

It is good for people to contribute to the worship, and it is a privilege and a responsibility we should enjoy and be willing to share; the various and many roles need some co-ordination.

Different churches will have different roles to complement the priest, some with more lay involvement and some with less. This is for the local church to decide together.

What is important is that those asked to take on a role understand their place in the wider liturgy, the significance of that role and that they then do it to the glory of God, and to help others find God for themselves.

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Holy Communion: its Shape and Liturgical Structure



One of the key theological emphases that undergirds Common Worship, as was true of the ASB, is this sense that the celebration is the work of all the people led by the priest / presiding minister.

It is not surprising therefore that at the same time as the introduction of the new liturgy there was also the introduction of the Offertory, the wider use of Eucharistic or Communion Assistants, and greater lay involvement in the reading of lessons and the leading of the intercessions.

Roles

Common Worship refers to the “president”, although the Methodist Worship Book, possibly more helpfully, refers to the “presiding minister”. Worship and the Eucharist is the work of all the people of God.

We all “celebrate” the Eucharist together, enabled by the person presiding at the gathering, and those who assist in various ways, whether by reading the Bible, leading the prayers, acting as sidespersons, or as Communion Assistants, as well as those who have worked “behind the scenes” to prepare the church and the service.

Together this forms our “sacrifice of worship” which we offer.

***“We are one Body,
because we all share
in one bread”***

Holy Communion

There are two main Communion Services within the Church of England, the Book of Common Prayer, whose service was developed from the Medieval rite, and the Order 1 from Common Worship, (which broadly follows the previous Alternative Service Book 1980 in shape), and which takes its structure from the early liturgy of Hippolytus, a liturgy which was only discovered in the nineteenth century.

Both are structured around the “ministry of the Word” (Bible readings and sermon) first followed by the “ministry of the Sacrament” afterwards.

This “ministry of the sacrament” has a basic shape which is similar in both services but expressed more clearly in the Common Worship form. Following the example of Jesus it involves taking, giving thanks, breaking the bread, and distributing the bread and wine.

The service concludes liturgically and practically with God’s people being sent out with God’s blessing to serve Him in their daily lives:

***“Send us out,
in the power of your Spirit,
to live and work
to your praise and glory.”***

The shape and liturgical structure of Holy Communion

Take...

The bread and wine is taken and placed on the altar or Communion Table. Often this can involve an “Offertory” in which case those involved may be the Eucharistic Assistants who will help with distribution later. However it may equally be the minister taking the bread and wine from the credence table nearby.

Break...

In the BCP the minister breaks the bread within the prayer: in Common Worship this happens after the prayer is finished, often as the minister says, “We break this bread to share in the Body of Christ”



Give Thanks...

The prayer of Thanksgiving / The Eucharistic Prayer, which includes the words of “institution”, a recalling of what Jesus did and said at the Last Supper

...and Distribute

It is here that the Eucharistic Assistants have their role, enabling all to “share in the one bread”. They may also be asked to help in the clearing up after all have received. This “clearing up” may happen immediately after all have received, or in the final hymn or after the service. It is quite appropriate for the Eucharistic Assistants to help consume the bread and wine that is left over but it should be done reverently and decently, and – if within the service itself – not in a way that is distracting to the congregation.