

CHAPTER 13

The Communion

The people and presiding priest share the gifts of God

The rubrics make clear that the Invitation takes place before any (including the presider) have received communion. For the Invitation the presider may hold the bread in one hand and the cup in the other, or the deacon may hold the cup and the presider the bread.

If necessary the invitation could be expanded to, for example, "All who are baptised, whether you are Anglican or not, whether you are an infant, youth or adult, all are welcome to draw near and receive ..."

When the invitation to communion has been made, the congregation begins to move forward immediately. While the congregation moves forward the presider and assistants receive communion as unostentatiously as other members of the assembly would be expected to do. Those at the altar receive standing.

When the presider and assistant(s) communicate each other all are seen to be given communion by someone else. Those assisting with administering communion can themselves take the vessels from the altar rather than needing to be handed them by the presider. It is convenient to have two persons administering chalices for each person distributing the bread.

When there is a small gathering, communicants may administer the sacrament to one another (page 517). In this case the presider could receive last.

The whole congregation moving forward to receive, referred to as the "communion procession," is an ancient element of the liturgy. It may be accompanied by the singing of a simple, memorable refrain. Such corporate singing heightens the sense of unity evoked by a procession of the whole people of God. Alternatively, a cantor or choir could lead singing, with the congregation joining the refrain. Ushers are generally unnecessary to help such a procession. If ushers are used they should encourage people forward rather than give the

appearance of holding people back. There needs to be sensitivity to any in the congregation who are not coming forward to receive communion.

To facilitate the smooth movement of the procession several people need to assist in distributing communion when numbers are large (at least one person administering bread for every hundred communicants). Even in small congregations someone assisting the presider to distribute communion is desirable. Whenever possible, lay people assist in administering communion. While traditionally the presider is one of those who administers the bread, reserving administration of the consecrated bread to the ordained while the laity administer the chalice has no theological rationale.

Those receiving communion do so either standing or kneeling (page 517). Communion rails, originally there to protect the altar, are being used less and less. Either receiving around the holy table (as much as the architecture will allow!) or receiving from "stations" is now more common. When "stations" are used, care needs be taken that the distance between the altar and those distributing communion is not so great that the sense of meal and the relationship between table and communion is lost. In any case a space between the person distributing the bread and the one distributing the wine allows time to chew the bread before receiving the wine.

The Prayer Book instructs that the bread and the cup are given into the hands of the people (page 517). Four different sentences of administration are provided (pages 427, 472, 489). Their brevity has been designed so that the communicant is able to respond "Amen" before receiving communion in every case. There was a practice, sometimes seen in the past, of a communicant receiving only part of the sentence of administration as the priest moved from communicant to communicant. The rubrics clearly see this as not acceptable.

The bread is received with one hand on top of the other. This avoids crumbs falling between cupped hands, or the bread crumbling if received between the thumb and forefingers.

When administering the bread, gestures such as signs of the cross, squeezing of hands, or breaking the wafer in the communicant's hands can detract from and confuse the primary symbolism of receiving.

Young children can receive communion in the same manner as adults.

Some children will wish to receive only the bread. Babies not yet on solids might receive a little wine from the tip of a finger, or from bread intincted in the chalice. Infants can receive a small piece of bread (which may have been intincted in the wine). Parents may normally be the appropriate persons to administer communion to their infants. The words of administration of the sacrament are the same for children as for adults.

In the event of there being insufficient bread and/or wine for the number of communicants, the presider consecrates more using the form provided on page 428 (see also page 516). In this form, as the word "also" indicates, this is not a "separate" consecration but includes the additional bread and wine with that over which the Great Thanksgiving was offered. Hence the rubrics make clear that this supplementary consecration also occurs at the altar (and not, for example, at the credence) and is to be done by the presider and not by a concelebrating presbyter. The form need be said only loud enough for an assistant to pronounce the concluding "Amen." It is not necessary that distribution of communion by others be interrupted. The Prayer Book anticipates that all will receive bread and wine consecrated at that celebration of the Eucharist rather than from the reserved sacrament.

After communion the deacon(s) and lay persons who take communion to those ill or house-bound can receive the consecrated bread and wine to take with them. They may be sent with words such as: "N and N who are not able to be with us are one with us in the Body of Christ. Therefore we send you to take them the sacrament which we have shared."

Some Questions

In your experience is it possible to have both a strong sense of reverence and of community at communion time?

Which suggestions in this chapter would you like to see introduced in your community and which would you be uncomfortable with and why?

Are there other suggestions that you have?