



*"We must always remember that our goal is not to receive Communion;  
our goal is to **achieve** Communion."*

—The Rt. Rev. Mark Hollingsworth, Bishop of the Diocese of Ohio

Tuesday, September 1, 2020

Greetings Siblings in Christ,

One of the lessons that I, as a parent, raise continually for my children, is that when one has new, better information, one should re-evaluate one's decisions. This is the mature and responsible thing to do.

When we began this Eucharistic fast, I had no idea how long, or how devastating this time of COVID-19 would be. As we have journeyed together, we have all learned a great deal: about the risks, about ourselves, about what it means to be church.

This we know:

- Large, indoor gatherings pose a huge risk of infection transmission.
- The longer we are "breathing each other's air" the greater the risk of transmission.
- Outdoor gatherings pose significantly less risk.
- Masks and physical distancing are our most effective tools to counter the spread of infection.

Few of us have ever experienced these kinds of circumstances, especially with regards to Church and our community life. And while it has become clear that we will be living in these conditions for an extended season, we are called to continuing faithfulness to God and each other throughout this time.

In this season, we are being called to be the Body of Christ in new ways. God is with us; the Holy Spirit is moving in and through us, even now. We are being challenged to imagine and discern how we will be faithful and how we will be Church together.

From the beginning, my priorities have been that:

- We love one another and express care for one another, especially the most vulnerable among us.
- We adhere to the doctrine, discipline, and canons of our Episcopal Church.
- We make our worship as faithful, welcoming and inclusive as possible.
- We move forward, in as much as possible, as one body, reflecting our unity as the Body of Christ.

I have listened prayerfully to voices from all over the Episcopal Church in Colorado:

*“Communion is spiritual food for my body and soul renews what it is within me to be human.”*

*“When we are worshipping online at our kitchen tables, we are by grace gathered at The Table in communion together. It is different; we don’t have bread and wine, but it is Communion.”*

*“I am wondering if I will get to have Communion again before I die.”*

*“The whole point of Communion is the messiness of incarnation, of being with people I know and people I don’t know and receiving the same meal. I’m not interested in some sterilized version.”*

*“The physicality of receiving Christ’s body into my body is what’s important for me.”*

One thing is clear: there are a number of Eucharistic theologies among our clergy and congregations. And the blessing of the Episcopal Church is that we work to maintain a “big tent” where people of all types can find welcome. Our church is clear that while Holy Eucharist is not the **only** means of Grace, it is a sure means of Grace and necessary for our common life.

I miss celebrating the Eucharist, but what I miss most is being with you, putting my hand in yours as we share and incarnate the Body of Christ. And as we move forward in these strange and sometimes difficult circumstances, we as a church will have to adapt and practice flexibility to live more fully into our calling to be people of Word and Sacrament.

To that end, I gathered a group of clergy and lay leaders from around the Diocese, representing different regions and communities to discern with me how we might safely break our fast, together. This Advisory Team spent hours in prayer, conversation, and discernment regarding how we could offer guidelines for Eucharistic celebration.

*“While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread and after blessing it, he broke it, gave it to the disciples and said, “Take eat; this is my body.” —Matthew 26:26*

I expressed to the team the importance of the four parts of communion being observed: taking, blessing, breaking, and sharing. Understanding that we will only partially achieve Communion in this life, I am conscious of those saints who struggled and sacrificed that the laity might have full access to the elements of the sacrament. Because of their sacrifice, I contend that if we are not sharing the sacred meal as broadly as possible, we are missing a key component of achieving Communion.

Our *Book of Common Prayer* offers us the option of [Communion under Special Circumstances](#) and the Advisory Team agreed that these are indeed “special circumstances.” The Advisory Team and I have worked together to develop guidelines with an eye to providing structure and flexibility for congregational leaders.

## Guidelines:

- While our goal is to resume receiving the Sacrament together, no clergy or congregation should feel pressure or provide Eucharistic service until they are fully ready to do so.
- At the recent House of Bishops meeting, after an extended period of prayer and conversation, the house concurred that current theology in the Episcopal Church requires the consecrator be in the same physical space as the elements (bread and wine) to be consecrated.
- The Sacrament should be celebrated in community (with a minimum of 3 people present) and distributed in one kind (the chalice is not offered), which constitutes full Communion, for this season. Sealed communion kits, while not ideal, are acceptable.
- While our *Book of Common Prayer* instructs that the Sacrament be delivered “immediately” following the consecration, delivery within a week of consecration is acceptable.
- Whether Eucharist is offered at worship or not, churches should abide by all safety and gathering protocols set forth by the state and local government, especially around numbers, hand-washing, mask wearing, and physical distancing for any in-person gathering.
- Church leaders are urged to be especially aware of and pastorally sensitive towards those who are in high risk categories (including themselves), offering contactless Communion.
- Congregations are urged to make participation in Eucharist as communal as possible, sharing as widely as circumstances permit and remembering to care for those who cannot risk Communion at this time.
- Clergy are fully empowered to, with their lay leadership, determine how often the Sacrament is offered while we are living with the threat of COVID-19.

I appreciate all of you who faithfully and reverently observed this Eucharistic fast. Thank you for your patience and support. I know how hard this season has been and I appreciate your willingness to walk this journey with me. Therefore, I invite congregations, if they discern that they are ready to do so, to join in the breaking of the Eucharist fast beginning Sunday, September 13 or a later date if a congregation discerns that a delay is prudent or necessary.

Following my letter, there will be a document with detailed practical suggestions that meet the safety criteria available, as well as one congregation’s Communion plan that you can use to spark your own thinking and planning about this new season.

I give thanks the Advisory Team for the ways in which they have blessed me and our Church:

The Rev. Nancey Bookstein, St. Brigit’s in Frederick

Mr. John Breed, St. Bartholomew’s in Estes Park

The Rev. Scott Campbell, Calvary in Golden

The Rev. Liz Costello, St. Gregory’s in Littleton

Ms. Kim Keffler MPH, St Aidan’s in Boulder

Mr. Charles Martin, St. Aidan’s in Boulder

The Rev. JK Melton, St. Augustine’s Creed and St. Stephens in Monte Vista

The Rev. Lisa Musser, Trinity Church in Greeley  
Dr. Gina Shed, Holy Comforter in Broomfield  
The Rev. Debbie Shew, St. Mark's in Durango  
Mr. Greg Smith, St. Luke's in Westcliffe

May God continue to bless our efforts in this time and enable us always to reflect the love of Christ for one another.

Yours in Christ,  
+Kym