

## **Communion in Missional Communities**

As congregations and members of the congregations of the Episcopal Diocese of Texas establish missional communities they are to make provision for those communities to engage in regular worship, using forms from the Book of Common Prayer. That worship is to include provision for the Holy Eucharist led from time to time by a duly ordained and licensed priest.

Permission may be sought to supplement those celebrations of the Holy Eucharist with Communion from the reserved sacrament. The sacrament will be reserved from a Celebration of Holy Eucharist at the sending congregation, or from a regular celebration of the Holy Eucharist led by a duly ordained and licensed priest for the missional community itself.



Those leading Communion from the reserved sacrament for missional communities will be specially licensed Eucharistic Visitors (Missional Community Eucharistic Visitors), who have been trained, vetted and licensed according to the practices of the Diocese, with additional training in the Book of Common Prayer, liturgical planning, preaching, and the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church and the Diocese of Texas. When the missional community work is under the guidance of a priest who crafts or approves the form of the liturgy, the requirement for the additional training may be waived. Vetting and training will include Safeguarding God's Children, Safeguarding God's People, and background and reference checks. In some cases, the MCEVs will be students preparing for ordination through programs at Iona School for Ministry or an accredited seminary. They will serve under the supervision of the Rector of a sending congregation, and the Bishop of Texas.

A form of service approved by the Diocesan Bishop of the Diocese of Texas will be used for all celebrations of Communion Under Special Circumstances for Missional Communities.

Permission to use this rite must be approved in writing for the specific community for which it will be employed. The Pastoral Leader in charge of the missional community will make an annual report to the Diocesan Bishop of the liturgical and pastoral work of the missional community by January 15 for the previous year. In addition, numbers and types of services, attendance, and offerings will be reported to the sending congregation in order to be included in parochial reports and the reports on the State of the Church as directed by the Bishop's Office.

In the worship of missional communities associated with the Episcopal Diocese of Texas, translations of scripture listed in Canon II.2 shall be used, unless approval of another translation has been requested and approved in writing by the Diocesan Bishop.

The provision of this rite does not alter expectations that the sacraments of Baptism, Marriage, Reconciliation of a Penitent, and Unction will be led by a duly ordained priest or bishop. Declarations of forgiveness used in worship led by lay persons will follow the form provided for use by a deacon or lay person.

The leader of a service of Communion Under Special Circumstances for Missional Communities may be referred to, whether in speaking or in writing, as the “Eucharistic Minister”, the “Eucharistic Visitor” (though this may be confusing, given that the person will be a known leader of the community), or the “Officiant”, to avoid confusion with the “Celebrant” who leads regular services of Holy Communion.

**Rationale:**

The Canons of the Episcopal Church have no clear provision for the ministry and worship this action envisions. The Canons envision the Eucharistic Visitor being sent forth from any celebration of the Holy Eucharist, regardless of day, and delivering the sacrament in a timely manner following the service only to those who, by reason of illness or infirmity, cannot attend public services of worship. (Canon II.4.7) The Book of Common Prayer expresses this provision through the “Communion Under Special Circumstances” service. (BCP 396) Though the service directs the inclusion of “fellow parishioners, relatives and friends”, the impetus for the ministry is the inability of the focal recipient to get to a traditional church setting.

However, the spirit of Canon II.4.7 and the Communion Under Special Circumstances deeply inform our intentions. The Eucharist stands as the central act of worship in the post-1979 Episcopal Church. To “conform to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of the Episcopal Church” is to work tirelessly to bring God’s people to the Eucharistic table, so that they might be fed “from the riches of God’s grace”. (Ordination: Priest, BCP 525-533) Priests and Deacons, and now, Lay Eucharistic Visitors extend the table to include those who cannot join the people as they are remade into the Body of Christ through the celebration of the feast. Home Communion, as it is often called, both serves the pastoral need of comforting and expressing the love of Christ and the Church, and expresses our belief that receiving the sacrament restores individuals to health, that they might rejoin the Church’s efforts to carry forth God’s mission in the world. As Eucharistic Prayer C asserts, we are to come to the table for solace and strength, for pardon and renewal, that we may be made one body in Christ to serve the world in his name. (BCP 372)

Missional communities seek to gather into spiritual community our neighbors where we find them, rather than expect them first to come into an established congregation. They often understand Communion intuitively, and hunger to make it part of their spiritual sustenance, but may not enter a parish building and community in order to sate that hunger. Our theology, Christology and ecclesiology motivate us to provide the food out in the world. That is what drives us to carry communion to the sick, but also to discern ways to take the Eucharistic feast to missional communities.

Over the past thirty years, the provision for lay Eucharistic Visitors fulfilled two deep needs in the Church. Neither should be given particular primacy. One was the need to acknowledge the full participation of the laity in the ministry of the Church. Lay persons share in the sacramental and pastoral ministry of the Church because they share in Christ's eternal priesthood. (Baptism, BCP 308) Reserving all handling and distribution of the sacrament communicated that lay persons only receive the ministry of the Church from the hands of the ordained. Empowering the laity to deliver the sacrament, both as Eucharistic Ministers and as Eucharistic Visitors, restored to them and to the Church, the benefits of their calling and spiritual gifts.

The other deep need was and is more laborers to work in the harvest. Overly restricting ministry to the ordained creates a very limited and expensive system. Historically, the very thing which was intended to return us to the practice and wisdom of the early Church – the Sunday Eucharist – also hampered the Church's ability to connect with neighbors outside the Church. The return to the centrality of the Eucharist eliminated the opportunity for lay leadership of small worshiping communities. As the Church expanded across the American continent from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, much of the visionary and faithful expansion was made possible by lay leaders who gathered, catechized, and tended the flock between or in lieu of visits from ordained clergy. Though motivated by a return to the practices of the ancient Church, the impact of the insistence on Eucharist every Sunday in every congregation was dependence on paid, professionally trained, and highly vetted ordained leaders. The impact on mission has not been universally positive. In order to reach our neighbors in our current context, we cannot continue to operate under this highly clericalized system. If we are not to abandon our commitment to the centrality of the Eucharist, we must imagine new ways to gather God's people around the table and nourish them with Christ's Body and Blood. We must empower lay persons to take their appropriate roles in this mission.

# Communion under Special Circumstances for Missional Communities

(adapted from the Book of Common Prayer, 1979, 396-401 and used with permission of the Bishop of the Diocese of Texas. Only for use in missional communities associated with the Episcopal Diocese of Texas.)

*This form is intended for use with communities associated with the Episcopal Diocese of Texas and called together outside of traditional church settings.*

*When missional communities are established, it is desirable that the Pastoral Leader of the community arrange to obtain the services of a duly ordained and licensed priest to celebrate the Eucharist with them from time to time. At other times, or when desired, such communities may be communicated from the reserved Sacrament, using the following form.*

*It is desirable that lay persons other than the Pastoral Leader participate in reading the lessons, leading the Prayers of the People, and the distribution of the sacrament.*

*The leader of this service will be referred to as the Officiant, or such other term approved by the Bishop of the Diocese.*

*Prayerful and creative planning is required to craft this service in ways appropriate for the particular missional community. Translation into the language spoken by the people is always recommended.*

## **Gather in the Lord's Name**

*Hymns, songs and instrumental music may be used at appropriate times during the service.*

*The opening sentences from Morning or Evening Prayer, the opening acclamation from the Holy Eucharist, or other words, prayers, and acts of welcome may be used to open the service.*

## **Proclaim and Respond to the Word of God**

*A Liturgy of the Word follows the gathering rite, and may follow the form of the Offices or the Eucharist, or its own form, provided that a reading from the Gospel is always included.*

*"The proclamation and response may include readings, song, talk, dance, instrumental music, other art forms, silence." (BCP, p. 400)*

### **Pray for the World and the Church**

*Suitable prayers may be offered, following one of the form of the Prayers of the People or some other formal or informal design.*

*A Confession of Sin may follow. The following or some other form is used*

Most merciful God,  
we confess that we have sinned against you  
in thought, word, and deed,  
by what we have done, and by what we have left undone.  
We have not loved you with our whole heart;  
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.  
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.  
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,  
have mercy on us and forgive us;  
that we may delight in your will,  
and walk in your ways,  
to the glory of your Name. Amen.

*When the Confession is used, a declaration of forgiveness follows. The Officiant alone says*  
Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us all our sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen us in  
all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep us in eternal life. Amen.

*The Peace may then be exchanged.*

*An Offering may be collected, at this or some other time.*

### **Share Communion**

*Eucharistic Prayers are reserved for use by priests and bishops, and are not used when a lay officiant leads this service.*

*The worshippers are invited to share in receiving the Eucharist. The following, or some other acknowledgment of the connection to the altar at which the Eucharist was celebrated, is recommended:*

*Officiant:* We receive the offering of this Bread and Wine, the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, blessed (or consecrated) at (the altar of Name of Congregation/our table) so that we might share in these holy gifts.

*Response:* We who are many are one Body, because we all share one bread, one cup.

*The following collect, or some other collect or prayer giving thanks for the Eucharist, may be used:*  
Almighty Father, whose dear Son, on the night before he suffered instituted the Sacrament of his Body and Blood:  
Mercifully grant that we may receive it thankfully in remembrance of Jesus Christ our Lord, who in these holy  
mysteries gives us a pledge of eternal life; and who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

*The Lord's Prayer is said, the Officiant first saying*

Let us pray in the words our Savior Christ has taught us.

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy Name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those  
who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
and the power, and the glory,  
for ever and ever. Amen.

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your Name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those  
who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial,  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours,  
now and for ever. Amen.

*The Officiant may say the following Invitation*

The Gifts of God for the People of God

*and may add* Take them in remembrance that Christ died for  
you, and feed on him in your hearts by faith,  
with thanksgiving.

*The Sacrament is administered with the following or other words*

The Body (Blood) of our Lord Jesus Christ keep you in  
everlasting life. [Amen.]

*One of the usual postcommunion prayers, or another prayer of thanksgiving and sending for mission is then said.*

*The service concludes with the following or another dismissal*

Let us bless the Lord.  
*Thanks be to God.*

## **CANON 4: Of Licensed Ministries**

**Sec. 1 (a)** A confirmed communicant in good standing or, in extraordinary circumstances, subject to guidelines established by the Bishop, a communicant in good standing, may be licensed by the Ecclesiastical Authority to serve as Pastoral Leader, Worship Leader, Preacher, Eucharistic Minister, Eucharistic Visitor, Evangelist, or Catechist. Requirements and guidelines for the selection, training, continuing education, and deployment of such persons, and the duration of licenses shall be established by the Bishop in consultation with the Commission on Ministry.

**(b)** The Presiding Bishop or the Bishop Suffragan for the Armed Forces may authorize a member of the Armed Forces to exercise one or more of these ministries in the Armed Forces in accordance with the provisions of this Canon. Requirements and guidelines for the selection, training, continuing education, and deployment of such persons shall be established by the Bishop granting the license.

**Sec. 2 (a)** The Member of the Clergy or other leader exercising oversight of the congregation or other community of faith may request the Ecclesiastical Authority with jurisdiction to license persons within that congregation or other community of faith to exercise such ministries. The license shall be issued for a period of time to be determined under Canon III.4.1(a) and may be renewed. The license may be revoked by the Ecclesiastical Authority upon request of or upon notice to the Member of the Clergy or other leader exercising oversight of the congregation or other community of faith.

**(b)** In renewing the license, the Ecclesiastical Authority shall consider the performance of the ministry by the person licensed, continuing education in the licensed area, and the endorsement of the Member of the Clergy or other leader exercising oversight of the congregation or other community of faith in which the person is serving.

**(c)** A person licensed in any Diocese under the provisions of this Canon may serve in another congregation or other community of faith in the same or another Diocese only at the invitation of the Member of the Clergy or other leader exercising oversight, and with the consent of the Ecclesiastical Authority in whose jurisdiction the service will occur.

**Sec. 3.** A Pastoral Leader is a lay person authorized to exercise pastoral or administrative responsibility in a congregation under special circumstances, as defined by the Bishop.

**Sec. 4.** A Worship Leader is a lay person who regularly leads public worship under the direction of the Member of the Clergy or other leader exercising oversight of the congregation or other community of faith.

**Sec. 5.** A Preacher is a lay person authorized to preach. Persons so authorized shall only preach in congregations under the direction of the Member of the Clergy or other leader exercising oversight of the congregation or other community of faith.

**Sec. 6.** A Eucharistic Minister is a lay person authorized to administer the Consecrated Elements at a Celebration of Holy

Eucharist. A Eucharistic Minister should normally act under the direction of a Deacon, if any, or otherwise, the Member of the Clergy or other leader exercising oversight of the congregation or other community of faith.

**Sec. 7.** A Eucharistic Visitor is a lay person authorized to take the Consecrated Elements in a timely manner following a Celebration of Holy Eucharist to members of the congregation who, by reason of illness or infirmity, were unable to be present at the Celebration. A Eucharistic Visitor should normally act under the direction of a Deacon, if any, or otherwise, the Member of the Clergy or other leader exercising oversight of the congregation or other community of faith.

**Sec. 8.** A Catechist is a lay person authorized to prepare persons for Baptism, Confirmation, Reception, and the Reaffirmation of Baptismal Vows, and shall function under the direction of the Member of the Clergy or other leader exercising oversight of the congregation or other community of faith.

**Sec. 9.** An Evangelist is a lay person who presents the good news of Jesus Christ in such a way that people are led to receive Christ as Savior and follow Christ as Lord in the fellowship of the Church. An Evangelist assists with the community's ministry of evangelism in partnership with the Presbyterian or other leader exercising oversight of the congregation, or as directed by the Bishop.