

Good practice for Eucharistic or Communion Assistants taking communion to people in their own homes, sheltered accommodation or care homes.

Background

There are some churches in the diocese where lay people take Holy Communion to the housebound or the sick, or to others who cannot get to church. This is a proper ministry, encouraged by our bishops, and a real way in which the “church” can come to those who cannot come to it. Because this ministry involves those people working with and ministering to vulnerable people often in their homes, it is necessary that the parish has ensured that those who go in the name of the church have received appropriate training and have been carefully selected.

- Everyone involved in such ministry will already have been nominated by the parish priest and PCC and had some experience as a Eucharistic/Communion Assistant in church services.
- Those engaged in this ministry must hold a current CRB enhanced disclosure. For their sake, and for the sake of those to whom they minister, they should be given proper training and ongoing support for what they do; ideally this is a ministry which is better done by a pair of people, rather than an individual.

Some practical advice

Visiting a person in his/her home, whether it be a private home or care home, is a privilege not a right. Visiting for the purpose of taking communion brings with it additional courtesies. Fuller guidance will be issued in due course but some important points to remember are:

1. Always ensure you arrive in good time for the appointment and leave sufficient time for any further commitments. Rushing in and/or out not only appears uncaring but undermines the value of the worship.
2. Make sure you are properly prepared – for example, knowing how you collect consecrated elements from church, what cards or books you will need, what reading is to be used, collect to be said etc. If it is your church’s tradition to use, for example, candles, a cross or a crucifix, make sure you have everything with you. You do not want to give the impression that a service at home is in any sense a less important version of what would be offered in church.
3. Be alert to pastoral issues that might arise through the visit – possibly through things you are told or that you see - and, if in doubt, refer these confidentially to your parish priest.
4. Hygiene issues are very important. Please ensure that communion vessels are thoroughly washed and that you use hand gel before and after the visit, without making this look like some kind of ritual cleansing or in anyway seeming to cast doubt on the cleanliness of anyone’s home or person.
5. As in all ministry, personal relationships are crucial and it is important therefore that boundaries are established and respected. Things like:
 - Are Christian names permissible?
 - Will the format be a chat then the service... or the service first then a chat afterwards... or something else?
 - Are you comfortable with someone whose background might be from a different church tradition from your own? e.g an elderly person from a higher church background has come to live near

family and home communion has been asked for at the local church which is of a different tradition.

- There might be others from the church who are pastoral visitors and therefore visit the person to whom you are taking communion. These ministries are not in competition, they are complementary!

And finally

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. It is also true that we handle “sacred things” as we administer Communion, and in God’s eyes the wounded, sick and poor are particularly precious. Taking what is sacred to those who are precious is a double privilege and responsibility.

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, since meat for Jews should be drained of its 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.

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.

The ministry of Eucharistic/Communion Assistant is an important one within the life of the church. However, it never stands alone and is always part of the wider life of the worshipping and pastoral life of the church. All clergy, Readers, Church Army Officers and Authorised Lay Ministers are, through their licence or commissioning, authorised to administer both elements at Holy Communion in public worship and in people’s homes.

Your reference point for this ministry should normally be your parish priest who will be responsible for ensuring that you are properly prepared for the ministry you undertake. However, if there are further queries please contact

Revd Canon Dr Chris Bracegirdle, Bishop’s Senior Chaplain
0161 792 2096 chaplain@bishops court.manchester.anglican.org