

## Options for Communion in a Time of Pestilence *with thanks to Bishop Steve Breedlove*

Understand that there are many times and places in Church history where partaking in communion was not possible.

- Times of persecution and martyrdom
- Times of imprisonment
- Times of famine
- Times of sickness
- Times of warfare
- While we have a high view of communion and its efficacy for imparting grace, God is not limited or bound to the physical partaking of the elements as a means mediating his grace into our lives. To be precise, we dwell within a state of grace in Christ: Romans 5:1-2.
- There is historical precedent for receiving communion in substance without partaking of the elements at all.<sup>1</sup>
- To “fast” from taking communion may be an extended discipline in this season that can (1) call us to seek and hunger for the Lord in deeper ways and (2) clearly enable us to testify that we are doing all we can to love our neighbors by “flattening the curve” of the rate of COVID-19 infection.

Having said that, it is hard for many of us to imagine not offering communion, at least on some rotation, to those who knowingly and willingly take the risk that any participation in the exchange of elements could expose them to infection.

### **When and if you do offer communion:**

- In our tradition, only a priest can consecrate the elements in the context of celebrating communion.
  - If a deacon, or other designated person is permitted to preside, it can only be with pre-consecrated elements consecrated by a priest in a proper Eucharistic service.
- You cannot celebrate communion without the celebrant being physically present in the same room / space as the elements when they are consecrated. (You cannot consecrate the elements of communion “virtually” or by words spoken over cyberspace.)
- Clearly remind people that, no matter how it is physically done, there is a risk in receiving communion. Consecrating the elements does not guarantee purity for the hands of the celebrant, the servers, or the steps of the actual distribution process.
- During this season of pestilence, you are permitted to only serve communion in one kind (i.e., bread only).
  - However, remember that you are to consecrate both enough bread to serve the needs of all the recipients, plus a small amount of wine in the chalice. The priest (alone) is to partake of the wine.
- Because of the restrictions on the size of gatherings, a workable way of distributing consecrated bread must be established. Some ideas might be:
  - Offering small baggies of consecrated bread or wafers, to be fully consumed by the participants.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the practice of the early church in the desert, where the elements were placed in a container and the recipients received the elements from the container.

- Allowing people to drive past the place where you've celebrated communion for an hour after the service in order to be served communion by a clergy or Lay Eucharistic Minister.
    - The recipient must be given the bread without risk of being contaminated or contaminating the yet-to-be distributed elements.
  - Taking and distributing consecrated communion elements to small groups, homes, families, and individuals.
- Of course, all of these run the risk of bringing people into physical contact. Needless to say, in any effort to celebrate and distribute communion in real time, extreme measures of hygiene and sterilization must be taken at all steps.
- Another option would be celebrating communion in real time in small groups of ten or less. In this regard, some variations of the above instructions can be practiced. But again (need I say it more), extreme hygiene and sanitation is a highest priority.