

THE REPRESENTATIVE BODY OF THE CHURCH IN WALES

CORONAVIRUS – COVID19

GUIDANCE ON CELEBRATING HOLY COMMUNION

ALERT LEVEL ZERO

This advice note seeks to enable Holy Communion to be celebrated in a safe and appropriate way. It includes practical steps in the administration of Holy Communion.

Where either priests or parishioners have concerns about participating in a service of Holy Communion, it is important that no pressure is placed on priests to preside at Holy Communion or on parishioners to receive the Sacrament.

This advice should be read alongside the guidance Covid 19 Churches Risk Assessment Guidance Alert Level 0 'available on the Church in Wales Website at <https://www.churchinwales.org.uk/en/clergy-and-members/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance/>

Introduction

At Alert Level Zero, from August 7th 2021, there are no legal limits (for Covid reasons) on the number of people who can meet, including in private homes, public places or at events. In addition, all businesses and premises may be open and activities can fully resume.

However, the Welsh Government has kept a small but significant number of legal requirements to help reduce the spread of the virus and help protect the most vulnerable. Businesses, employers and other organisations have a duty to protect their employees and customers while on their premises. There are three legal requirements that remain at Alert Level Zero:

1. Businesses, employers and other organisations, including activity and event organisers, must undertake a coronavirus risk assessment of their premises and activities and take reasonable measures to minimise exposure to, and the spread of, coronavirus based on that risk assessment.
2. Everyone must still self-isolate for 10 days if they test positive for COVID-19. If you are a close contact of someone who has tested positive and you are not fully vaccinated you must also self-isolate for 10 days as instructed by the Test Trace Protect system.
3. Adults and children over 12 must wear face-coverings in indoor public places including churches, church halls and community buildings.

It will be noted that social distancing is no longer a legal requirement. However, it is a very useful risk mitigation measure so it is generally recommended that social distancing measures be retained where practical.

It is a general legal duty to protect all people who come into your building/s, or who could be affected by your activities, from harm. This includes taking reasonable steps to protect your clergy, volunteers, members of the congregation or visitors from coronavirus (as with

other hazards). This is called a COVID-19 risk assessment and it will help you manage risk and protect people.

PCCs/MACs need to develop their risk assessment for their activities, and this note seeks to suggest reasonable measures that might be considered to control the risk of Covid transmission.

Q. Can we celebrate Holy Communion with our congregations in church buildings?

A. Yes, subject to a number of important conditions outlined below.

Q. Can the common cup be shared?

A. It is generally advised that Communion should be administered in one kind only. There must be no sharing of the common cup. In this instance the president alone should take the wine, consuming all that has been consecrated; other communicants should receive the bread only, in the hand. We are clear that this is still “complete Communion” and appropriate in the emergency situation that still applies.

However, it is appreciated that for some, Communion in one kind only is a matter of concern. Whilst not the preferred approach of the Bench of Bishops, simultaneous administration of consecrated bread and wine may be practised strictly in accordance with the provisions at Appendix I attached. Churches wishing to do this should confirm their intention to their Archdeacon (or other nominated person). This provision will be kept under review by the Bench of Bishops.

Q. Are we able to share the Peace?

A. Yes, but subject to developing a policy for it within your risk assessment. The legal requirement to wear face coverings provides a basic protection and the provision of hand washing and sanitising will also assist.

Many congregations will now be familiar with offering a sign of peace without touching one another. If your risk assessment concludes it is reasonable to share the Peace with touch, consider providing badges for those who may not wish to do so, and whether the Peace might be shared only with those people in one’s immediate vicinity. Hand sanitiser on each pew or row may be useful.

Sharing the peace without touch will greatly reduce risk of transmission.

Q. What hygiene measures should be followed when handling the Eucharistic elements?

A. If it is customary for the bread and wine to be brought to the table in an offertory procession, consider how this should be done with minimal risk.

We recommend that Ministers should not speak over uncovered 'consumables'. In practice, this means that while the president can speak the words of the Eucharistic Prayer over bread and wine that he or she alone will consume, bread or wine that will be consumed by other communicants must remain covered until being distributed (e.g. wafers in a ciborium with the lid on or covered by a pall, or bread on a paten covered by a purificator or other cloth).

We continue to encourage the use of individual communion wafers or bread that has already been divided rather than large wafers or loaves of bread that are broken and shared, as this practice minimises the physical contact the president will have with the elements. It is also advised that, if possible, the president be the only person to handle the wafers or bread during the distribution, unless there are very large numbers, and that individual communicants should not pass around wafers or bread.

At the fraction (breaking of the bread) it is suggested that the president's portion alone should be broken with the rest remaining covered.

If the consecrated bread and wine are shown to the people, use the president's portion alone for this purpose.

Q: How should Holy Communion be administered?

A: Careful consideration needs to be given to the question of how the sacrament should be administered given the continued potential for risks to health posed by the common cup.

There are two possibilities for administration:

1. under the form of bread alone, mindful that the president must still receive in both kinds;
2. In both kinds by simultaneous administration. Whilst not the preferred approach of the Bench of Bishops, simultaneous administration of consecrated bread and wine may be practised strictly in accordance with the provisions at Appendix I attached.

Which you adopt, should be informed by your risk assessment.

It is important that no pressure is placed on members of the congregation to receive the sacrament if they feel unable to do so.

Consider whether the words of administration can be spoken to each communicant (face coverings being worn), or whether the words of distribution might be spoken once to all.

Q: Are altar parties or assistants permitted?

Yes, but you need to think about how this is done to minimise risk of transmission. This will be more appropriate where you have large numbers of communicants. If others assist in preparing the elements before or during the service, then hand hygiene precautions should apply.

Q. When should the priest and communicants sanitize their hands?

A. The priest or assistants should sanitise their hands before administering the consecrated bread.

Each communicant should also be encouraged to sanitise their hands before receiving the bread or wine.

The bread should be administered into the hand with care being taken by the president to avoid contact with the communicants' hands.

Q. Can the altar rails be used?

A. Yes, but this will be an area of closer contact between people and rails are hard surfaces on which the virus may rest.

The safest approach is to avoid touching the rail and to maintain physical distancing, by communicants forming a line maintaining two metres' distance to receive the bread, standing, from the priest. It may also be possible for the priest to take communion to people in their seats.

However, depending on the layout and features of the church, and numbers attending you may be able to work out a way for communicants to kneel at the altar rail safely. You might consider cleaning the altar rail immediately before and after people come to receive and encourage people to kneel with distance between them. Face coverings should be worn immediately before and after people kneel at the rail.

Q. What about face coverings?

A. The law remains that all persons aged over 11 gathering indoors should wear a face covering. This applies to all activities and services within the church or church hall.

There are exceptions to the requirement to wear a face covering for medical reasons, and it is permitted to remove the covering "to communicate with another person who has difficulty communicating (in relation to speech, language or otherwise)".

Further guidance for the public is available at:

<https://gov.wales/face-coverings-guidance-public>

and for premises managers at:

<https://gov.wales/face-coverings-guidance-measures-be-taken-employers-and-managers-premises>

The priest need not wear a face covering where it is impractical to do so but they should consider a range of other mitigations to provide a barrier to transmission including increasing distancing, screens, visors and additional hygiene measures. However, when administering the bread, a face covering should be worn by the priest.

The public should be reminded of the requirement to wear a face covering and a standard sign can be found at <https://www.churchinwales.org.uk/en/publications/administration-and-business/COVID-19/>

Q. What about cleaning after the service?

A. Arrangements for the cleaning of communion plate, linen, and shared surfaces should be made. Linen can be washed in the normal way, and plate should, after any ceremonial cleansing, be washed in warm water, being careful not to use damaging detergents or solvents.

Q. Can we reserve the Sacrament?

A. Churches which reserve the Sacrament may do so. It is recommended that the priest should place the consecrated bread in the vessel for reservation. It should not be consumed or distributed for 72 hours by anyone other than the priest who reserved it.

Q. What about Test, Trace and Protect?

The Welsh Government Test, Trace, Protect strategy sets out the approach to tackling coronavirus, testing people with symptoms in the community, tracing those who have come into close contact with people who have tested positive for coronavirus and protecting family, friends and our community by self-isolating.

All persons entering places of worship should be asked to complete a record of attendance which records their name, contact telephone number and date and time of visit but people cannot be required to do so. In the case of access to church halls or churches for permitted community activity and by general visitors, it is a requirement that attendees are recorded before being admitted. These records must be handled in accordance with GDPR to protect the individuals' privacy. These records should be kept for 21 days after the event and then destroyed.

A consent form can be found at <https://www.churchinwales.org.uk/en/clergy-and-members/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance/test-trace-and-protect/>

You should also provide a revised privacy notice and templates can be found <https://www.churchinwales.org.uk/en/clergy-and-members/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance/test-trace-and-protect/>. There is a version if you collect this information in advance online rather than 'at the door'. The 'online' privacy notice should be made available on your website, and the 'at the door' privacy notice should be available for inspection (perhaps on the table where people are completing forms and on the church noticeboard)

The new NHS COVID-19 app is intended to help in this process but is not mandatory. The system involves the creation of a site specific QR code which allows people visiting to use the App. See <https://gov.wales/nhs-covid-19-app-guidance-businesses-and-organisations>

This system does not replace the physical recording of attendance set out above.

It is recommended that all public church premises (including churches, halls, offices etc) should display such a QR code.

Further Welsh Government guidance [can be found here](#) on how to maintain records and on compliance with GDPR.

Further information about Test, Trace, Protect is available here [Test, trace, protect: coronavirus | Sub-topic | GOV.WALES](#).

Appendix I

Procedures for simultaneous administration of consecrated bread and wine

This appendix sets out a procedure for simultaneous administration of the consecrated bread and wine in a manner that seeks to minimise the possible health risks.

Whilst not the preferred approach of the Bench of Bishops, it is appreciated that for some, Communion in one kind only is a matter of concern and therefore this provision is being offered. Churches wishing to follow this practice should confirm their intention to their Archdeacon (or other nominated person) after agreement with their MAC/LMAC/PCC. They will need to ensure this practice is consonant with their Risk Assessment. If changes to the RA are required, they will need to register these changes with the Archdeacon in an updated RA. This development will be kept under review by the Bench of Bishops.

This procedure seeks to minimise the COVID risk from receiving Communion in both kinds, although it will not remove it entirely. Officiants ought to be clear about the logistics of any new planned administration. They will need to make this known so that communicants can decide on the level of risk they wish to accept.

Practice

The simultaneous administration of consecrated bread and wine is effected by the president taking a piece of bread carefully from the paten or ciborium with ~~the fingers~~ an appropriate utensil and touching it briefly but carefully to the surface of the wine, allowing a small amount of the wine to suffuse into the bread.

Key points

- The consecrated bread and wine ought to be dropped into the hand of the communicant taking care no physical contact is made.
- The president communicates last and must not drink from the chalice until this point.
- The president must sanitize hands in advance of the distribution; each communicant must sanitize their hands before receiving.
- Communicant and president must both be wearing face coverings, and the communicant must move away from the communion station before removing their mask to consume the consecrated bread and wine.
- Communicants who wish to continue receiving under one kind should continue to be able to do so.

Before the Service

- If loaves or large pieces of leavened or unleavened bread are used, these should be divided into individual pieces in a hygienic way before the start of the service. Hand hygiene and physical distancing precautions should apply.

- The bread and wine to be received by communicants should be covered at all times before the distribution.

Before the Eucharistic Prayer

- Offertory processions where the bread and wine are brought to the table are not recommended at this time.
- When the president takes the bread and wine before the Eucharistic Prayer, it is recommended that this takes place in silence. If words are said when the bread and wine are taken into the hand, only the bread that the president will receive and a covered cup are taken (the other elements being covered).
- The president should consider how much wine will be necessary in the chalice, probably much less than usual.

During the Eucharistic Prayer

- The bread and wine to be received by communicants other than the president should be covered at all times, including during the account of the Lord's Supper.

At the Breaking of the Bread

- At the breaking of the bread (the 'fraction') – whether this takes place during the Eucharistic Prayer or afterwards as a separate action – only the consecrated bread that the president will consume at the end of the distribution is broken. The remainder of the bread remains covered. If other consecrated bread needs to be broken before it is administered, this must be done after the president has sanitized their hands, in silence or while the Agnus Dei is said by the congregation.

At the Giving of Communion

- Unless there are very large numbers, it is advised that the president be the only person to handle the bread during the distribution. If there are large numbers of communicants, the procedures for the president at the distribution, below, should be followed carefully by all who are assisting to distribute Holy Communion. In any case, care should be taken so that communicants who are moving from their places preserve physical distancing.
- At the invitation to communion, it is recommended that only the bread that the president will receive be shown to the people. The words of distribution ('The body and blood of Christ' or 'The body and blood of Christ keep you in eternal life' or another suitably adapted authorized form) are spoken to the whole congregation immediately after the invitation to communion, and all who intend to receive say, 'Amen'.
- The president puts on a face covering and sanitizes their hands.
- Leaving the uncovered consecrated bread for the president's later consumption on the holy table, the president carries the consecrated bread and wine in their covered containers (a covered chalice and either a ciborium or a covered paten) to a table or other surface from which Holy Communion will be distributed. It should be arranged so that the president can have access to each element, but should not allow the president or other communicants to stand directly over them or face them.

- The president uncovers the bread and wine and takes the ciborium/paten in their hands.
- Each communicant then receives Communion in both kinds simultaneously in this way:
 1. The communicant must sanitize hands prior to arriving at the place of communion.
 2. The communicant stands at the place of communion and holds out hand(s).
 3. The president takes a piece of bread with their free hand and briefly but carefully touches it to the surface of the wine, allowing some of the wine to suffuse into the bread.
 4. The president drops the bread into the communicant's hand in silence without touching the hand. In cases where receiving in the hands is not possible, such as illness or disability, hands must be sanitized before and after.
 5. The president should take care to avoid the possibility of surplus wine dripping from the bread at the time of administration.
 6. The communicant moves away from the place of communion, removes face covering with free hand, consumes the bread, and replaces the face covering.
- If the president accidentally touches the hand of the communicant or any other surface, both president's and communicant's hands must be sanitized again.
- If a communicant must receive in their place, they should still sanitize their hands. The president brings the requisite amount of bread and the wine to them, and performs step 3 above immediately before administering.
- Once all others have communicated, the president returns the remaining consecrated bread and wine to the table, and receives Communion according to the same method, using the portion of bread that remained at the table (i.e. the president's wafer/bread).
- Any consecrated bread and wine which is not required for purposes of communion is consumed at the end of the distribution or after the service.

Note: The procedure given above could be adapted for use in churches where it is the norm for someone other than the president, or several such people, to distribute Communion, where all involved take care to observe the precautions noted above