

The Diocese of Niagara
Guidelines for the Administration of Communion from the Reserved Sacrament
May 10, 2016

Communion from the Reserved Sacrament: By whom and under which circumstances

The practice of 'taking' consecrated sacrament to others is a practice as old as the Church itself. [An appendix with some history of the administration of reserved sacrament is attached (courtesy of the Rev'd Dr. Eric Griffin).] It is an appropriate, sound and caring extension of the ministry of the gathered community to those who, for various reasons, may not be able to gather with the community for its principal celebration of the Eucharist.

The taking of reserved sacrament to the sick and others is often a role carried out by Deacons, but can be equally properly handled by duly prepared and supported Lay-persons as well. In all cases, preparation and sensitivity are paramount. Some of that sensitivity is needed to be true to Anglican sacramental traditions, norms and practices.

The celebration of the Eucharist **is** an act of the gathered community. Yet, care must be taken to avoid any ambiguity which would suggest that, simply because a community is gathered, unauthorized persons, (i.e. – anyone other than a Priest) would preside at the consecration of bread and wine. The guidelines and suggested practices herein are designed to support, in careful and proper ways, the distribution of Eucharistic elements to the faithful, but must be clearly seen as not implying an extension of priestly ministry to Deacons or to the Laity. The inherited discipline and history of the Church is quite clear. As much as we presently value the regular celebration of the Eucharist, there is no justification for inconsistent or careless 'bending' of the rules of practice which we have considered normative for centuries.

The Bishop is, therefore, quite concerned that anything resembling a 'Deacons' Mass' **not** take place in Niagara. When a Deacon or Lay-person is officiating in a parish on Sunday morning (or other principal worship service of a parish or mission) communion from reserved sacrament should **not** be taking place. Communion from reserve is intended **only** for sick, shut-ins, those unable to be present at the Sunday Eucharistic celebration, and in institutions such as nursing homes, prisons, etc. While it may be seen as unfortunate that a full celebration of the Eucharist does not take place more frequently in such institutions, because a Priest is not available, care needs to be taken to ensure that only reserved sacrament is present, if the sacrament is to be there, and that only those properly prepared and authorized by the Rector to do so will administer same.

The Bishop of Niagara has also decided to authorize the administration of communion from reserved sacrament at mid-week services in parishes in the Diocese, provided that it only take place when specifically authorized by the Bishop's office, and only by Deacons and Lay-persons appropriately prepared for this ministry. Permission for exercising this practice in a parish should be sought from the Bishop's office, detailing the proposed pattern or frequency for such services and should include assurances that the officiants will have been duly prepared and supported for this significant ministry.

Order of service

The introduction and rubrics for 'Communion Under Special Circumstances' (BAS p. 256 ff) provide sound and practical advice on the issues involved taking the reserved sacrament to the sick the housebound, those in nursing homes and seniors' residences, and also to those unable to be present for the community celebration.

While a Sunday morning service in a parish church might also include the readings of the day and a homily, prayers of the faithful, etc., the texts directly connected to *communion* are very well presented in the above noted resource.

Contrary to what seems to have been happening from time to time, this service should in no way, bear signs of a *celebration* – i.e. – no *Sursum corda*, no *Sanctus* or *Benedictus*, and, particularly, no Eucharistic prayer with only the words of institution excised. If one needs a more complete ‘service’, as is often the case in nursing homes or other institutions, particularly if a group of worshippers is present as a ‘congregation’, then the Service of the Word (readings, affirmation of faith, intercessory prayers, confession) provides a more appropriate choice than a truncated form of the Eucharistic celebration.

Using the BAS (p. 256) form as a guide, therefore, the communion from reserved could simply be:

Greeting (p. 256)

A short reading of scripture (selection provided p. 256-257)

A confession (suggested; not mandatory)

The Lord’s Prayer

The Invitation (p. 260)

Communion

Doxology and Dismissal.

It should always be made clear to participants by the person officiating that communion is being administered from reserved sacrament. The BAS service for *Ministry to the Sick (page 556)* provides an excellent resource for making this declaration. It could be used immediately prior to the Lord’s Prayer or to the Invitation from page 260.

The Church of Christ, of which we are members, has taken this bread and wine and given thanks according to the Lord’s command. We now share in the communion of his body and blood.

Alternately, the Service of the Word (contained in the *Supplementary to the BAS, 2001*) could be used with the Sunday readings.

Commissioning

The consecrated elements which one distributes at such times should be from the reserved sacrament, reverently set aside in the parish. Ideally, if there is a consistent and organized programme in the parish for communicating the sick and those unable to be at the celebration, consideration should be given to a form of commissioning or sending which could take place each Sunday, at the conclusion of the liturgy, at which those who will be taking the sacrament (Deacons or Laity) are given the bread and the wine to take, and are prayed for by the gathered community, which also offers prayers for those who will receive the sacrament.

A model (taken from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*) suitable for local adaptation) for commissioning:

Gracious God, loving all your family with a mother’s tender care:

As you sent the angel to feed Elijah with heavenly bread, assist those who

set forth to share your word and sacrament with those who are sick,

homebound, and imprisoned. In your love and care, nourish and strengthen those who will

receive this sacrament, and give us all the comfort of your abiding presence

through the body and blood of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. AMEN.

If more information is needed please contact the Diocesan Liturgical Officer, The Very Rev. Peter Wall.

Appendix: Concerning the Administration of the Reserved Sacrament

The Rev'd Dr. Eric Griffin December 2015

Since its very beginning, Christianity has had the sharing of a sacred meal of bread and wine as its principal act of worship. The Ancient Church often called it the “agapé” or “love feast”; and it has been known variously as the “Lord’s Supper”; the “Divine Liturgy”; “Mass”; “Holy Eucharist” and “Holy Communion.” We know that since at least the second century C.E. Christians have kept, or “reserved” some of the blessed bread and wine for distribution to remote congregations not having the resources to provide the Eucharist for themselves, and also to the sick so that they too might be included in the worship of the whole congregation. The Eucharist is at its heart a shared meal, and it has always been the Anglican way that holy communion may not be received by one’s self alone. Each person should feel welcome and included in the worship of the whole congregation. [It is important, therefore, that when the Reserved Sacrament is brought to an individual, the one bringing must each time also receive.]

The First Book of Common Prayer of the Anglican Church (1549) made allowance for the reservation of the bread and wine for the sick, but it was later forbidden by the rubrics of the Second Book (1552). [The reasons for the prohibition in the 1552 and subsequent Books of Common Prayer are now obsolete. There was concern at the time for possible “superstitious” misuse and misunderstanding of the reserved sacrament.] Reservation did not become commonplace among Anglicans again until the 20th century. The intention of reserving the sacrament is to facilitate and enhance sacramental worship in the parish.

In the Diocese of Niagara, the distribution of the reserved sacrament to those in hospital, or shut in or living in retirement and nursing homes has become commonplace. Simply because a person cannot physically attend the principal services of worship is no reason for them to be excluded from communion. A full celebration, however, of the holy communion liturgy may not always be appropriate, especially when brought privately to an individual. Deacons, and more recently Lay Administrators of the sacrament, have been authorized to distribute communion from the Reserve.

In order that it be made clear that the communicants are being included in the worship of the Sunday congregation, care must be taken to avoid any implication of a new or supplementary re-consecration of the elements of the bread and wine.

The Book of Alternative Services has included some direction for the administration of communion from the reserve for the sick, and a service for “Communion under Special Circumstances.” Nevertheless for consistency of practice and the avoidance of misunderstanding, the attached Guidelines have been developed for us in Niagara.