



The Episcopal Diocese of Western North Carolina

April 7, 2022

Dear Friends in Christ,

Two years ago, I wrote to you to announce that public in-person worship in the Diocese of Western North Carolina would be suspended through May, as we came to grips with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, thereby limiting our observances of Holy Week and our celebration of Easter Day to worship that we could offer online. Beginning in late May of 2020, we initiated a return to public in-person worship, albeit with significant restrictions. Over time, we have gradually eased our restrictions on public in-person worship, each of our worshiping communities doing so at their own pace.

Now, as we once again approach Holy Week and Easter, I write to you to refine the remaining restrictions on our practices of worship. Effective immediately, I authorize the restoration of using the Common Cup at Communion. Detailed in the accompanying guidelines, congregational leadership will once again have the option of distributing the wine of communion by a shared chalice.

The initial restriction of sharing the Common Cup was due in large part because we didn't have sufficient scientific knowledge about this particular Covid virus and most health experts leaned toward an abundance of caution. Now, two years later, with the availability of vaccines and infection and hospitalization rates much lower, we can consider safely returning to using the Common Cup.

I know many will want to have on hand any relevant scientific data or widely shared "best practices" from medical and public-health experts, I offer the following:

- In an editorial review on Eucharistic practices recently [published by PubMed for NIH in 2020](#), the authors note that in the long history of communities sharing the Common Cup – a worldwide practice – there is, and always has been, the theoretical and potential risk for the transmission of some microorganisms. However, there is no public health evidence of outbreaks or transmission from the common cup.
- Several medical and public-health studies, including this one by [The Journal of Environmental Health](#) reveal that intinction by the Eucharistic Minister does not eliminate all risk of infection, but it does reduce it over that of sipping from a common communion cup. The cleanliness of the minister's hands appears to be a significant factor.

Despite this information, for some, it will seem as if we are rushing too quickly, and they will choose to wait for a time. For others, this will be a welcome option. However, one thing is certain: as we all adapt to a world that includes COVID-19 for the foreseeable future, gathering at the table to receive bread and wine made holy remains a source of strength and inspiration, as it has from the earliest days of the church.

In whatever ways you will observe Holy Week this year, I hope that you hear the words of Jesus from the thirteenth chapter of John's gospel.

After his meal with them, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, in an act of servanthood, and then said to them, "For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you." (John 13:15) Later, after Judas had gone out, he said to them, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35)

I pray that by our words and by our actions, our neighborhoods, communities and the wider world will know of God's saving love.

Faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'José A. McLoughlin', written in a cursive style.

The Rt. Rev. José A. McLoughlin
Bishop, Diocese of Western North Carolina

Guidelines
The Episcopal Diocese of Western North Carolina
April 7, 2022

Local Leadership

- As stated in previous guidelines throughout the pandemic, while clergy have sole authority over parish liturgy, they are encouraged to work in consultation with vestry leadership in the oversight and planning of local protocols for worship, within the rubrics of authorized liturgical resources and the guidelines of the Diocese of Western North Carolina published here and in the future.
- In establishing protocols for their congregation, church leadership should regularly monitor the prevalence of COVID-19 within their own county. The Center for Disease Control provides a useful, regularly updated resource for this purpose, one that includes recommended steps for preventing the spread of COVID. This resource is titled COVID-19 by County and can be found at the following [link](#).
- There may be times when church leadership should properly decide to implement more restrictive protocol for their congregational life for a time, including protocols regarding physical spacing and masking. Remember to communicate effectively with the members of your congregation!
- Congregations are still welcome to offer a variety of alternatives for their people, including worship options that are in-person or online, indoors or outdoors.
- In all decisions, congregations should carefully consider the needs of those who are most vulnerable, including our children, those who are immunocompromised and those who cannot be vaccinated, for one reason or another.
- Congregational members should be reminded to stay home when they are sick, and in all things to be respectful of others whose choices might be different than their own.

Celebrating the Holy Eucharist

- When “setting the table” for the Eucharist, besides the bread there should be a single chalice along with a single cruet/flagon of an appropriate size to contain enough wine for distribution to the whole congregation. Congregations may now return to the use of the Common Cup and over the next eight (8) weeks begin to phase out and end the practice of individual cups by Sunday, June 5, 2022, the Feast of Pentecost.

The use of the Common Cup is central to the ecclesial and liturgical theology of The Episcopal Church. It powerfully symbolizes our membership in the Body of Christ and our call to mutual vulnerability, depth of community, and open self-offering one to another.

- As a sign of hospitality, efforts should always be made to minimize the number of people having contact with Eucharistic vessels or elements. The use of hand sanitizer should still be expected for those involved in celebrations of the Eucharist.
- In the distribution of the bread and wine of communion, there may be as many stations as needed, whether at the altar rail or at other appropriate places around the gathering space. Optimally, those preferring to maintain physical spacing will be given an appropriate option for receiving communion.
- Congregations are encouraged to return to offering wine at communion if they have not yet done so. Wine is to be distributed in one or more of the following ways:
 - By sipping from a shared chalice, served by properly trained Eucharistic ministers using the best practices of turning and wiping the chalice after each person.
 - By intinction, *only when* the priest, deacon or properly trained Eucharistic minister dips the bread into the wine themselves, and then places the elements directly in the recipients' hands. The recipients are not to directly intinct.

Note: A congregation may certainly choose not to offer intinction.

- Recognizing that people have varying levels of comfort during a continuing pandemic, I want to be clear that no one is required to drink from the chalice. Members of our worshiping communities should be reminded that receiving communion in one form only is always an option, and that they may individually refrain from sharing the wine of communion until they are ready. Remember that Communion in one kind is efficacious.

Other Practices

- All other congregational practices with respect to worship, formation ministries and fellowship should be planned in keeping with relevant CDC guidelines. Due caution should be exercised to protect the health and well-being of all who will attend.

Guidelines are effective as of April 7, 2022, and will remain in effect until such time as they are replaced or removed.