concerned you then ensure that this is fed back to one of the clergy team as soon as possible or if necessary reported in accordance with the ministry area's safeguarding policy.

Ensure you have adequate support in place to chat confidentially about your own feelings and the experiences you have encountered.

Keep those you have visited regularly in your prayers and let them know they are being prayed for.

Ensure that any remaining consecrated bread and wine is returned to church.



# Appendix

A format of service to be used, produced by the Church In Wales, is printed below.

## HOME COMMUNION

### THE COMMUNION

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid; cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy Holy Name; that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy Name; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Let us humbly confess our sins to Almighty God.

**Almighty God, our Heavenly Father,  
We have sinned against thee,  
In thought and word and deed,  
And in what we have left undone,  
We are truly sorry and repent all our sins.  
Have mercy upon us, most merciful Father.  
Forgive us all that is past.  
And grant that we may ever hereafter  
Serve and please thee in newness of life,  
to the honour and glory to thy name.  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

*The Minister says:*

May Almighty God have mercy upon us; pardon and deliver us from all our sins, confirm and strengthen us in all goodness; and bring us to everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**



## THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

### The Collect of the day

### Reading/s

### Prayers

As our Saviour Jesus Christ has taught us we are bold to say:

**Our Father, who art in heaven,  
Hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come.  
Thy will be done.  
On earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
As we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation.  
But deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
The power, and the glory,  
For ever and ever. Amen.**

Receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ given for you, and feed on him in your heart(s) by faith with thanksgiving.

The Body of Christ keep you in eternal life. **Amen.**  
The Blood of Christ keep you in eternal life. **Amen.**

OR

The Body and Blood of Christ keep you in eternal life. **Amen.**

*The service shall conclude as follows:*

**Praise the Lord O my soul: and all that is within me praise his holy name.  
Praise the Lord O my soul: and forget not all his benefits;  
Who forgiveth all thy sin: and healeth all thine infirmities.**  
(Psalm 103. 1-3)





## The Blessing

May the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep our heart(s) and mind(s) in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord: and may the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be upon us and remain with us always. **Amen.**

*An alternate service that could be used:*

## COMMUNION AT HOME

Peace to this house and all whose home is here, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Father of glory, holy and eternal,  
look upon us now in power and mercy.  
May your strength overcome our weakness,  
your radiance transform our blindness,  
and your Spirit draw us to that love  
shown and offered to us by your Son,  
our Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Let us bring our sins to our Heavenly Father:  
**Heavenly Father,**  
**we have sinned in thought, word and deed,**  
**and have failed to do**  
**what we ought to have done.**  
**We are sorry and truly repent.**  
**For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ**  
**who died for us,**  
**forgive us all that is past and lead us in his way**  
**to walk as children of light. Amen.**

May Almighty God, who forgives all who truly repent,  
have mercy on us and set us free from sin,  
strengthen us in goodness  
and keep us in eternal life;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

*The collect and bible reading(s) may be used here.*



God's Church, of which we are members, has taken bread and wine and given thanks over them according to our Lord's command. These holy gifts are now brought here so that, in trust and thanksgiving, we may all share in the communion of the body and blood of Christ.

As our Saviour taught us, we boldly pray:

**Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come;  
thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation;  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
the power and the glory,  
for ever and ever. Amen.**

Receive the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ given for you, and feed on him in your heart by faith with thanksgiving.

*Holy Communion is received and a silence is kept.  
A prayer or psalm may be said.*

Be in peace to love and serve the Lord.  
**In the name of Christ. Amen.**

