



GUIDELINES:

Online Gathering for Worship with Holy Communion



Guidelines: Online Gathering for Worship with Holy Communion

These guidelines are for communities who desire to gather online for worship and to experience the presence of Christ, be nurtured in faith and “strengthened for their participation in the mission of Christ in the world”, through the celebration of Holy Communion (Basis of Union, par 8).

Introduction

- Permission for Online Gatherings of Worship with Holy Communion is a temporary pastoral measure for the period of COVID-19 isolation measures, and the ASC advises that they are no longer to be used subsequent to that period. This permission and these guidelines cease to be valid until the end of November 2021 unless the ASC determines otherwise.
- No congregation is required to offer Online Gatherings for Worship with Communion. Congregations may, for good pastoral and theological reasons, choose instead to ‘fast’ from Holy Communion for a period of time, or to use liturgies which do not replace the liturgy of Holy Communion, but provide a specific time within the service for the remembrance and celebration of the saving activity of God through Jesus Christ. Further thoughts including the theological rationale for these two alternatives to Communion will be found in the accompanying “Resource for Theological Discernment. The decision whether to offer Online Gatherings for Worship with Holy Communion is the responsibility of the Church Council with the Minister.

Preparation and Setting

- A Service of Online Gathering for Worship with Holy Communion takes place where there is an authentic gathering of the community, with the intention that that community gathers for worship, hears the Word and takes part in the Sacrament together as one body.
- A Minister or duly authorised Lay Presider will lead the liturgy.
- A Service of Online Gathering for Worship with Holy Communion should take the form of a “Service of the Lord’s Day”, including the elements which have been indicated as being “essential for a full diet of worship” (UiW2, p8). In particular it is important that the Sacrament is offered alongside the Service of the Word.



- Online participants should be advised beforehand of the nature of the elements they should have with them for the service. Decisions regarding whether the bread used is leavened or unleavened, pre-cut or an unbroken loaf, and whether the wine used is fermented or unfermented are the responsibility of the minister or presider with the Church Council. (See UiW2, p143, Note 20. See also “Wine of the Lord’s Table” on the Assembly website.) In order to show appropriate reverence for the elements, participants should be advised to prepare only what is required and that any leftover after the service might be reverently consumed.

During the Service

- The liturgy should acknowledge the exceptional circumstances in which the service is taking place, noting with regret the things which are absent – the tangible physical presence of the whole community, the possibility of a physical distribution of the elements to all the gathered people. At the same time the liturgy should remind the community of the ongoing presence of Christ and the hope which is our Christian inheritance – that even in these difficult times, Christ communes with us.
- The invitation to the table should acknowledge that there may be participants who will choose to abstain from taking the elements in this context, and that they too continue to be held in the love of Christ and of this community.
- Other than the points noted above, the Minister or Presider should follow the authorised liturgy for Communion and in particular will lead the verbal parts of the liturgy normally prescribed for the Presider.
- The Presider should perform the blessing of the elements they have with them, before inviting online participants to take up the elements before them.

Resources

- Along with these Guidelines, the Assembly has made available a “[Resource for Theological Discernment](#)” which will assist Ministers and Church Councils to make a decision regarding whether they wish to offer Online Gatherings for Worship with Holy Communion, or not.
- An example of an alternative liturgy which is not a Communion liturgy is the “[Liturgy of Empty Hands](#)” which has been developed by Rev Dr Amelia Koh-Butler and has been adopted by a number of international ecumenical bodies. There are a number of other alternative liturgies available online including a “[Love Feast](#)” liturgy provided by the United Methodist Church.