



THE DIOCESE
OF VIRGINIA

Clergy Zoom Meeting August 12, 2020

Opening Prayer

Opening Reflection by Bishop Goff

In this 22nd week of Extraordinary Time, we gather today with a format that is modified from our usual. We will begin with no more than 15 minutes of Q and A about phased regathering.

Then we will have a presentation on sharing the sacrament of holy communion during pandemic. After the presentation, you'll be sent to chat rooms with Eucharist Task Force members to share your thoughts or questions.

This is a different way to use the Zoom technology and may be risky, since Erin Kamran, our tech guru who supports these meetings is on vacation this week. I ask your patience if there are glitches.

Before our Q and A, I offer a few reflections:

1. We bishops and canons of the church met with Dr. Anthony Fauci yesterday via ZOOM. One of the messages he urged us to share as widely as we can is that this pandemic will end. He is optimistic that there will be a safe and effective vaccine. The dynamic of this outbreak will turn around. So we need to hold onto hope and not let down our guard because of fear or exhaustion, frustration or hopelessness.
2. This pandemic will end, and it will be a while yet until it does. We need to keep breathing, keep working, keep resting and keep praying.
3. If you have taken a vacation, well done. If you haven't, I hope you've got one scheduled. If you don't have one scheduled, please do. You not only need a break and a rest, you deserve one and you've earned one.
4. Your bishops are aware that when there are spikes of anxiety because of something in the news, because of something we have written or said, or for any reasons, you are on the front lines of anger or hurt from members of your congregations. Some of you have been on the receiving end of verbal attacks. Let's keep being supportive and attentive to each other in these times. We can't control the spikes of anxiety. We can manage how we care for ourselves and for each other in the hard times.

You are remarkably resilient. God continue to bless you with courage and strength, with stamina and hope for the super marathon that we are still running.

Comments and Q&A

Ted Smith shared that there has been a recent spate of thefts of checks from parish mailboxes. He advised that you either secure them with a locking mailbox or have your mail held at your post office for periodic pickup.

Q&A

The diocesan health markers appear to show the 7-day average but you're asking us to look for a 14 day rolling average. Where can we find that? **You will note that the diocesan tracker shows this: Compared to last week, the 7-day average of new cases is rising. Compared to two weeks ago, the 7-day average of new cases is rising. The second data point, compared to two weeks ago, is what will give you that 14-day rolling average.**

What about worship communities using their space who have been told by their judicatory that they must begin in-person worship? **We remain consistent: any worshipping communities that use space in Episcopal churches must follow the guidelines that the Diocese of Virginia has set.**

Any guidance concerning internal reviews and audits? **We are coming up with some guidelines in the near future so you will know how you can do them safely. You've got some breathing room. Due date for audits is Aug 31st, but if you don't make that date, don't worry about it.**

May we send in our proposals for phased regathering prior to the health markers being met in our health district? **Yes – you can do so and receive conditional approval – we'd encourage you to do that!**

May we bring more than ten people into the church so that we can stage or practice worship for our phase two plans? **Not at this time. At this point, the maximum remains at ten people.**

We have a parish dinner in the fall. May we do it using takeout food? **We'd suggest you plan for various options and see where you are (health markers in your area, for example) for your parish dinner- takeout is certainly a possibility.**

Any update on guidance about office workers? **As per last week's guidance: we would say not yet for everyone, all the time. Our guidance is this: those who have tasks that can only be done in the office should do them there and stay only long enough to do those tasks. Follow all distancing/masking/sanitation and hygiene protocols. Our primary aim is safety.**

We turn now to our presentation on the Eucharist in the time of Pandemic.

Two overarching goals guide the work we are doing around communion:

To honor our Eucharistic theology and practice in the midst of the faith community, and

To keep everyone safe and healthy, so that no will become ill because we share communion with each other.

Bishop Porter Taylor will begin the presentation.

Liturgy in the Time of Covid 19 **Bishop Porter Taylor**

Liturgy matters to Episcopalians. Indeed, our fundamental statement of identity is “the law of prayer is the law of belief.” When someone asks an Episcopalian about our core belief, the common answer is like our Lord's: “Come and see.” We invite people to worship with us to

show them our beliefs. The theologian John Macquarrie wrote, “A sacrament links the two worlds in which we have to live, or rather, as I would prefer to say, the dualities under which the one world keeps appearing.”¹ We go to the altar to eat the bread of heaven and to gather with “angels and archangels and all the company of heaven.” Patrick Malloy writes that “the Eucharist shows the world an image of how human beings live in God’s kingdom.”²

Therefore, there is more at stake in the Eucharistic feast than satiating our individual desire. Instead of only considering our need, as faithful Christians we must remember God’s intention in revealing this sacred meal to faithful people—which is to make us instruments of the divine will so that God’s realm of peace, justice, and mercy might come near. The Eucharist empowers and enlightens us to be sent out “to do the work you have given us to do, to love and serve you as faith witnesses of Christ our Lord” (BCP, 366). This is why we come to the feast and this is why the ordering of the feast is important. It’s not just about our own need. It’s also about God’s need of us to be agents of God’s will. Because of that, the order of the whole Eucharist matters because it’s much more than the distribution of bread and wine. Patrick Malloy writes, the “whole liturgical action is sacramental, not just the bread and wine.”³ Bishop Tom Briedenthal says, “The Eucharistic act cannot be reduced to the reception of the consecrated bread and wine; it is a common act of repentance and trust in God through hearing God’s word whereby we offer ourselves to God in order to be returned to ourselves as the body of Christ.”⁴ We cannot allow our hunger for the Body and Blood of Christ to make us forget the principle purpose of the Eucharist. Indeed, one measure of our faith is our longing for the sacred meal. However, our longing must be deeper. We long for the New Jerusalem. We long for God’s will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Therefore, it’s not about finding innovative ways to get a wafer or a taste of wine. It’s about remembering and being reoriented. “We sit by the shores of Babylon and dream of home” and if we find a quick solace, then our desire for God’s reign diminishes.

Principle One.

Because “the law of praying is the law of believing” the whole liturgy matters. It’s not just the bread and wine. Instead the “liturgy is more than words.”⁵ It is all of the service—including the people gathered. In addition, “the whole liturgical action is sacramental not just the bread and wine.”⁶ We can figure out many ways safely to get people a wafer and perhaps a taste of wine, but if we only focus on those elements, we have diluted the sacrament. It’s about all the actions, the prayers and praises.

Principle Two.

Leonel Mitchell writes, “The principle of common participation by the entire assembly [is] a principle which stands at the very center of the Liturgical movement of the 20th Century.”⁷ The Eucharist is a feast which always means community. Indeed all the sacraments require another person. You cannot bless yourself, absolve yourself, commune yourself, pronounce forgiveness

¹ John Macquarrie, [A Guide to the Sacraments](#), Continuum: New York, 1999.

² Patrick Malloy, [Celebrating the Eucharist: A Practical Ceremonial Guide for Clergy and Other Liturgical Ministers](#). Church Publishing: New York, 2007. Malloy, page 8.

⁴ Tom Briedenthal, Pastoral Letter to the Diocese of Southern Ohio, 2020.

⁵ Malloy, p. 6.

⁶ Malloy, p. 8.

⁷ Leonel Mitchell, [Praying Shapes Believing](#). Harrisburg: Morehouse, 1985, p. 8.

to yourself, baptize yourself, confirm yourself, or marry yourself. Therefore, our attention must not fixate on how individuals can receive the bread and wine by themselves, but rather attend to how the Eucharist can maintain its identity and validity by being communal. We do not seek to be an ecclesial UPS; we seek to remain the Church. James Farwell says, the “oldest theology of the Eucharist is as a sacrament of unity.”⁸ Note that the instructions for “The Distribution of Holy Communion” in The Book of Occasional Services stipulate: “This form for the distribution of Holy Communion by licensed lay persons is intended to foster a corporate sense of the Eucharist...”⁹ Therefore, how can the Church gather the community to reaffirm and rediscover and foster unity as opposed to merely focusing on receiving bread and wine?

Principle Three.

God uses material things. Matter matters. We are embodied souls. There are no virtual sacraments nor virtual people. We can be represented on screens, but the image is not fully us. More importantly, bread is bread and wine is wine and not images of themselves. There is a tangible aspect to the elements that is essential. This is why in both the BCP’s instructions for Eucharistic Visitors as well as the instructions in the BOS for Distribution of Holy Communion insist on taking the elements from the altar to those who cannot come. To be reconnected to the Body is to receive the gifts from the Body.

Principle Four.

The presence of Christ is fully accessible in each sacrament. This principle is called “Concomitance.” Alcoholics practice this each Sunday and this was sufficient before the Reformation. The Dictionary of the Episcopal Church defines “concomitance” this way: “Concomitance is the doctrine that affirms the simultaneous presence of Christ’s body and blood in each of the Eucharistic elements. It contradicts a narrow identification of Christ’s body with the bread and Christ’s blood with the wine. The doctrine of concomitance upholds the truth that the fullness of communion is available by receiving either the consecrated bread or wine. A Prayer Book rubric concerning the administration of Holy Communion to the sick states that “it is suitable to administer the Sacrament in one kind only” if the sick person is unable to receive either the consecrated bread or wine (BCP, p. 457). The doctrine of concomitance affirms that the communicant receives Christ’s body and blood in this situation....The term is from the Latin, “to accompany.””

Task Force Group One, with Shearon Williams presenting

Compilation of Eucharistic Task Force Preliminary Thoughts and Recommendations of Drs Bearman (VCU) and Fauci (NIAID)

Altar Guild Set-Up:

- Wears face masks and uses hand sanitizer, possibly gloves
- Prepares wafers for everyone (rather than bread) and small amount of wine for celebrant only
- Everything placed on credence table or Altar (rather than having a presentation)

Celebrant:

⁸ James Farwell, Conversation, July 9, 2020.

⁹ Book of Occasional Services, p. 284.

- Wears mask and possibly face shield for Eucharistic Prayer. Also uses hand sanitizer, possibly gloves. If no gloves, sanitizes hands before beginning EP and immediately after receiving the priest host and small amount of wine.
- Wafers spread out on tray or put in small individual cups.

Communicants:

- Use hand sanitizer (make available in multiple places)
- Wear masks entire time except when actually consuming the wafer
- Stand 6 feet apart, possibly with marks on the floor when inside

Instructional Videos made available for people to view ahead of time.

Comments from the breakout rooms

There was a sense of fear among some about beginning this practice, and worry that there would be a sense of exclusion for some. This related to a worry that some parishes would be in a position to offer this and others would not, and it would raise questions about the choices. Some clergy were grateful that a clear and consistent message that applied to ALL parishes had protected everyone thus far and this possibility would be confusing. Others felt that having different options depending on context was important.

Some groups were focused on the nuts and bolts: what would the role of the deacon be? Would it be possible for those who came for “pick-up communion kits” to consume them on church property and then leave containers on another table. Some felt the notion of masks, shields and gloves was overwhelming.

Task Force Group Two, with Charlie Dupree, re distributing the host not in church – for those who cannot attend church service or are not ready to attend

- Strong connection to the table
- Commissioning
- Same prep protocols as Shearon mentioned
- No going into peoples' homes

After the service for a time specific period, simple communion kits available for pickup. Prepared under the protocol Shearon mentioned. When the members of the household pickup, they would be commissioned. Corporal, wafers, no wine, some variation of the liturgy for people receiving communion at home. An extension of the altar. There would be a training to let people know theologically and sacramentally what is going on to handle properly.

There may be homebound people, but our present conversation is guided by current visitation guidelines.

Comments from the Breakout Rooms

Some of us liked the idea of pick up communion kits. Masks, shields, gloves feels overwhelming. A suggestion was offered to have a tray and people can reach for host.

Time for education is needed. What's the role of deacon? This sounds like take home kits as Eucharistic ministers. If people come to church have them consume on campus and then leave containers on another table.

Concerned about the possibility of NOT offering if the priest and or the parishioners are not comfortable sharing the Eucharist until after COVID is over. We want to make sure we're explaining why we're doing what we're doing, even the current restrictions, keeping our current understanding of Eucharist.

Our group was all over the place, lots of conversation about the handling of the wafers, distance, travel to pick up, desire to be very specific in our protocols and guidelines, protect our most vulnerable folks . The question was also raised: do we even need to be having communion if everyone cannot have the option?

There's a struggle with how to explain in a consistent and comprehensible manner. How do we explain the thought process, particularly when they see different things being done in other places. The principles laid out by Bishop Taylor is magnificent AND may need to be translated into simpler language.

Our group had feedback on the emphasis on the community - what about those who are not in the community physically because of health. Many like the idea of the Eucharist being shared, what about those who don't even feel comfortable coming to the church? Impersonal nature, the sound of the tray and cups didn't feel consistent with our theology of the Eucharist. What if exceptions need to be made in an individual setting? Is that allowed or are we all bound to do one thing?

In our group, there were worries about sacramental inequity. Even churches within the same area might have different situations. Clarifications of what was meant – questions about the face mask and the shield.

There were worries about the exclusionary nature of doing community this way. This feels disconnected. Concerns about the practicality, particularly when a parish is widespread. How do you secure the dignity of the sacrament while providing it faithfully? Theology of community: we've done a great job of teaching our people about the Word being part of the whole of the sacrament. Does this muddy those waters?

A more comprehensive prayer or set of prayers is needed for this.

Next Steps

Bishop Goff: What is next - we will gather up things you've said. As you have other thoughts, please send them to Mark Eastham – he'll gather them up and pass them on to the committee. meastham@thediocese.net

The task force will meet tomorrow and keep working on fleshing this out including what they've heard from you, and will be making recommendations to the Bishops. We are moving on this to present options, but hope to be able to give something back to you fairly shortly.

Ordinations

There will be eight ordinations to the priesthood in September, each done individually. Eucharist will be celebrated for each of them. The newly ordained will celebrate. This is a decision I made, knowing that they may not have the opportunity to celebrate Eucharist elsewhere for quite a while. We may have options that will be incorporated into those services, or it might be that only

the celebrant will celebrate and receive communion depending on where we are. It's thinking about that as perhaps a model, but we don't want it to be disconnected with the whole of the Diocese. Again, we invite your input, which you can send to Mark Eastham at the aforementioned email address.