

Virtual Communion and the Covid-19 Pandemic

Preface from the Chair of the Inter Anglican Standing Commission on Unity, Faith and Order

IASCUFO has met and considered the very helpful brief paper from the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation on 'virtual eucharists'. We are happy to commend this document, and particularly its *Suggestions for a way forward*, to the Primates as providing guidance for Member Churches on the question of the Eucharist during times of limited public gathering, such as in the recent COVID-19 pandemic. We recognise that the urgency of this question has diminished somewhat since the effects of the pandemic have moved on, yet it still provides helpful guidance in an age when interaction between people increasingly happens online. While most churches have now returned to in-person gathering, there are more churches that offer online worship than before the pandemic, so this document's advice remains valid.

We are aware that this advice, as with much other guidance, will need to be contextualised in different environments across the global Communion. We are also aware that more work needs to be done on a theology of the internet, online presence and artificial intelligence, in particular around the significance of online 'space', which is increasingly becoming a dimension in which much of life is lived for many younger people in particular. The growing awareness of a digital space, for example in online simulations of community, social media and 'virtual reality', is a factor that requires theological reflection into the future.

However, as we reflect on the theological issues raised by the pandemic and related lockdowns for our theology and practice of the Eucharist, this document provides, in our view, helpful guidance as we navigate these issues into the future.

Should the Primates wish to bring this work to the attention of the ACC, a draft resolution with background information is offered below.

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Chair, IASCUFO

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International Anglican Liturgical Consultation

Introduction

This short paper has been produced by a small group of members of the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation (IALC) who were asked by the Primates' Meeting to consider the liturgical and theological issues raised by the practice of virtual communion in some parts of the Anglican Communion during the Covid-19 pandemic.

We began our consideration by discussing some analogies that are now taken for granted wherever internet access is available. Various combinations of voice and video call across relatively low-cost networks now unite dispersed families in real time. Skill in using these media is no longer regarded as something peculiar to a generation of under 30s: keeping in touch with grandchildren has provided powerful motivation to an older generation. When technical problems arise in domestic or office communication, it is possible for an adviser to take control of a device from a distant location and provide support. Had familiarity with platforms like WhatsApp, FaceTime, Facebook, Skype and Zoom not already been part of the social and working lives of many people, the churches might have struggled to keep multigenerational congregations united in some way in the months following March 2020. Opinion has remained divided, however, as to the extent to which the virtual gatherings for worship have been appropriate and effective. Probably the most divisive topic has been the celebration of the Eucharist.

We acknowledge that the normative setting for the celebration of the Eucharist within a local community (a broad and not wholly satisfactory term, but one intended to express geographical unity) is a single physical location, with worshippers gathering at the same time. In an ideal enactment, members of the congregation would be present for the full duration of the liturgy; they would engage fully in the prayers of preparation; they would join in the confession genuinely conscious of their own sins, and receive true comfort in the absolution; they would hear and meditate upon the scriptures and the sermon; they would align themselves with the prayers of intercession; they would express genuine reconciliation and love for their neighbour in the exchange of the peace; they would bring heart and mind to the offering of the Eucharistic Prayer; and they would depart with their faith confirmed and strengthened by sharing in the body and blood of Christ, newly committed to offering themselves to God as living sacrifices in their vocation to the world.

Such an act of worship exists more securely in the pages of liturgical textbooks and pastoral commentaries on the Eucharist than in the lives of eucharistic communities. The practice of public worship is full of distractions of all kinds. Yet imperfect as most celebrations are if measured by the criteria of exact attention to rubrics and full engagement of participants, the fact of gathering is indispensable. The mantra of 'the Lord's people at the Lord's table on the Lord's Day' remains powerful.

In our discussion of virtual eucharists, the group had to decide how the necessary elements we recognised in 'face to face' or 'in-person' liturgical practice could be identified in virtual gatherings. Our approach was to consider the situation with which worshipping communities have been presented, and to examine the various ways it has been addressed.

There seems to be a consensus that online *services of the word and prayer* are, if less than ideal, not objectionable. Such services can be lay-led and have provided important continuity through the pandemic. We have not gathered evidence, but it may even be that communities

dependent on the visit of a priest every couple of weeks or even monthly have, over the last 18 months, been able to participate in a weekly act of worship not previously available to them.

2 The Celebration of the Eucharist during the Covid-19 Pandemic

When it comes to celebrations of the *Eucharist/Holy Communion*, the approaches that have been adopted include the following:

- Worshipping communities have chosen to abstain completely from eucharistic celebrations until the whole community is able to gather again in the regular place of assembly. Services of the word and prayer have become the staple liturgical diet.
- Some communities have actively promoted the practice of Spiritual Communion. At face value, this is to take seriously the assurance carried into the 1662 Prayer Book, that if, by just impediment, we do not receive the Sacrament but are properly prepared to do so, we nonetheless 'eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ profitably to [our] soul's health' [3rd rubric following 'The Communion of the Sick', *The Book of Common Prayer (1662)*]. Local and individual interpretations of Spiritual Communion have, however, produced a number of variants. Most of these lose sight of the significance of a sense of being united in spirit with the community that receives the sacrament. In their odder manifestations, they envisage a kind of individualised spiritual experience that can be summoned at will, and at any time, with no necessary connection to the communal practice of a liturgical body with which the individual identifies.
- Live streaming (or broadcasting pre-recorded celebrations), in which the president alone receives communion has become another solution. The principal unforeseen consequence of this has been the return of the private mass, which Anglican tradition explicitly rejects; and if others are present where the Eucharist is celebrated, a sense of grievance that the president's household is able to receive, but not the wider congregation. A further concern relates to language that describes the president receiving communion on behalf of the virtual congregation. This is problematic both in terms of the theology of eucharistic presidency (in which the president has a representative liturgical role, but never acts on behalf of the people; e.g. the Eucharistic Prayer, articulated by the president, is the prayer of the whole assembly; the president is not offering it on their behalf) and the theology of spiritual communion (since it suggests that the community's means of reception is via the president's communion).
- Live streaming (or broadcasting pre-recorded celebrations), in which the president expressly purports (or suggests the same by his or her actions) to consecrate the elements remotely has provided a way to bring the act of consecration and reception into the homes of those participating remotely. To deal rigorously with this option entails a journey into pneumatology that is beyond the scope of this paper. It has been well argued by a theologian of the United Reformed Church ([John Bradbury](#)), though he has been quick to say that his arguments relate specifically to his own Church.
- The possibility remains open that some may, without explicit encouragement or invitation, or even despite explicit discouragement, choose to provide their own bread and wine and receive simultaneously with those actually receiving in an online celebration. This is beyond the control of ecclesiastical authorities. While the value of 'the domestic church' has been actively discussed and affirmed during the pandemic, domestic Eucharists without a priest present have been – at least for Anglicans – another unforeseen consequence.

3 Questions arising from remote participation in the Eucharist

Key questions arising out of the variants on home reception include:

- Must the service be in 'real time'? That is, should the Eucharist be live streamed rather than pre-recorded and watched later? We note that most live-streaming platforms will have a short delay.
- Must the president physically touch the elements – or at least have them close by – in order to effect consecration?
- Can the sacramental intention of the president extend beyond elements on the table before them? How far and with what limits may this intention extend? If the priest cannot see the bread and wine and may be unaware of their existence, how can there be intention to consecrate? This becomes more urgent as people exercise the power to choose their preferred celebration. It is entirely possible to live in the United States and join a parish in England for their Eucharist, or even to sample different communities' celebrations on different occasions. It goes without saying that such online itinerant practice will quite likely cross ecclesial as well as geographical boundaries.
- Is it the words and actions of the president which are primary, or is it the faith of the recipient, taking into account Articles 28 & 29, that 'the mean whereby the body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper is Faith' and that 'such as be void of a lively faith, although they do carnally and visibly press with their teeth (as St Augustine saith) the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ, yet in no wise are they partakers of Christ'?
- Does 'virtual' communion sit any more uneasily with Anglican theology than, say, a lay person taking the reserved sacrament to the resident of a nursing home? The group's view is that elements reserved for the communion of the sick should have been consecrated at a public celebration of the Eucharist, and that the sick person is thus associated with a community (however small) gathered in a particular place and a particular time. 'Spiritual Communion' properly understood would seem to be very closely applicable to those unavoidably separated from the community's celebration, especially the sick, prisoners, or those cut off by circumstances from any access to the liturgy of the Church.
- Do perceived pastoral benefits, such as the encouragement of participants to persevere in their faith, outweigh theological precision in unusual circumstances? That is, can we afford to take a pragmatic approach during limitations imposed by Covid-19 (or similar pandemic)? Or will this inevitably overflow into regular practice and become routine, to the longer-term detriment of all?

Anyone with a sense of Anglican history will realise at once that the likelihood of agreement on these questions is low. Given the practical differences from diocese to diocese and province to province, the best we can probably achieve is to ask what can be widely commended, and what should as far as possible be discouraged.

4 Suggestions for a way forward

Some tentative suggestions for a way forward:

- Any kind of virtual service should be seen as less than the ideal of the Christian community gathered together in the same place (whether to share in the Eucharist or in any other form of service).
- At the same time, we acknowledge that for great numbers of people, liturgical life has depended on virtual gatherings, and that to depreciate them uncritically is to disparage the sincerity of those for whom this has been considerably better than nothing.

- That said, for the reasons outlined in this paper, online Services of the Word present fewer theological concerns than virtual celebrations of the Eucharist. Though non-sacramental in a technical sense, Services of the Word are different from, but not inferior to, celebrations of the Eucharist, and offer a means of grace by which the community encounters Christ through the proclamation of God's word and is thereby strengthened in its discipleship.
- In relation to virtual celebrations of the Eucharist, we do not believe the concept of remote consecration to be consistent with Anglican theology and practice, and therefore it should not be recommended. Indeed, we would go as far as proposing that it should be discouraged as far as possible. We also consider that the practice of the president alone receiving the consecrated elements should be discouraged.
- Where a Eucharist with an in-person congregation is live-streamed to enable those who are not able to be physically present to be included within the worshipping community, the use of bread and wine at home should not be encouraged. We would support the provision of resources to help clergy and communities consider the theological and liturgical issues relating to this issue.
- It should be noted that the Book of Common Prayer allows for the possibility of the service of Holy Communion taking place without the consecration and administration of the elements being part of it. We have not been able to establish whether Ante-Communion is a regular feature of local practice in any part of the Anglican Communion, especially since good resources for Services of the Word are usually available. However, some may find that the familiarity of words and structure is beneficial in circumstances such as an unexpected change to online services.
- Finally, we wonder whether it is too late to explore the resources of the Anglican tradition for thorough discussion of fasting and abstinence as spiritual practices. Instead of grieving over eucharistic deprivation, could communities have found positive ways to align themselves in solidarity with a wider world suffering from loss of freedom, employment and human contact? Even in relation to the contested issues of communion in one kind only, such an approach might have some value.

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Advent 2021

This paper should be read in the wider context of Anglican understandings of the Eucharist. To illustrate this, appendices provide key texts from Anglican sources, and from Agreed Statements made with ecumenical partners, which variously underline the importance of abiding by the norms and practices of Anglican tradition shared with the historic Church, including assumptions around physically gathering, and receiving the elements from the hand of the priest.

- I. Some Anglican texts on the Eucharist
- II. Some Anglican-ecumenical texts on the Eucharist

Appendix I

Some Anglican Texts on the Eucharist

Richard Hooker (1554-1600)

The fruit of the Eucharist is the participation of the body and blood of Christ. There is no sentence of Holy Scripture which saith that we cannot by this sacrament be made partakers of his body and blood except they be first contained in the sacrament, or the sacrament converted into them. "This is my body," and "this is my blood," being words of promise, sith we all agree that by the sacrament Christ doth really and truly in us perform his promise, why do we vainly trouble ourselves with so fierce contentions whether by consubstantiation, or else by transubstantiation the sacrament itself be first possessed with Christ, or no? A thing which no way can either further or hinder us howsoever it stand, because our participation of Christ in this sacrament dependeth on the co-operation of his omnipotent power which maketh it his body and blood to us, whether with change or without alteration of the element such as they imagine we need not greatly to care nor inquire. *Laws*, Book V.67.6

The real presence of Christ's most blessed body and blood is not therefore to be sought for in the sacrament, but in the worthy receiver of the sacrament. V.67.5,6

Let it therefore be sufficient for me presenting myself at the Lord's table to know what there I receive from him, without searching or inquiring of the manner how Christ performeth his promise; let disputes and questions, enemies to piety, abatements of true devotion, and hitherto in this cause but over patiently heard, let them take their rest; let curious and sharpwitted men beat their heads about what questions themselves will, the very letter of the word of Christ giveth plain security that these mysteries do as nails fasten us to his very Cross, that by them we draw out, as touching efficacy, force, and virtue, even the blood of his gored side, in the wounds of our Redeemer we there dip our tongues, we are dyed red both within and without, our hunger is satisfied and our thirst for ever quenched; they are things wonderful which he feeleth, great which he seeth and unheard of which he uttereth, whose soul is possessed of this Paschal Lamb and made joyful in the strength of this new wine, **this bread hath in it more than the substance which our eyes behold, this cup hallowed with solemn benediction availeth to the endless life and welfare both of soul and body, in that it serveth as well for a medicine to heal our infirmities and purge our sins as for a sacrifice of thanksgiving; with touching it sanctifieth, it enlighteneth with belief, it truly conformeth us unto the image of Jesus Christ;** what these elements are in themselves it skilleth not, it is enough that to me which take them they are the body and blood of Christ, his promise in witness hereof sufficeth, his word he knoweth which way to accomplish; why should any cogitation possess the mind of a faithful communicant but this, O my God thou art true, O my Soul thou art happy!" *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* V.67.12

The Book of Common Prayer (1662)

A rubric defining the manual acts was added to the Book of Common Prayer in 1662 and clearly directs that 'the priest is take the Paten into his hands'; that the priest is 'to break the bread; that the priest is 'to lay his hands upon the Bread'; and that the priest is 'to lay his hand upon every vessel (be it Chalice or Flagon) in which there is any Wine to be consecrated'.

The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral (1888)

This text, affirmed by the Lambeth Conference in 1888 as a basis for 'reunion', i.e. Christian unity, assumes a common, historic, position on the celebration of the Eucharist, though acknowledges potential variation in the local administration of the historic episcopate.

- i. The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as "containing all things necessary to salvation," and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith.
- ii. The Apostles' Creed, as the Baptismal Symbol; and the Nicene Creed, as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith.
- iii. The two Sacraments ordained by Christ Himself – Baptism and the Supper of the Lord – ministered with unfailing use of Christ's words of Institution, and of the elements ordained by Him.
- iv. The Historic Episcopate, locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the Unity of His Church.

Lambeth Conference 1897

Resolution 50

Where difficulties arise in regard to the administration of Holy Communion to the sick, we recommend that these difficulties should be left to be dealt with by the bishop of each diocese in accordance with the direction contained in the preface to the Prayer Book of the Church of England "Concerning the Service of the Church"; And forasmuch as nothing can be so plainly set forth, but doubts may arise in the use and practice of the same; to appease all such diversity (if any arise) and for the resolution of all doubts, concerning the manner how to understand, do, and execute the things contained in this Book; the parties that so doubt, or diversely take any thing, shall always resort to the Bishop of the Diocese, who by his discretion shall take order for the quieting and appeasing of the same; so that the same order be not contrary to any thing contained in this Book. And if the Bishop of the Diocese be in doubt, then he may send for the resolution thereof to the Archbishop.

Lambeth Conference 1908

Resolution 31

For reasons given in the Report on the Administration of Holy Communion, as well as for other reasons, the Conference is convinced that it is not desirable to make, on the ground of alarm as to the possible risk of infection, any change in the manner of administering the Holy Communion. Special cases involving exceptional risk should be referred to the bishop and dealt with according to his direction.

Resolution 32

The Conference declares that the only elements which the Church can sanction for use in the administration of the Holy Communion are bread and wine, according to the institution of our Lord. While declaring this, the Conference does not pronounce judgement upon such a course as in cases of absolute necessity may be in particular regions adopted by those bishops on whom falls the responsibility of dealing with an imperative need. But it would insist that any such divergence from the practice of the Church, if it is to be justified by actual necessity, ought to cease as soon as the conditions of necessity are over.

Lambeth Conference 1920

Resolution 12: Reunion of Christendom

...

B. ...

i. ...

ii. In accordance with the principle of Church order set forth in the Preface to the Ordinal attached to the Book of Common Prayer, it cannot approve the celebration in Anglican churches of the Holy Communion for members of the Anglican Church by ministers who have not been episcopally ordained; and that it should be regarded as the general rule of the Church that Anglican communicants should receive Holy Communion only at the hands of ministers of their own Church, or of Churches in communion therewith.

C. C. In view of doubts and varieties of practice which have caused difficulties in the past, the Conference declares that:

1. Nothing in these Resolutions is intended to indicate that the rule of confirmation as conditioning admission to Holy Communion must necessarily apply to the case of baptized persons who seek Communion under conditions which in the bishop's judgement justify their admission thereto.

2. In cases in which it is impossible for the bishop's judgement to be obtained beforehand the priest should remember that he has no canonical authority to refuse Communion to any baptized person kneeling before the Lord's Table ...

Lambeth Conference 1968

Resolution 46: Relations with Other Churches: Anglicans Communicating in other than Anglican Churches

The Conference recommends that, while it is the general practice of the Church that Anglican communicants receive the Holy Communion at the hands of ordained ministers of their own Church or of Churches in communion therewith, nevertheless under the general direction of the bishop, to meet special pastoral need, such communicants be free to attend the Eucharist in other Churches holding the apostolic faith as contained in the Scriptures and summarised in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, and as conscience dictates to receive the sacrament, when they know they are welcome to do so.

Lambeth Conference 1930

Resolution 42: The Unity of the Church: Special Areas

The Conference, maintaining as a general principle that intercommunion should be the goal of, rather than a means to, the restoration of union, and bearing in mind the general rule of the Anglican Churches that "members of the Anglican Churches should receive the Holy Communion only from ministers of their own Church," holds, nevertheless, that the administration of such a rule falls under the discretion of the bishop, who should exercise his dispensing power in accordance with any principles that may be set forth by the national, regional or provincial authority of the Church in the area concerned. The bishops of the Anglican Communion will not question the action of any bishop who may, in his discretion so exercised, sanction an exception to the general rule in special areas, where the ministrations of an Anglican Church are not available for long periods of time or without travelling great distances, or may give permission that baptized communicant members of Churches not in communion with our own should be encouraged to communicate in Anglican churches, when the ministrations of their own Church are not available, or in other special or temporary circumstances.

Explanatory Note: In view of the dangers of misconception, we think it desirable to say that in recognising that a bishop of the Anglican Communion may under very strict regulations and in very special circumstances permit individual communicants to join with members of other Christian bodies in their services of the administration of the Lord's Supper, we felt bound to consider the difficulties created by present conditions, especially in some parts of

the mission field. But we would point out that the very special circumstances and the very strict regulations specified in this Resolution of themselves show that we are not departing from the rule of our Church that the minister of the sacrament of Holy Communion should be a priest episcopally ordained.

Lambeth Conference 1948

Resolution 37: The Church and the Modern World: The Church Militant

The Conference urges all Church people to look upon their membership of Christ in the Church as the central fact in their lives. They should regard themselves as individually sharing responsibility for the corporate life and witness of the Church in the places where they live. They should discharge this responsibility and give a distinctive witness

- (a) by the regularity of their attendance at public worship and especially at the Holy Communion;
- (b) ...
- (c) ...
- (d) ...
- (e) ...
- (f) ...

Thus there will be in every locality a living centre of Christian faith, witness, and fellowship.

Resolution 117: Administration of Holy Communion

The Conference affirms that the giving of Communion in both kinds is according to the example and precept of our Lord, was the practice of the whole Catholic Church for twelve centuries, has remained the practice of the Orthodox Churches, and has been universally upheld by the teaching and practice of the Anglican Communion since the Reformation.

Resolution 118: Administration of Holy Communion

The Conference holds that administration from a common chalice, being scriptural and having a spiritual meaning of great value, should continue to be the normal method of administration in the Anglican Communion; but is of opinion that there is no objection to administration of both kinds by the method of intinction where conditions require it, and that any part of the Anglican Communion by provincial regulation according to its own constitutional procedure has liberty to sanction administration by intinction as an optional alternative to the traditional method, and that the methods of intinction to be adopted or permitted should not be left to the discretion of individual priests

Lambeth Conference 1958

Resolution 74: The Book of Common Prayer: Prayer Book Revision

The Conference, recognising the work of Prayer Book revision being done in different parts of the Anglican Communion,

- (a) calls attention to those features in the Books of Common Prayer which are essential to the safeguarding of our unity: ie. the use of the canonical Scriptures and the Creeds, Holy Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Communion, and the Ordinal;
- (b) notes that there are other features in these books which are effective in maintaining the traditional doctrinal emphasis and ecclesiastical culture of Anglicanism and therefore should be preserved;
- (c) and urges that a chief aim of Prayer Book revision should be to further that recovery of the worship of the primitive Church which was the aim of the compilers of the first Prayer Books of the Church of England.

Resolution 76: The Book of Common Prayer - The Holy Communion Service

The Conference requests the Archbishop of Canterbury, in co-operation with the Consultative Body, to appoint an advisory committee to prepare recommendations for the structure of the Holy Communion service which could be taken into consideration by any Church or Province revising its eucharistic rite, and which would both conserve the doctrinal balance of the Anglican tradition and take account of present liturgical knowledge.

Resolution 100: The Reconciling of Conflicts Between and Within Nations: The Church's Work of Reconciliation

...

- (d) There is need to emphasise the disastrous effect on the common life of those who come to the Lord's Table unreconciled to their neighbours and with bitterness towards them in their hearts. - 25 - Resolutions from 1958 We would recall that the Invitation to the Holy Communion is addressed to those who are "in love and charity with their neighbours."

Lambeth Conference 1968

Resolution 23: Liturgical Information

The Conference welcomes and commends the adoption of a common structure for the Eucharist as an important unifying factor in our Communion and ecumenically. We ask provincial liturgical committees to continue to keep in touch with one another by circulating work in progress to the chairmen of the other liturgical committees through the good offices of the Secretary General of the Anglican Consultative Council.

Lambeth Conference 1988

Resolution 4: Anglican-Lutheran Relations

...

In this case: When a joint Eucharist is held in an Anglican church an Anglican bishop or priest should preside, using an Anglican liturgy, with the Lutheran preaching; when a joint Eucharist is held in a Lutheran church a Lutheran should preside using a Lutheran liturgy, with the Anglican preaching. ...

Lambeth Conference 1998

Resolution III.8: The Virginia Report

This Conference

- a. ...
- b. ...
- c. affirms that the Churches of our Anglican Communion are joined in the communion of God through Our Lord Jesus Christ by the gracious power of the Holy Spirit, celebrating the fact that our communion together is maintained in the life and truth of Christ by the gift to us of the Holy Scriptures, the Apostles and Nicene Creeds, the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist, and the historic episcopate, and commending the fundamental importance of these to the consideration of our partners in ecumenical dialogue;

Resolution IV.23: The Roman Catholic Church

This Conference:

- a. ...
- b. welcomes the proposal for a high-level consultation to review Anglican-Roman Catholic relationships in the light of the agreements reached and the 'real though imperfect communion' already existing between the churches of the Anglican Communion and the Roman Catholic Church. The Conference requests that the consultation should include different local situations, including the movement of clergy from one Church to another; the experience of Christian solidarity under persecution [e.g., in the Sudan]; discussions of the implications of having agreed

- statements on Eucharistic Doctrine and Ministry and Ordination, and the status of Apostolicae curae in the new context brought about by the work of ARCIC;
- c. c. recognises the special status of those Agreements which have been affirmed by the Lambeth Conference 1988 as 'consonant in substance with the faith of Anglicans' (Eucharistic Doctrine, Ministry and Ordination, and their Elucidations) and urges the provinces to receive them into their life;

Appendix II

Some Anglican-Ecumenical texts on the Eucharist

Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC)

ARCIC: *Agreed Statement on Eucharistic Doctrine* (1971)

I. The Mystery of the Eucharist

3. When his people are gathered at the eucharist to commemorate his saving act for our redemption, Christ makes effective among us the eternal benefits of this victory and elicits and renews our response of faith, thanksgiving and selfsurrender. Christ through the Holy Spirit in the eucharist builds up the life of the church, strengthens its fellowship and furthers its mission. The identity of the church as the body of Christ is both expressed and effectively proclaimed by its being centred in, and partaking of, his body and blood. In the whole action of the eucharist, and in and by his sacramental presence given through bread and wine, the crucified and risen Lord, according to his promise, offers himself to his people.

III. The Presence of Christ

6. Communion with Christ in the eucharist presupposes his true presence, effectually signified by the bread and wine which, in this mystery, become his body and blood^[2]

(Footnote 2: The word transubstantiation is commonly used in the Roman Catholic Church to indicate that God acting in the eucharist effects a change in the inner reality of the elements. The term should be seen as affirming the fact of Christ's presence and of the mysterious and radical change which takes place. In contemporary Roman Catholic theology it is not understood as explaining how the change takes place).

The real presence of his body and blood can, however, only be understood within the context of the redemptive activity whereby he gives himself, and in himself reconciliation, peace and life, to his own. On the one hand, the eucharistic gift springs out of the paschal mystery of Christ's death and resurrection, in which God's saving purpose has already been definitively realised. On the other hand, its purpose is to transmit the life of the crucified and risen Christ to his body, the church, so that its members may be more fully united with Christ and with one another.

7. Christ is present and active, in various ways, in the entire eucharistic celebration. It is the same Lord who through the proclaimed word invites his people to his table, who through his minister presides at that table, and who gives himself sacramentally in the body and blood of his paschal sacrifice. It is the Lord present at the right hand of the Father, and therefore transcending the sacramental order, who thus offers to his church, in the eucharistic signs, the special gift of himself.

8. The sacramental body and blood of the Savior are present as an offering to the believer awaiting his welcome. When this offering is met by faith, a lifegiving encounter results. Through faith Christ's presence which does not depend on the individual's faith in order to be the Lord's real gift of himself to his church becomes no longer just a presence for the believer, but also a presence with him. Thus, in considering the mystery of the eucharistic presence, we must recognize both the sacramental sign of Christ's presence and the personal relationship between Christ and the faithful which arises from that presence.

9. The Lord's words at the last supper, "Take and eat; this is my body", do not allow us to dissociate the gift of the presence and the act of sacramental eating. The elements are not mere signs; Christ's body and blood become really present and are really given. But they are really present and given in order that, receiving them, believers may be united in communion with Christ the Lord.

10. According to the traditional order of the liturgy the consecratory prayer (anaphora) leads to the communion of the faithful. Through this prayer of thanksgiving, a word of faith addressed to the Father, the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ by the action of the Holy Spirit, so that in communion we eat the flesh of Christ and drink his blood.

11. The Lord who thus comes to his people in the power of the Holy Spirit is the Lord of glory. In the eucharistic celebration we anticipate the joys of the age to come. By the transforming action of the Spirit of God, earthly bread and wine become the heavenly manna and the new wine, the eschatological banquet for the new man: elements of the first creation become pledges and first fruits of the new heaven and the new earth.

ARCIC: *Elucidation* (1979)

Christ's Presence in the Eucharist

6. Criticism has been evoked by the statement that the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ in the eucharist (para. 10). The word become has been suspected of expressing a materialistic conception of Christ's presence, and this has seemed to some to be confirmed in the footnote on the word transubstantiation which also speaks of change. It is feared that this suggests that Christ's presence in the eucharist is confined to the elements, and that the Real Presence involves a physical change in them.

In order to respond to these comments the Commission recalls that the Statement affirmed that:

1. It is the glorified Lord himself whom the community of the faithful encounters in the eucharistic celebration through the preaching of the word, in the fellowship of the Lord's supper, in the heart of the believer, and, in a sacramental way, through the gifts of his body and blood, already given on the cross for their salvation.
2. His body and blood are given through the action of the Holy Spirit, appropriating bread and wine so that they become the food of the new creation already inaugurated by the coming of Christ (cf. paras. 7, 10, 11).

Becoming does not here imply material change. Nor does the liturgical use of the word imply that the bread and wine become Christ's body and blood in such a way that in the eucharistic celebration his presence is limited to the consecrated elements. It does not imply that Christ becomes present in the eucharist in the same manner that he was present in his earthly life. It does not imply that this becoming follows the physical laws of this world. What is here affirmed is a sacramental presence in which God uses realities of this world to convey the realities of the new creation: bread for this life becomes the bread of eternal life. Before the eucharistic prayer, to the question: 'What is that?', the believer answers: 'It is bread.' After the eucharistic prayer, to the same question he answers: 'It is truly the body of Christ, the Bread of Life.'

In the sacramental order the realities of faith become present in visible and tangible signs, enabling Christians to avail themselves of the fruits of the once-for-all redemption. In the eucharist the human person encounters in faith the person of Christ in his sacramental body

and blood. This is the sense in which the community, the body of Christ, by partaking of the sacramental body of the risen Lord, grows into the unity God intends for his Church. The ultimate change intended by God is the transformation of human beings into the likeness of Christ. The bread and wine become the sacramental body and blood of Christ in order that the Christian community may become more truly what it already is, the body of Christ.

Gift and Reception

7. This transformation into the likeness of Christ requires that the eucharistic gifts be received in faith. In the mystery of the eucharist we discern not one but two complementary movements within an indissoluble unity: Christ giving his body and blood, and the communicants feeding upon them in their hearts by faith. Some traditions have placed a special emphasis on the association of Christ's presence with the consecrated elements; others have emphasized Christ's presence in the heart of the believer through reception by faith. In the past, acute difficulties have arisen when one or other of these emphases has become most exclusive. In the opinion of the Commission neither emphasis is incompatible with eucharistic faith, provided that the complementary movement emphasized by the other position is not denied. Eucharistic doctrine must hold together these two movements since in the eucharist, the sacrament of the New Covenant, Christ gives himself to his people so that they may receive him through faith.

ARCIC: *The Church as Communion* (1990)

It is characteristic of the Apostle Paul to speak of the relationship of believers to their Lord as being "in Christ" and of Christ being in the believer through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:1-11; 2 Cor 5:17; Col 1:27-28; Gal 2:20; cf. also Jn 15:1-11). This relationship Paul also affirms in his description of the Church as the one body of Christ. This description is integrally linked with the presence of Christ in the eucharist. Those who share in the supper of the Lord are one body in Christ because they all partake of the one bread (1 Cor 10:16-17 and 12:23-30). This description underlines the intimate, organic relationship which exists between the Risen Lord and all those who receive new life through communion with him. Equally it emphasizes the organic relationship thus established among the members of the one body, the Church. All who share in the "holy things" of the sacramental life are made holy through them: because they share in them together they are in communion with each other.

International Commission for Anglican-Orthodox Theological Dialogue (ICAOTD)

***The Moscow Statement* (1976)**

23. The eucharistic understanding of the Church affirms the presence of Jesus Christ in the Church, which is his Body, and in the Eucharist. Through the action of the Holy Spirit, all faithful communicants share in the one Body of Christ, and become one body in him.

24. The Eucharist actualizes the Church. The Christian community has a basic sacramental character. The Church can be described as a synaxis or an ecclesia, which is, in its essence, a worshipping and eucharistic assembly. The Church is not only built up by the Eucharist, but is also a condition for it. Therefore one must be a believing member of the Church in order to receive the Holy Communion. The Church celebrating the Eucharist becomes fully itself; that is koinonia, fellowship - communion. The Church celebrates the Eucharist as the central act of its existence, in which the ecclesial community, as a living reality confessing its faith, receives its realization.

25. Through the consecratory prayer, addressed to the Father, the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of the glorified Christ by the action of the Holy Spirit in such a way that the faithful people of God receiving Christ may feed upon him in the sacrament (1 Cor. 10.16). Thus the Church depends upon the action of the Holy Spirit and is the visible community in which the Spirit is known.

VII The Invocation of the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist

29. The Eucharist is the action of the Holy Trinity. The Father gives the Body and the Blood of Christ by the descent of the Holy Spirit to the Church in response to the Church's prayer. The Liturgy is this prayer for the eucharistic gifts to be given. It is in this context that the invocation of the Holy Spirit should be understood. The operation of the Holy Spirit is essential to the Eucharist whether it is explicitly expressed or not. When it is articulated, the 'Epiclesis' voices the work of the Spirit with the Father in the consecration of the elements as the Body and Blood of Christ.

30. The consecration of the bread and the wine results from the whole sacramental liturgy. The act of consecration includes certain proper and appropriate moments - thanksgiving, anamnesis, Epiclesis. The deepest understanding of the hallowing of the elements rejects any theory of consecration by formula - whether by Words of Institution or Epiclesis.¹ For the Orthodox the culminating and decisive moment in the consecration is the Epiclesis.

31. The unity of the members of the Church is renewed by the Spirit in the eucharistic act. The Spirit comes not only upon the elements, but upon the community. The Epiclesis is a double invocation: by the invocation of the Spirit, the members of Christ are fed by his Body and Blood so that they may grow in holiness and may be strong to manifest Christ to the world and to do his work in the power of the Spirit. 'We hold this treasure in earthen vessels.' The reception of the Holy Gifts calls for repentance and obedience. Christ judges the sinful members of the Church. The time is always at hand when judgement must begin at the household of God (2 Cor. 4.7; 1 Pet. 4.17).

32. Although Epiclesis has a special meaning in the Eucharist, we must not restrict the concept to the Eucharist alone. In every sacrament, prayer and blessing the Church invokes the Holy Spirit and in all these various ways calls upon him to sanctify the whole creation. The Church is that Community which lives by continually invoking the Holy Spirit.

The Church of the Triune God (2006)

17. When bishops, or presbyters as representatives of the bishop, celebrate the Eucharist, they build up ecclesial unity. In the Eucharist the people Priesthood, Christ and the Church of God are in a constant personal and communal relation to Christ, the risen Lord. Since earliest times ordinations have been liturgically and theologically inseparable from eucharistic communion. The fact that the eucharistic gathering is the exclusive setting of ministerial ordinations asserts that the priesthood belongs to the eucharistic community. Priesthood exists for the community; that is why every ordination takes place within the context of the eucharistic assembly. The people of God, gathered together in eucharistic communion, constitutes the basis for ordained priestly ministry.

18. This understanding of ordination has implications of paramount importance both for a theology of priesthood and for an understanding of its role for ecclesial unity. We must first stress that the Eucharist is indispensable for our spiritual well-being, as a sacrament decisive for our ecclesial existence. As such it should not be seen as an objectified rite, disconnected from our corporate identity, but as springing from the community itself. The Eucharist should

be understood as a gift to the community, to both minister and people. In this sense the Eucharist is not the action of an ordained individual but that of a community; it is celebrated by priest and people together. The Eucharist is a liturgical action which is the work of the people, not of a minister apart from the ecclesial community. Ultimately the celebrant of the Eucharist is Christ himself, acting through the presiding bishop or presbyter and the community to build up the body of Christ.

19. The priestly president of the eucharistic assembly exercises an iconic ministry. As the Dublin Agreed Statement made plain, 'In the Eucharist the eternal priesthood of Christ is constantly manifested in time. The celebrant, in the liturgical action, has a twofold ministry: as an icon of Christ, acting in the name of Christ towards the community and also as a representative of the community expressing the priesthood of the faithful' (DAS p.56). In the context of the Eucharist, the bishop or presbyter stands for Christ in a particular way. In taking bread and wine, giving thanks, breaking, and giving, the priest is configured to Christ at the Last Supper. The president draws together the life and prayer of the baptised, and offers them to the Father with the bread and wine. In the eucharistic prayer, the offering of praise and thanksgiving for the mighty deeds of God, culminating in the sacrifice of the paschal mystery, is offered for all creation. Received by the Father, the gifts of bread and wine are returned in the Holy Spirit as Christ's risen life, his body and blood, the bread of heaven and the cup of salvation. In the eucharistic action, the Church is renewed in its prayer and self-offering as the priestly people of God.

20. We wish to stress again that priesthood cannot exist apart from the community. It is not an authority or a power above the community, nor a function or office parallel to or outside it. Priesthood is intrinsically related to the eucharistic offering, the central empowering event and source of unity of the ecclesial community. This means that local communities find their unity in their priest, through whom the local community forms a eucharistic body, sacramentally linked and canonically united with the catholic fullness of the Church. Through the gift of grace given to the ordained person, ecclesial unity and catholicity is realised in a particular place as eucharistic participation. Priesthood exists, then, as a gift of grace which belongs, not to individuals in their own right, but to persons who are dedicated to serving the community. The words of Christ addressed to his disciples are significant, and clearly describe the true character of priestly service: 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came, not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many'(Matthew 20.25-28).

Draft Brief to ACC18

A paper on *Virtual Communion and the Covid-19 Pandemic* from members of the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation

What is this about?

Virtual Communion and the Covid-19 Pandemic is a paper produced by a small group of members of the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation at the request of the Primates' Meeting to consider what, if any, variations in the normal celebration of the Eucharist by the gathered people of God might be acceptable in the circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic. It particularly explores the opportunities provided by technology for virtual engagement in worship.

The Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Unity, Faith and Order (IASCUFO) has considered the paper, confirmed its conclusions, and commended it to the Primates, who now in turn commend it to the ACC. IASCUFO recommends that it be read within the wider context of Anglican understandings of the Eucharist, to give a fuller grounding for its reasoning. Appendices give texts from the Anglican tradition and ecumenical agreed statements that provide some of this wider context.

What questions does this address?

The paper considers various options that worshipping communities, unable to meet in person but able to gather via electronic means, have pursued during the pandemic. These range from abstaining completely from eucharistic celebration until able to gather again, through spiritual communion, to the priest (and household) alone receiving communion, to suggestions of 'remote' consecration of elements.

The paper then considers questions that arise from remote participation in the Eucharist, drawing on traditional Anglican and wider understandings and practices. Recognising that some form of virtual service may sometimes be the best available option, it makes recommendations on what can be commended, such as Services of the Word; and what should be discouraged. The latter includes the president alone receiving the consecrated elements, and any form of 'remote consecration' or use of bread and wine at home.

Why is it important?

Right celebration of the sacrament of Eucharist, Holy Communion, is one of the central pillars of Anglican understanding, in accordance with the continuous tradition of the Church. This is underlined in the third provision of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral:

- iii. The two sacraments ordained by Christ himself – Baptism and the Supper of the Lord – ministered with the unfailing use of Christ's words of institution, and of the elements ordained by him.

Any variation from such norms, for example by using alternatives to the bread and wine, has therefore always been resisted.

The paper judges that some practices suggested as ways of responding to the Covid-19 pandemic, including any proposal for 'remote consecration', are not consistent with Anglican theology and practice, and so should be discouraged. Again, IASCUFO strongly endorses these conclusions.

The paper proposes resources to help clergy and communities better understand the importance of, and reasoning for, these conclusions. There might also be consideration of spiritual practices of abstinence and fasting, as ways of aligning with others suffering deprivation of various forms.

What is ACC asked to do?

ACC is asked to consider the following draft Resolution:

The Anglican Consultative Council

- Welcomes the paper *Virtual Communion and the Covid-19 Pandemic*
- Commends the report to the Churches of the Anglican Communion, for study and adoption;
- Affirms the recommendations expressed as 'Suggestions for a way forward' and endorses the view that any sort of 'virtual consecration' is not consistent with Anglican theology and practice of the celebration of the Eucharist, and is therefore to be discouraged;
- Asks the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation to develop resources to help clergy and communities consider the theological and liturgical issues relating to this issue;
- Invites the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation to undertake a wider study of the use of virtual space, social media and digital engagement, in relation to worship and Christian community;
- Encourages the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation to consider how spiritual practices of fasting and abstinence, including from participation in the Eucharist, may offer positive ways for aligning in solidarity with those who suffer deprivation of any sort.