Guidelines for the Celebration of Holy Eucharist during the COVID-19 Pandemic

“I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus . . . so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end . . .” 1 Corinthians 1:4-8

I can think of no better way to express my gratitude for your ongoing ministry, in the face of this unprecedented challenge, than these hope-filled words of St Paul. I hope you will be encouraged to continue to seek new and creative ways to be the Church; take hold of the promise given to you, that by God’s grace and in Christ, “you are not lacking in any gift . . . [Christ] will sustain you to the end.” Please, also take to heart my request to look after your own health so that you can continue to minister to your flock.

Now that all in-person public worship has been suspended in our diocese, I wanted to give you some guidelines that might assist you as we await the end of our time of ‘quarantine’ for the good of our neighbors.

The Celebration of Holy Eucharist

You are permitted to celebrate Holy Eucharist. Anglican theology and liturgy teach that an authorized minister can preside at a celebration of Holy Eucharist, provided that is not done as a private individual, but as part of a community of believers. This means that at least three persons must be present (the priest and two witnesses). This celebration can be done at the priest’s home or in a church building and live streamed or as a pre-recorded broadcast.

Remember, Anglican theology never makes the weekly reception of communion necessary to discipleship or the constitution of the Church. In fact, many of our smaller faith communities do not celebrate a service of Holy Eucharist weekly even in the best of times. This hardship may very well endear in us a deep and abiding longing for Holy Communion as we anticipate the time when we can once more come together to share the sacrament of Christ’s Body and Blood.

Live Stream Participation

Although it is acceptable to live-stream or broadcast a service of Holy Eucharist, this does not mean that those watching in their own homes are sharing communion; they are watching you participate in Holy Communion. There is no magical way that you can consecrate bread and wine on the tables of everyone watching your service. Please do not encourage any activity that would suggest otherwise. Placing unconsecrated bread and wine before a computer or television screen detracts from our liturgical understanding of the Eucharist and promotes a magical
interpretation. The BCP rubrics make it very clear that we are only consecrating what is before us:

*At the following words concerning the bread, the Celebrant is to hold it, or to lay a hand upon it; and at the words concerning the cup, to hold or place a hand upon the cup and any other vessel containing wine to be consecrated.*

Therefore, rather than inviting your people to share breads and wine in their own homes at the same time as your celebration of Holy Eucharist, I prefer that you encourage a spiritual communion (see the resources on our web page) and then invite your people to use the prayers of blessing over their food as provided for in the Book of Occasional Services, pages 95-96. I believe that this will encourage participation without confusing our people about what is taking place.

**Pray the Daily Office**

I encouraged you to make the Daily Office an obligation at our Clergy Conference a few weeks ago. I am delighted to see so many of you praying the Office in your homes. Please, keep this up. I am convinced that spending time in the rhythm of prayer and Scripture will transform your ministry and bear much fruit in the life of our Diocese. Encourage your people to join in with your daily routine. As you know, we have chosen not to broadcast a Diocesan Sunday service in order to promote community at the local level. I am certain that our people gain much comfort by hearing your familiar voice. Mission House staff will continue to offer noonday prayers Monday – Friday, and I encourage you to share this with your people and make this an opportunity for us all to pray together as a diocese rather than repeating this service at each faith community.

**Making a Lament to God**

We face a crisis. It is right and good to call on God’s aid at such a time. Fr Matthew SC Olver, Professor for Liturgy at Nashota House has recommended praying the Supplication which can be used especially in times of war, national anxiety, or of disaster. Call on the cloud of witnesses to give us succor at this time of crisis. *‘Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us . . . ‘*. Hebrews 12:1-2

**Worship Resources**

Go to the DioLex webpage [http://diolink.org/diolex/index.php/covid-19/](http://diolink.org/diolex/index.php/covid-19/) to find many useful resources for liturgy and worship. We have material for spiritual communion, the Supplication, a Virginia Theological Seminary webinar on Holy Week and Easter services, and much more. If you have a particularly helpful resource, please share it by sending it to Courtney Buterbaugh at communications@diolex.org
Remember, we will present new information and answer your questions each week in a live broadcast from Mission House. These fireside chats will be held on Thursday at 12:15 following noonday prayers. If you missed the first session, you can find it here: https://www.facebook.com/diolexky/videos/627480991142311/?t=0

As always, if you have any questions, please reach out.

In Christ,

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