

THE DIOCESE OF EXETER

Services of Public Worship with Communion by Extension

Guidelines for Clergy, Readers and PCCs

Background

'Communion by Extension' is a provision whereby, in the absence of a priest to preside at the Eucharist, a congregation may nevertheless be nourished with the consecrated bread and wine of Holy Communion. It is an exceptional provision for which the Diocesan Bishop's explicit permission is required.

It is a separate provision from taking communion to the sick or housebound in their homes from the reserved sacrament (which any Reader may do without further licensing, and for which other lay people, may be authorised by the suffragan bishops).

The House of Bishops' guidelines also make clear that 'Communion by Extension' should not be regarded as a means of introducing a sacramental element into the life of home groups, or other parish groups, whether on an occasional or regular basis. The House of Bishops recognises the value of an occasional celebration of Holy Communion in such circumstances, when a priest must preside.

The General Synod first discussed provision for Communion by Extension in 1993. The final report was approved in 1999. In 2001 an order of service was published entitled 'Public Worship with Communion by Extension'. The term 'Holy Communion' is deliberately not used to make clear that this service is not a celebration of Holy Communion.

Where Communion by Extension is used in the Diocese of Exeter, it should always be advertised as 'Public Worship with Communion by Extension.'

Guidelines

Communion by Extension allows for bread and wine, consecrated at a Sunday service in one church to be taken that same day to another church (usually in the same benefice), where an authorised service called 'Public Worship with Communion by Extension' is celebrated, led by a person authorised by the Diocesan Bishop during which the consecrated elements are shared.

The guidelines for this provision, together with the forms of service to be used, are clearly set out in 'Public Worship with Communion by Extension', Church House Publishing 2001. Any parish wishing to make use of the provision needs to have studied this booklet. It can also be found on the Church of England website.

Authorisation for the use of Communion by Extension is dependent on prior teaching, training and preparation in the parish. It is not therefore designed to meet a short term emergency. It may be used in a benefice through a transitional period, for instance a vacancy or a period that will come to an end with the ordination to the priesthood of a deacon or someone now in training for ordination or during pastoral reorganisation. It could be used during clergy holidays, providing the teaching, training and preparation has been put in place.

It is important that Communion by Extension never becomes the normal setting in which people receive the consecrated elements. Therefore, in a multi parish benefice, for example, the use of Communion by Extension must be fairly rotated so that no single congregation is deprived of a regular service of Holy Communion.

Procedure

The procedure to be followed in introducing Communion by Extension is as follows:

1. The Diocesan Bishop's permission for its introduction is sought by the Incumbent who will outline the particular pastoral circumstances that have led to the request.
2. The PCC discusses Communion by Extension, agrees to its use (PCC resolution) and approves the names of those to be trained and authorised to lead services.
3. Careful training is given, involving study of the House of Bishops' Notes and Guidelines, and the texts for Orders of Service. If you require further guidance about the training to be given to Readers in preparation please contact the Bishop's Chaplain.
4. Teaching is given in the parish in sermons and articles.
5. Sufficient copies of the authorised forms of service are to be provided for the congregation, locally produced and adapted if appropriate.
6. The Diocesan Bishop receives confirmation that all the necessary preparation has been completed and is asked to approve both the names of those to exercise this ministry and also the pattern of services within which Communion by Extension is to be a part.
7. The Diocesan Bishop issues the necessary authorisation whereby Communion by Extension becomes part of the worship provision in the parish/benefice.
8. Permission will normally be given for a period of three years, after which the Incumbent and the PCC will need to re-apply, having first reviewed the practice and reflected on how it has been received by parishioners, and the effect it has had on the life of the church.
9. If it is important to begin this process during a vacancy, the Rural Dean acts in place of the Incumbent

Note: It is difficult to envisage this process being completed in less than about three months, so clergy and parishes are encouraged to look ahead so that appropriate time is given to preparing for Communion by Extension.

10. Readers who are authorised to lead Public Worship with Communion by Extension will include a list of the number of such services they have led in their Triennial Return to the Archdeaconry Wardens prior to the renewal of their Licences.

Forms of Service

'Public Worship with Communion by Extension' is published by Church House Publishing and contains orders of service appropriate to this provision. It is envisaged that the Eucharistic elements and ministers will be 'sent out' from an earlier service of Holy Communion, held on the same day in another church within the benefice so that the service in the 'receiving church' is truly by extension.

+Robert Exon
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