

Eucharistic Fellowship in an Age of Pandemics

A theological and medical–scientific framework for policy recommendations and congregational study guide.

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Preamble

The Means of Grace and the Hope of Glory

Early Christians understood their worship to reflect the hospitable table fellowship Jesus himself practiced (e.g., Mt. 9:10-15, Lk. 14:7-15), and also their participation in the paschal mystery of Christ's death and resurrection envisioned by St. Paul (1 Cor. 11:23-26). The Church eventually called this worship "eucharist" when Christians give thanks for the real presence of the risen Christ in their midst as they share bread and wine.

As Episcopalians, we honor these ancient roots of Christian worship and we value the classical insights that shape our eucharistic liturgies in The Book of Common Prayer. Those traditions and our own experience affirm the formative character of our worship, the ways in which the eucharist shapes us as a community of God's people and equips us for ministry. This "spiritual food" nourishes our life together as "living members" of the body of Christ, (BCP, p. 365), and sends us out into the world to "love and serve" God (p. 366). We are particularly mindful in times of isolation and social fragmentation that the eucharist both promises and provides a healing and graceful communion. As eucharistic communities, we bear witness to this rich unity in Christ, even when we cannot all gather together in physical proximity or in the same way.

While the COVID-19 pandemic may have interrupted some of our customary habits in gathering for worship, we are profoundly grateful that it did not diminish nor alter our convictions concerning the centrality of the eucharist in our congregational life. Episcopalians around the U.S. and Anglican Christians around the world tried and tested many different ways to be in eucharistic communion with each other during this time while also treating such communion with the deep reverence it rightly deserves—as "the means of grace and the hope of glory."¹

As we begin to emerge in new ways from the pandemic, we seek to retrieve traditional insights for a fresh way of being church together around the eucharistic table. In these last two years, we have recognized more vividly the hunger for communion—in ourselves and others, including those who had previously never attended worship in person; we have witnessed how Holy Communion can unite us without erasing our diversity; and we have heard more clearly God's call to offer eucharistic gifts to a divided and suffering world.

Taking all of this to heart and appreciating the range of distinctive contexts and sensibilities in our various congregations, we wish to invite deeper participation in eucharistic fellowship. We imagine such participation to include a range of options that feels reasonably safe while also offered in recognizably familiar patterns of liturgical prayer.

¹ From "The General Thanksgiving" in *The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 101.

Individual Reflections of Committee Members

The Rev. Thomas Downs

We've all seen those pictures of a hungry person looking in a restaurant window, watching other people eat. For me, these last two years of online services have felt like that. In my parish, our in-person services are live-streamed over Facebook. The eucharist ends with prayers for spiritual reception, thanksgiving, and blessing. Then with the camera off and "no one looking in," we distribute the bread to the assembled congregation. It feels a little like the restaurant drawing a curtain between the folks inside being fed and the folks outside going hungry.

Then having communicated with the congregation, I pick up the chalice and the paten and go to the sacristy to reverently consume the untouched wine and the remaining bread. So a similar pattern is repeated. I do the ablutions alone, so no one can see me eat the "full meal." Theologically speaking, one receives the full benefit of the sacrament through spiritual communion or eating just the bread. What troubles my heart is that image of the hungry person looking in, who knows she can't fully participate and feels excluded. The common cup will return to our parish life and I believe online worship will continue, but my ongoing concern is with making both a means of genuine inclusion.

The Ven. Beth Drew

It's what we believe in, not simply what we do, that in the end becomes real, if not around us, at least in our own hearts. I am a person who intellectualizes everything—especially coming out of a tradition that required absolute obedience to what, as I grew up, seemed preposterous. The words I found in *The Anglican Vision* say it better than I possibly could. To partake, receive, and be made one body: this was eucharistic worship. I did indeed keep God and myself separate for many years. But the eucharist always pulled me on and made me realize that the real person I was and was struggling to become was the person who was in relationship with God...God and me; God and all other human beings like me; offering and being offered in Christ...this taught me to believe in the incarnation. By being called into relationship with the holy and eternal God, I have been shown belief in God is more important than believing certain propositions about God and more than I am able to imagine about God. I believe that in this current time, we have the opportunity to look at ways in which we can make all feel welcome and comfortable at the table. I believe God meets each of us in our own way, seeks each of us in God's way, and is real and present to us in the form we most identify with. We can keep continuity with the past, even while making changes in response to a situation that has at its fore, the safety and care of our beloved community.

Mrs. Jelecia Geraghty

Over the past two years, we have experienced an unimaginable amount of growth and change - learning how to livestream and doing church at home, not having physical communion and then

communion being different - a lot has changed. We have gained a number of new members, both in-person and online, many of whom have never experienced The Episcopal Church. The connections we have made with our brothers and sisters in Christ both in and out of our parishes are much more meaningful now. This is the perfect time for us to look at our practices and determine what is more important - the cup itself or the renewal of our souls from physically experiencing the Holy Spirit entering our bodies in communion with others.

Dr. Timothy Gombis

The current season has no precedent in living memory, and the uncertainties of our turbulent world seem to pile up at an alarming rate. In the midst of chaos, however, we are held by the meal—the Lord’s meal. Or, perhaps it’s the meal that is held, and to which we are always already invited. The meal that is held that holds us—the eucharist. It binds us to God and to one another, and it reminds us that we are held fast. It unites our discrete communities and the global body of Christ.

Each of us grieves what we’ve lost in the last two years. Among these, our embodied fellowship and the changes in eucharistic practice. These alterations are necessary so that we might care well for the vulnerable among us and do our part to prevent the spread of infection in our wider communities. We’re currently still enjoying the meal, though it feels more like a picnic than a great feast because of the suspension of the shared cup. We’ll need to be wise as we navigate this moment and what is to come, even as we look forward to the full enjoyment of the eucharist as we’ve known it. In the meantime, this is what we know: the meal is still being held, and the meal still holds us.

The Rev. Dr. Andy Guffey

Worshiping in exile. For much of the pandemic, especially in the early days, it felt to me that we were worshiping in exile, or in the wilderness. In 2020, the lectionary told the story of the wilderness wandering: full of longing for what was, hope for what might yet be, and ramshackle attempts to be attentive to the God who wanders with us in the wilderness. But the temple was silent, the city desolate. Finding God in the tabernacle meant letting go of, at least for a time, the God of the temple. It meant relinquishing the habit of the eucharistic rites, pondering what we must give up for a time, so that when we were able to break the fast we might have a renewed sense of how much we were prepared for the sacrament to mean.

So we wandered in longing, with parched tongues, and we languished in hope, on the border of despair. And God was with us, inviting us to find God anew in the cloud, in our prayer, in our accommodated habits, in our imagination of what we might yet become. And we gave thanks, together. We made eucharist, but with austerity, not as we had been accustomed. And we pleaded, How long? We protested, How can we sing the Lord’s song in this foreign land?

And I wondered, What will we know that we didn't know before? And what did God hope for? For what did God long? And I thought that maybe the old, good news was true—that it was us. Maybe God wanted us. Maybe Christ was being poured out anyway, for us, for all of us, even if we couldn't break the bread or pour the wine. And I thought, maybe if we could turn our mourning in exile to the God wandering with us, we might find the rock split open into a gushing spring; if we could accept the fast in the wilderness, we might find manna; if we could lift our hearts to the Lord and give thanks, we might arrive at the greater Feast.

The Rev. Dr. W. Richard Hamlin

The lockdown was, by far, the longest I have gone without being physically present for worship or physically receiving communion since I was confirmed over 60 years ago. I realized in a new way how central those experiences are to my life.

I was pleasantly amazed at how quickly people embraced the understandings of concomitance and spiritual communion. It was gratifying to hear from so many people that their online congregations included those who had never attended that church as well as some who had moved away. I am intrigued by the sense of community and shared experience among those who regularly watch/participate² in the same streaming services, particularly Dean Robert's (Canterbury Cathedral) Morning Prayer Garden Congregation.

I was surprised that I found spiritual communion so fulfilling. But, as nourishing and meaningful these streaming services were, there was still something lacking and, for me at least, a deep longing, which grew stronger as the lockdown lengthened, for being physically present with others to worship and to share the common cup.

The Rev. Dr. Jay Emerson Johnson

When I became an Episcopalian in college, I was delightfully surprised by the breadth of Anglican traditions. Just as there are four accounts of the Gospel in the Christian Testament of the Bible, so there are multiple eucharistic rites in The Book of Common Prayer, each with its own distinctive theological tone and tenor. This range of liturgical options invites an expansive embrace of eucharistic communion rather than trying to reduce these "holy mysteries" to a single point of view. The liturgical precautions and restrictions prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic have focused my attention on two of those eucharistic themes in particular. First, I have been more viscerally reminded that Jesus, at the final meal with his friends, offered himself to them, his own body and blood, in a bold gesture of intimacy. This has brought to mind the profound significance of a shared vulnerability in our eucharistic communities. And second, I have appreciated in some new ways how John's account of the Gospel frames the

² My personal sense, reinforced by the stumbling of others to find the right verb, is that "watching" is too passive, but that "participated" still seems like an overstatement even when one joins remotely in the responses of a live streamed service.

feeding of the 5,000 as a eucharistic story; in addition to risk and vulnerability, in other words, eucharist also promises divine abundance. In addition to reassuring our own congregations, these eucharistic insights would surely offer a compelling vision for the wider world around us.

Ms. Amy Simons

Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine: Glory to him from generation to generation in the Church, and in Christ Jesus forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:20-21)

I love this bit of scripture. I first bumped into it as an optional concluding statement in the service of Evening Prayer, and I frequently use it to close small group sessions of one sort or another. I love it because it beckons us to simultaneously employ both our intellect and our sense of wonder in the context of seeking God's wisdom. I think we can all agree that prayer and imagination have been necessary and useful gifts these last few years, particularly as the targets for safely caring for one another, worshiping, and teaching continue to move and the measure of our impact remains elusive. Yet, for me, God's "working in us" connects the "generation to generation in the Church," and, indeed, God's glory. God is committed to working in us despite how badly we are flawed and prone to distraction. In response to that, I feel a deep need to return to receiving Holy Communion in the fullest way I am able. This is where my relationship with God, and those around me, is strengthened. It is in this sacrament that I am reminded that God, knowing how humbling it would be, put on human flesh and came among us. In a time when being physically among one another is sometimes a problem, I find great comfort in knowing that it is also part of the solution.

The Rev. Dr. JoAnn Kennedy Slater

To enhance our understanding, I would ask us to notice that while wine is one of the two main elements of the Eucharist, bread is everywhere in the scriptures. Passover meals, "Bethlehem" meaning "house of bread", "turn these stones to bread", the Emmaus story where Jesus was recognized in the breaking of the bread, the phrase "The Bread of Life", and all the many feeding stories that had bread (I am certain altar guilds everywhere are happy not to deal with fish or livestock) ...so many bread references; and my personal favorite teaching on the eucharist is that Jesus invites everyone to the table.

While this report is to focus on the wine, let's not get lost in the weeds, or chaff (those bread/wheat images really are everywhere). I am hoping we can be vulnerable enough to listen to one another and recognize what other elements of the eucharist are being missed. I offer, that one element unspoken, and we still long for, is the feeling of peace, the sacred safety, in our common gathering. And that the absence of the common cup, the wine, is the last reminder of what we have been through and need to continue to move through together. If we focus on the "wine delivery systems" we will miss the greater opportunity that our bishops called us to,

which was to enhance our understanding of the eucharist, and all its elements in a world right now where so many people cannot gather around any table.

Medical Considerations for the Common Cup

Once again, healthcare concerns as they relate to liturgical practices have been brought to the fore by the reality of SARS CoV-2 (COVID -19) virus.³

Widespread concern regarding potential risk of transmission of communicable disease via the common cup dates back to the 19th century when the first scientific article appeared in the literature as early as 1894.⁴ Literature on this subject is limited to four experimental studies^{5 6 7} and one clinical survey.⁹ All four showed the presence of microorganisms on the rim of the chalice and in the wine and those organisms were viable for quite some time. The authors of these studies came to a common conclusion that the possibility of spread of an infection through this religious ritual does exist. It should be noted that all authors have focused their investigations on bacteria, and none has investigated the viability and transmissibility of viruses such as the common cold, influenza and herpes (cold sores) via the common communion cup. Despite the importance of this subject to public health, an extensive scientific review search revealed no study related to Holy Communion and possible severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) (the strain of coronavirus causing COVID-19) transmission. The common communion cup may theoretically serve as a vehicle of transmitting infection, but the potential risk of transmission is very small. There is no reported SARS-CoV-2 transmission case, either patient or asymptomatic carrier, at the time of this document from the practice of the common cup. That is not to say that it hasn't in reality occurred, it just has not been reported.

The past year's data has shown, vaccines more than anything else, do more to prevent disease spread and serious illness. The current vaccines are very effective in limiting severe illness for those who are fully vaccinated and boosted, but less so for limiting asymptomatic and milder illness. Unfortunately, no vaccine is 100% effective and evidence suggests that vaccine efficacy

³ This "Medical Considerations..." section draws from Spantideas N, Drosou E, Barsoum M, Bougea A. COVID-19 and Holy Communion. *Public Health*. 2020;187:134-135. doi:10.1016/j.puhe.2020.08.012

⁴ Anders HS. Prophylaxis in churches needed by the adoption of individual communion chalices or cups. *Proc Philadelphia County Med Soc* 1894;XV: 345e52.

⁵ Godfrey WH. Communion cup and bacteria. *J Am Med Assoc* 1939;112:2555.

⁶ Burrows W, Hemmens ES. Survival of bacteria on the silver communion cup. *J Infect Dis* 1943;73:180e90.

⁷ Gregory KF, Carpenter JA, Bending GC. Infection hazards of the common communion cup. *Canc Publ Health* 1967;58:305e10.

⁸ Hobbs B, Knowlden J, White A. Experiments on the communion cup. *J Hyg* 1967;65:37e48.

⁹ Loving A, Wolf L. The effects of receiving Holy Communion on health. *J Environ Health* 1997;60(1):6e10.

decreases with time. The majority of parish members' immune response is robust, however, the elderly, the very young, and those otherwise immunocompromised are at much greater risk of severe illness when partaking in the common cup even though the documented risk is low for the general population.

Potentially the greatest infection risk to parish members is the most insidious. Most viral infections have an incubation period after acquiring the virus and before they feel symptoms. They simply do not feel ill and they shed infectious material days before symptoms of the illness appear and thus take the cup unaware. Any individual experiencing respiratory infections, such as the common cold, influenza and COVID-19, as well as those with obvious lip or mouth lesions, such as a herpes sore on the lip, should avoid receiving the common cup, thus minimizing the unproven, but theoretical risk of contaminating the rim of the chalice and passing on their infection to healthy people.¹⁰

Current literature has proven that thorough hand washing has been shown to kill COVID-19. All liturgical ministers (and other worshippers) should thoroughly wash with soap and water before services. Hand sanitizer with an alcohol content of 60% has also been shown to be effective against COVID-19.¹¹

Recent studies corroborated that COVID-19 is transmitted primarily between people through respiratory droplets and contact routes.¹² It has long been known that ventilation is essential to avoid airborne infections. However, it must involve intake of uncontaminated air from the outside.¹³ With the recent decisions to end mask mandates, proper precautions for cross ventilation should be entertained.

From a science perspective, returning to the common cup should be accompanied by continued prudent safety guidelines and appropriate safeguards. Lifting restrictions while taking specific measures to protect the vulnerable can maximize public health. Vaccinations, ventilation, and vigorous hand hygiene are key.

¹⁰ Chin Elizabeth T., Leidner David, Zhang Yifan, Long Elizabeth, Prince Lea, Li Ying, Andrews Jason R., Studdert David M., Goldhaber-Fiebert Jeremy D., Salomon Joshua A.. (2021) Effectiveness of the mRNA-1273 Vaccine during a SARS-CoV-2 Delta Outbreak in a Prison. *N Engl J Med* 385:24, 2300-2301.

¹¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Show me the science—how to wash your hands. 2020. <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/show-me-the-science-handwashing.html>

¹² (Burke, 2020; CDC, 2020a; Chan et al., 2020; Huang et al., 2020; Li et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2020b; WHO, 2020b).

¹³ [Association of the infection probability of COVID-19 with ventilation rates in confined spaces](#). Dai H, Zhao B *Build Simul.* 2020; 13(6):1321-1327.

Policy Recommendation for Common Cup

It is the custom of the Episcopal Church and Anglican liturgical tradition to honor the lay order of ministry in the distribution of Holy Communion in two kinds and to uphold the symbolic action of partaking of one bread and one cup in Holy Eucharist, as a mark of the unity of Christ's body the church. While the suspension of the chalice and the distribution in one kind have been expedient and pastorally faithful measures for the good of God's people, the task force is aware that many of the faithful long for the return of the eucharistic cup, even as some remain hesitant to receive the chalice. The task force believes this longing to be an opportunity for reflection on the part of individual congregations and communities of faith regarding the meaning of the eucharist for God's people, in particular, for exploring what ways the eucharistic cup may be found to be to us the "cup of blessing" (1 Corinthians 10:16).

Based on our understanding of Anglican tradition, the scientific studies and knowledge available, and our attention to the desires of our several communities, we commend an approach to Holy Communion that allows for the return of the common cup, but with efforts to make the sacrament available in two kinds by alternative means as well ("**common cup, with options**"). We are not in a position to prescribe precisely the means of distributing the blood of Christ; our recommendation, however, is that the means employed adhere to three guiding principles: whatever means employed for the regular distribution of the eucharist should be reasonable, recognizable, and reverent.

It is possible to become too precious in our eagerness to offer the chalice to communicants. Abstaining from the chalice and the common cup remains a reasonable option. While communion in one kind is not envisioned as the ideal or common reception of the sacrament, it has long been a recognizable option for recovering alcoholics or others who, for whatever reason, have an aversion to receiving the eucharistic wine or to partaking of a common cup. Moreover, abstaining from the chalice may be done with deep reverence for the gift offered therein.

Extravagant measures, such as glazing the wafer with wine by means of an infuser or baking the eucharistic bread in small cup-shaped vessels, may be fitting for some communities, but they are perhaps not the most reasonable or recognizable options available. Individual cups may be reasonable and recognizable, but if the cups in question are coffee mugs or other vessels supplied by communicants, they may not reflect the reverence due to the sacrament.

While no set of practices can take account of every possible community and its context, the task force has identified the following specific measures, which we believe to be reasonable, recognizable, and reverent means of distributing the eucharistic cup:

1. Using a common chalice, when properly wiped with a clean purificator between each communicant, while potentially posing some risks, may be permitted. Celebrants and eucharistic ministers should wash their hands before the distribution of the sacrament (instead of a symbolic lavabo, an ewer of water, basin, and soap may provide the opportunity to prepare for the distribution of the sacrament). In addition, we strongly advise congregations to review with their clergy, eucharistic ministers, and eucharistic visitors good and proper technique in the thorough and vigorous wiping of the chalice rim inside and outside with a clean purificator between communicants. The friction between the clean cloth and the chalice is essential in mitigating the risk of infection from partaking of the common cup.
2. Intinction by the celebrant or eucharistic minister who has washed their hands appropriately, placed into the hand of the communicant, may be permitted. Intinction by the communicant should not be allowed. Intinction by communicants has been shown to increase health risks, since the fingers of many enter the chalice, brush the chalice, or even dip into the wine. If the celebrant or eucharistic minister washes their hands thoroughly before distributing and only their fingers enter the chalice, the risk is mitigated significantly. Similarly, placing the sacrament on the tongue of the communicant puts the fingers of the celebrant or eucharistic minister in close proximity to the exhalation of each communicant, or even on occasion into contact with the communicant's tongue. If intinction is preferred, we, therefore, recommend placing the intincted sacrament into the hand of the communicant.
3. **Individual cups filled from a common flagon, when handled reverently and emptied and cleaned properly, may be permitted.** In keeping with the rubrics in the Additional Directions for Holy Communion (BCP, pp. 406-407), it is appropriate that there be one chalice only on the altar during the consecration, with a flagon for filling further vessels. We suggest that it is further appropriate that the individual cups be seen to be filled from the flagon at the altar, rather than pre-filled or pre-packaged, to honor the symbolism of the common cup. Care should be taken in choosing what sort of individual cups are to be filled and how they are to be handled before, during, and after the communicant has received, properly honoring the blessing they hold and disposing of the traces that remain in a dignified and sanitary manner.
4. Through the use of eucharistic ministers and visitors. Please see discussion beginning on page 14.

These are our recommendations for the regular distribution of the eucharistic cup, any and each of which presents its own practical challenges. Deciding how to reintroduce the distribution of Holy Communion in two kinds ought to be part of each community's conversations and discernment about the ways the Holy Spirit may be speaking to us regarding Holy Eucharist in these times. It may very well be the case that some communities will decide to return to the common chalice, with provision made for those who wish to receive but remain uncomfortable with the common cup. It may be that an individual community will choose to continue to

abstain from the chalice until more of their community feels safe in doing so. These are questions that ought to be prayed over and explored together, as we discern the body of Christ among us.

We have learned much from the COVID-19 pandemic concerning public health, keeping each other safe, and loving our neighbors as ourselves. The lessons we continue to learn will surely extend beyond our concerns with the current pandemic and will shape our theological reflection and pastoral ministries on a whole range of topics that we cannot fully anticipate at present. In this era of severe fragmentation and social divisions, we likewise embrace the enduring importance of the common cup as a means to signify our unity with each other in Christ. Regardless of which practices a congregation may adopt, it is important to remember that individual communicants must feel free to participate in whatever way they feel is safe.

For Further Reflection

The COVID-19 pandemic introduced a global disruption of social life. Once the pandemic has subsided some aspects of our lives will return to their previous shape, but other aspects of our lives together will be forever changed. This is no less true of the church and the engagement of our several communities. Many congregations will continue to offer some sort of online opportunities (live-streamed services, Zoom groups, etc.). Increasingly, we find we will be fostering not only a physically-gathered community but also with a remote and/or digital community. Further reflection is needed regarding both the gifts and the challenges of this new situation, especially as it regards the regular participation in—the celebration and reception of—Holy Eucharist.

At the end of March 2020, the Most Rev. Michael Curry, presiding bishop and primate of The Episcopal Church, [issued guidance](#) regarding the eucharist, specifically referencing “drive-up” communion and implicitly addressing “remote consecration.” Presiding Bishop Curry advised: “Sacraments are communal actions that depend on ‘stuff’: bread and wine, water and oil. They depend on gathering and giving thanks, on proclaiming and receiving the stories of salvation, on bathing in water, on eating and drinking together. These are physical and social realities that are not duplicatable in the virtual world.” He also lauded the Daily Office as a particularly fitting instrument of corporate worship with a digital community: “in making greater use of the Office there may be an opportunity to recover aspects of our tradition that point to the sacramentality of the scriptures, the efficacy of prayer itself, the holiness of the household as the ‘domestic church,’ and the reassurance that the baptized are already and forever marked as Christ’s own.” The Presiding Bishop’s guidance affirms that the material elements are not incidental to the celebration of the eucharist. Moreover, physical proximity and embodied participation in the eucharist is crucial. For these reasons, the Presiding Bishop’s guidance makes the practice of remote consecration seem unrecognizable in the Anglican tradition. Moreover, the pandemic has urged us to reflect on the centrality of the eucharist in our communities, without forgetting

that the eucharist properly comes into relief as the principal act of Christian worship when it takes its place within the whole system, rhythm, and syllabus of prayer into which The Book of Common Prayer invites us. All Christian worship is infused by the grace of the eucharist, we might say, but the eucharist is not all of Christian worship.

Two years after Presiding Bishop Curry's timely remarks we are entering a situation in which we might re-examine, without the immediate pressure of pastoral necessity, many of the assumptions around our theology and practice of the eucharist. This opportunity for reflection ought to be embraced. As Presiding Bishop Curry and others have noted, former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams proposed in his essay, "Is here a Christian Sexual Ethic?" that the fundamental question when approaching the question of marriage rites is not "Is this permissible or not," but rather, "How much are we prepared for this or that liturgical action to mean?" The same may easily be said of our reflections on the eucharist.

The reflections and questions below are offered to open up just such conversations. Among the resources available to reflect on what we might yet learn from our experience of the eucharist over the course of the pandemic we especially commend the recently published book, [*Holy Communion in Contagious Times*](#), by the English biblical scholar and theologian Richard Burridge. Burridge's book has drawn both admiration and criticism, especially with respect to his conclusions.¹⁴ The value of the book is not that one should agree with its conclusions, but rather that it raises important questions that deserve fresh attention in light of the disruption of these times. Burridge's book presses on us the question of how much we are prepared for the Eucharist to mean. Among the topics Burridge explores are the following:

- Fasting from the eucharist
- Spiritual communion
- Solitary or "solo" communion
- Simultaneous (Con)celebration and the role of the people
- Lay presidency and the priesthood
- Drive-in church/drive-thru communion
- Further extended communion

Burridge also touches on thorny questions of theological anthropology and embodiment in the digital world. Many of the pressing questions for what the church will look like in the decades to come are raised throughout.

¹⁴ See, for instance, the [UK and US book launches](#), which included important and thoughtful responses.

Some of these questions were considered by this group, insofar as possible in the brief time we were convened:

- **Eucharistic visitors/extended communion:** While not a part of our charge, our discussions raised a pastoral concern for the distribution of Communion to those members of our digital congregations who cannot physically attend live services or who are reluctant to do so because of health considerations. Serving those in our local area may require an increased number of eucharistic visitors but how do we serve those who are geographically remote? There would seem to be two precedents for this kind of ministry. One analogy we discussed was when priests do marriage preparation for a couple who live in their area but are being married elsewhere. There is also the experience that many of us have had of a request being made for a hospital visitation by a local congregation to a member of a geographically remote congregation. The difference is that, generally, these are one-time or short-term provisions of pastoral care, whereas, providing home communion may be an ongoing need. We raised the question and possibility that this may be a new diaconal ministry: doing home communions for those who live locally but are part of a distant digital congregation.
- **Remote consecration:** Some ecclesial communities have opted to have the celebrant “remotely consecrate” the elements of eucharist via a digital medium. Participants prepare their own bread and wine at home and the celebrant presumably consecrates them over live-stream or Zoom. This group generally felt that this is not a recognizable practice in our tradition, as the Presiding Bishop’s guidance also suggests. The rubrics for the eucharistic rite, for instance, presume the ability of the celebrant to hold or lay a hand upon the elements or vessels (BCP, pp. 334, 342, 362, 368, 371, and 374), which is, arguably, not possible in a digital medium.
- **Spiritual Communion:** Related to remote consecration is the question of spiritual communion, in which some participants “receive” the grace of the sacrament without receiving the physical elements. This practice partially entails fasting from the eucharist and suggests that the *virtus* (the power or effect) of the eucharist is not necessarily tied to the reception of the physical elements (and thus related to what is known as “virtualism” in eucharistic theology). Clearly, this practice is a response to a pastoral need, finding a place in Anglican resources such as the [Saint Augustine’s Prayer Book](#) and the [Prayer Book for the Armed Services](#). It has certainly been employed in the current times as an irregular means of receiving the eucharist, and it is endorsed by the rubric in the Ministration to the Sick (BCP, p. 457): “If a person desires to receive the Sacrament, but, by reason of extreme sickness or physical disability, is unable to eat and drink the Bread and Wine, the Celebrant is to assure that person that all the benefits of Communion are received, even though the Sacrament is not received with the mouth.”

Reflection Questions

1. What are your favorite rituals, patterns, and habits that give you peace, when you arrive at church for the eucharist? A certain pew? Quiet time of prayer? A group of friends? Organ prelude? Are you a lector? Altar guild member? Usher?
2. Episcopalians have much humor around our custom of coffee hour. How does that table gathering add to your experience of the eucharist?
3. Is the eucharist for you more of a personal piety or community energy and witness, or a combination?
4. What are the different ways in which you have received communion (In The Episcopal Church and/or other traditions)? What have those experiences meant to you?
5. What sacraments of the church have been most meaningful for you? Why? How have they been a means of grace for you?
6. What do you see as your primary emphasis in your congregation's worship?
7. For you, what are the similarities and differences in attending a service in person, watching and participating in a live-streamed service, and watching a pre-recorded service?
8. Do any of the individual reflections (page 11) by committee members resonate with your feelings and experiences? In what ways?

Appendix

The Historical Context: Traditions, Canons, and Rubrics

As we make decisions about how to respond to the current concerns about COVID-19, it is helpful to have an understanding of the history and traditions, canons, and rubrics regarding the common Cup and reception in both kinds.

The following article from the Anglican Church of Canada provides a helpful overview of that history.

[Eucharist in Two Kinds and The Common Cup](#)

History and Theology

In the early church, communicants normally received both bread and wine. The manner in which these were received, however, changed gradually over the centuries. "In the patristic period, the communicants received in their hands (see Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogic Catecheses* 5:21-2). By the end of the sixth-century women had come to be forbidden to receive the bread on the naked hand, and in the West worries about possible superstitious misuse of the sacrament and growing respect for the eucharist led from around the ninth century to the practice of placing the host directly into the mouth. This manner of distributing the sacrament removed anxiety that small particles might be dropped, and any scruples about the need to purify the communicants' fingers after communion, as had become the custom for the priest (see *Ablutions*). The giving of the chalice lasted longer than receiving the eucharistic bread into the hands. In the seventh century communion by intinction, that is, the dipping of the bread into the consecrated wine (*intinctio panis*) gained popularity. Forbidden in the West by the Third Council of Braga (675), it regained popularity in the eleventh century, only to be forbidden again in the thirteenth. By this time the reception of wine at communion by the laity had almost universally disappeared in the West, allegedly for fear of spillage. The development in eucharistic teaching that the entire Christ was present under either species (*concomitance*) was decisive in bringing it to an end. While the Council of Trent reaffirmed this doctrine and restricted the chalice to the officiating priest, the Reformers maintained that communion under one form alone was contrary to the scriptural norm and the chalice was restored to the laity from the sixteenth century in the churches of the Reformation."¹⁵

¹⁵ Article 30 of the 39 Articles is entitled "Of both kinds" and states: "The Cup of the Lord is not to be denied to the Lay-people: for both the parts of the Lord's Sacrament, by Christ's ordinance and commandment, ought to be ministered to all Christian men alike". Common Cup

John Baycroft, retired Anglican Bishop of Ottawa, has written very powerfully about the Eucharist in general and the symbolism of the Common cup in particular in his small booklet *The Eucharistic Way*. In the section on "Bread and Wine" he says: "The cup is also important. Jesus took one cup and gave it to all of his disciples to drink. Perhaps it was the cup of Elijah from the Passover ritual as some people say, but it was certainly a single cup. He did not merely pour wine into the disciples' individual cups and tell them to take a drink. There is a powerful challenge in this one. We are reminded of the agonizing decision that faced Jesus when he was praying before the crucifixion: 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt. (Matthew 26:39). We are also reminded by the one cup that we cannot drink it alone. We drink from a common cup as a strong symbol of unity and our willingness to accept each other. We share our love and lives as we share the cup. The implications for this for fellowship and support in the local church, for relationships between rich and poor in communities and nations, and for justice between North and South and the first world and world countries are enormous. The cup of love and unity is unavoidably a cup of sacrifice".¹⁶

As the article implies, in the Eastern Church, the tradition of offering both bread and wine to the laity has continued unbroken, though the manner of that administration has become mixing the bread into the wine and administering with a spoon.

There are several passages in Episcopal Church canons and *The Book of Common Prayer* (1979) rubrics that speak to these practices.

Canon III.9.6(a)(1) says

The Rector or Priest-in-Charge shall have full authority and responsibility for the conduct of the worship and spiritual jurisdiction of the Parish, subject to the Rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer, the Constitution, and Canons of this Church, and the pastoral direction of the bishop.

This seems to place the pastoral direction of a bishop on an equal plane with the canons and rubrics. It also indicates that parish clergy do not have the authority to ignore the canons or rubrics unless they are given a pastoral directive by the bishop to do so.

The rubrics of *The Book of Common Prayer* state (pp. 338, 365) The ministers receive the Sacrament in both kinds, and then immediately deliver it to the people. [The directions in *An Order for Celebrating the Holy Eucharist*, p. 401, says "The Body and Blood of the Lord are shared in a reverent manner;"] This is reinforced in the rubrics gathered under the title of *Additional Directions*, pp 407–8: "Opportunity is always to be given to every communicant to

¹⁶ *The Eucharistic Way* John Bancroft. Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1981. pp.33-34.

receive the consecrated Bread and Wine separately. But the Sacrament may be received in both kinds simultaneously, in a manner approved by the bishop."¹⁷

Additional Directions also contain the following (p.407): "During the Great Thanksgiving, it is appropriate that there be only one chalice on the Altar, and, if need be, a flagon of wine from which additional chalices may be filled after the Breaking of the Bread."

"Opportunity" (in the rubric cited in the penultimate paragraph) is important and reflects, at least in part, the Church's understanding that receiving the sacrament in either kind is full reception. Sometimes this is because of medical considerations: gluten intolerance, those in alcohol recovery, those with restrictions because of imminent surgery, etc. At least since the AIDS crisis of the 1980's it has also been understood that people who are immuno-compromised may be advised to avoid the common cup. The doctrine of concomitance is strongly implied in the rubric on p. 457: *If the sick person cannot receive either the consecrated Bread or the Wine, it is suitable to administer the Sacrament in one kind only.*

Another rubric in the Ministry to the Sick (p. 457) states: If a person desires to receive the Sacrament, but by reason of extreme sickness or physical disability, is unable to eat and drink the Bread and Wine, the Celebrant is to assure the person that all the benefits of Communion are received, even though the Sacrament is not received with the mouth. This is a statement of the efficacy of Spiritual Communion. Although sickness or physical disability may not have been a literal reality, many Episcopalians and others invoked this doctrine for those prohibited from entering churches because of the lock-down but did watch broadcasts of the eucharist. Many of the broadcasts included a prayer for spiritual communion.

In addition, there are two Anglican documents that have something to say about these issues. Findings of the Fifth International Anglican Liturgical Consultation, Dublin, Eire, 1995; Group Statements; I Eucharistic Theology, A. Doctrine of the Trinity; states:

4. To participate in the Eucharist is incarnational. It involves a bodily response, both corporately and individually. It is with our hands and mouths that we take, eat and drink the sacramental signs of the body and blood of Christ. The eucharistic bread and wine are offered to us to be eaten and drunk so that Christ may dwell in us. When Christ 'shares his bread with sinners' we praise God for the fuller revelation each new participation brings us. Our devotion and love thus engendered and nourished are evidence of the Spirit's joyful moving in us.

¹⁷ This is reinforced in the Catechism (p.859) when it says "The outward and visible sign in the Eucharist is bread **and** [emphasis added] wine, given and received according to Christ's command.

The third article of Resolution 11 of the Lambeth Conference of 1888, setting forth the bases for what we now call full communion, says (BCP, p 878).:

(c) The two Sacraments ordained by Christ Himself—Baptism and the Supper of the Lord—ministered with un failing use of Christ’s words of Institution, and the elements ordained by Him.

The elements of the eucharist have always been understood to be bread and wine. In typically Anglican fashion, we have relied on a common-sense understanding of bread¹⁸ and wine.

There is a certain tension inherent in some of these traditions and understandings when we juxtapose them with each other. The question for us is how to be faithful to the spirit of these traditions in the current context.

Theses Regarding the Common Cup

1. The Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church. Both the Constitution and Canons point to the Rubrics of The Book of Common Prayer as the authoritative constraint to Episcopal Faith and Order. Even the acknowledged freedom of Bishops to develop special forms of service is qualified by the permission of the Rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer (Constitution Art. X).
2. The Rites and Rubrics of The Book of Common Prayer presume, prescribe, propose, and permit certain actions and customs regarding the celebration of the eucharist.
3. The Rites and Rubrics of The Book of Common Prayer presume that the celebration of Holy Communion (Holy Eucharist, the Lord’s Supper, etc.) will be the principal service of a Sunday and other Holy Days (BCP 13).
4. The Book of Common Prayer presumes what we may call an ordinary or regular celebration of the Holy Eucharist and Holy Communion under “special circumstances” or an irregular celebration of the Holy Eucharist.
5. Regarding the ordinary celebration of the eucharist, the Rites and Rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer presume that Holy Communion will be offered and received in two kinds. Both elements are to be consecrated on the altar, and the words of institution for both elements are present in all the Eucharistic Prayers. Indeed, the rubrics on pages 338 and 365 seem to prescribe the offering of the eucharist in both kinds: “The ministers receive the Sacrament in both kinds, and then immediately deliver it to the

¹⁸ One of the contributing factors to the Great Schism between Eastern and Western Christianity was the Eastern insistence that eucharistic bread must be leavened and the Western insistence that eucharistic bread must be unleavened. Those positions still hold and, more recently, the Roman Catholic Church has insisted that the unleavened bread must contain at least a trace of gluten in order to be used in the eucharist.

people. The Bread and the Cup are given to the communicants with these words....” The Additional Directions also stipulate, either by presumption of prescription, the celebrant receiving the sacrament in both kinds, with those at the Holy Table likewise communicating, and then the people. In the next direction, it is presumed that the bread and the wine will be received, albeit separately, unless both kinds are to be received simultaneously, in a manner approved by the bishop (BCP 407). These rubrics all presume, if they do not prescribe, the eucharist to be celebrated, offered, and received in both kinds.

6. The rubrics for the administration of the sacrament in both kinds and to give the bread and the cup to the communicants is certainly not permissive—the rubrics do not stipulate that the eucharist *may be* offered in both kinds—though they may fall short of actual prescription. The celebration, distribution, and reception of the eucharist in both kinds is presumed by the historic Faith and Order set forth in The Book of Common Prayer. The Articles of Religion, for instance, are included in the Historical Documents of the Church (BCP 867-876). While these articles, as historical documents, are not taken as canonically or customarily binding, Articles XXVIII and XXX bolster the presumption that the Supper of the Lord is a real partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ and that “the Cup of the Lord is not to be denied to the Lay-people” but rather that the sacrament is to be offered in both kinds. Likewise, in the Outline of the Faith, we read that the “outward and visible sign in the Eucharist is bread and wine, given and received according to Christ’s command” (BCP 859). That is to say, both bread and wine, or communion in both kinds, is presumed.
7. The Additional Direction also directs that both bread and a cup of wine are to be on the table during the celebration of the Eucharist (BCP 407). They then propose that “it is appropriate that there be only one chalice on the Altar, and, if need be, a flagon of wine from which additional chalices may be filled after the Breaking of the Bread.” Oddly, no instructions are given regarding the quantity of bread or the number of patens or ciboria. The instructions regarding a single chalice on the altar suggest a preference for the symbolism of the common cup. That the single chalice on the altar during the Great Thanksgiving is symbolic and not meant to be the only or principal manner of distribution is apparent from the flagon of wine that is permitted for the filling of further chalices. Even so, the flagon is permitted “if need be,” strongly implying a preference for a common cup also for distribution of the eucharistic wine.
8. It follows, then, that the common cup is to be preferred, while the offering of the eucharistic wine is permitted from more than one cup. The number and size of the further eucharistic cups is not specified. The use of individual cups, then, is arguably permitted under the Rubrics of The Book of Common Prayer, provided the cups are filled from the chalice or from the flagon permitted in the Additional Directions. (Right reverence of the sacrament would suggest that such cups ought to be made of glass or metal so that the remaining wine may be appropriately disposed of (e.g. rinsed out in a piscina).

9. The distribution of Holy Communion to those unable to be present is provided for in the Canons of the Episcopal Church (III.4.7 ["Eucharistic Visitors"]), and it is the reason for the Rite "Communion Under Special Circumstances": "This form is intended for use with those who for a reasonable cause cannot be present at a public celebration of the eucharist" (BCP 396). The rite is one of pastoral exigency, which presumes an ordinary celebration of the eucharist in public.
10. Although the offering of the sacrament in both kinds is presumed, and the reception is both kinds is anticipated, the rubric for Holy Communion in Ministration to the Sick allows for communion in one kind: "If the sick person cannot receive either the consecrated Bread or the Wine, it is suitable to administer the Sacrament in one kind only" (BCP, p. 457).
11. Spiritual communion ought to be considered a special case of Communion Under Special Circumstances, for those who long for the benefits of the eucharist but, for a reasonable cause, are unable to ingest the physical elements or are unreachable by a deacon, priest, or eucharistic visitor. So also the rubric in Ministration to the Sick (BCP, p. 457) prescribes: "If a person desires to receive the Sacrament, but, by reason of extreme sickness or physical disability, is unable to eat and drink the Bread and Wine, the Celebrant is to assure that person that all the benefits of Communion are received, even though the Sacrament is not received with the mouth."

Another document that is useful to help guide reflection is the document "[Renewing the Anglican Eucharist](#)" from the fifth International Anglican Liturgical Commission (Dublin, 1995).