



# The Episcopal Diocese of Virginia | Communion Guidelines

*April 2024*

When the COVID-19 outbreak occurred, there were immediate questions and concerns about how the virus was transmitted and the safety of gathering, and these questions and concerns necessarily impacted our liturgical practices, including communion distribution.

According to the Book of Common Prayer: “Opportunity should be given to every communicant to receive the consecrated bread and wine separately,” adding that “the Sacrament may [also] be received in both kinds simultaneously, in a manner approved by the Bishop” (pp. 407-408). The uncertainties that we faced early on in the pandemic, however, led most dioceses to restrict the manner in which consecrated wine was offered. In some dioceses the restriction was absolute, and only consecrated bread was offered. These decisions were not made lightly, and were motivated by a desire to err on the side of caution. Through it all, we were reminded by theologians and pastors alike from all over the world – including our Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry – that the Church has long held the understanding that receiving Communion in one kind is fully sufficient.

As we adjusted to the realities of the pandemic, we did so in faithful expectation of the day where we might reclaim full Eucharistic participation in a manner that upholds the covenantal relationships between bishops, priests, and people, and lives into our shared Eucharistic theology. Now that we find ourselves in what may be considered a post-pandemic reality, we ought once again revisit the guidelines for our communion practices.

Going forward, and in all cases, the health of our congregants and community members remains of the utmost concern, and certain circumstances will require special consideration, such as administering communion to persons in nursing homes, persons in hospitals, or persons with particular physical ailments.

- All baptized Christians are welcome to receive communion, in accordance with Canon I.17.7 of the General Convention. Episcopalians invite all baptized people to receive, not because we take the Eucharist lightly, but because we take our Baptism so seriously.



- Those who are not baptized Christians are welcome to come forward during communion to receive a blessing from a priest or bishop or prayers from a deacon or lay intercessor.
- At no time should a person be questioned at the point of receiving Holy Eucharist as to their baptismal status.
- Gluten-free hosts/bread may be offered as an alternative to gluten-full hosts/bread but should not be the only offering.
- A single chalice containing wine should be placed on the altar for the Eucharistic Prayer. One or more flagons or cruets containing wine may be placed on the altar as necessary, in order to fill any needed additional chalices at the conclusion of the Prayer.
- The common cup should be offered and received in the traditional fashion (i.e., sipping directly from the common cup) for each communicant by a clergy person or lay chalice bearer/administrator. The chalice shall be carefully wiped with a purificator where a communicant's mouth has made contact with the cup (inside and outside edge), rotating after each person receives.
  - In 2020, a global public health coalition issued a report (found [here](#)) containing the following: *Currently available data do not provide any support for the suggestion that the practice of sharing a common communion cup can contribute to the spread of COVID-19.*
  - In 2021, an epidemiological study written for the Anglican Church of Canada (found [here](#)) concluded the following: *While it's true a shared cup could transmit infection through saliva, the risk is extremely low, with no documented cases of any disease ever being spread that way. In the case of COVID-19 the risk is even lower because it's spread by aerosols and droplets: the fact is, the risk of catching COVID is far greater from breathing air exhaled by an infectious person next to you than from sharing a common cup.*
- The use of individual cups is no longer authorized. The common cup remains normative in the Episcopal Church as a matter of tradition and our shared sacramental theology.
- If intinction is made available, the clergy person or lay chalice bearer/administrator should dip the edge of the host or bread in the wine and then carefully place it on the tongue or in the hand of the person receiving communion. Other procedures that live into the spirit of this direction may be developed in a local context. All efforts should be made to minimize the number of fingers potentially coming into contact with wine that is to be consumed by mouth.
  - The practice of intinction has long been discouraged by medical authorities due to its own risk potential. Clergy and chalice bearers can attest to the frequency with which communicants who intinct inadvertently dip their



fingertips into the wine. Intinction then holds a higher risk than drinking directly from the common cup, because fingers (and fingernails) are a repository for pathogens not found in saliva. See “Eucharistic practice and the risk of infection” by David H. Gould found [here](#).

- It should be made clear that all baptized persons *may*, but no person *must*, receive communion in both kinds to receive the fullness of Christ’s body and blood. Our theology holds reception in one-kind (e.g., the bread alone) as full and complete.

These guidelines are written in an effort to comply with the expectations of the Canons of the General Convention, the Book of Common Prayer, and the traditions and Eucharistic theology of the Episcopal Church. We encourage you to reach out to the Bishop’s Office with questions and concerns, and, as always, give great thanks for your perseverance and faithfulness in the face of our continually changing landscape.