



The Diocese of Utah

The Right Reverend Phyllis Spiegel

January, 2023

Dear Beloved Community,

The time has come for us to review the worship practices which changed during the height of the pandemic. The reasons are twofold: we have learned much about the spread of the COVID virus since the current practices were put in place, and, secondly, we are called to be stewards of the environment and many of our initial practices are plastic and paper dependent.

Practices to continue:

- Signs should be kept fresh looking regarding masks being generally welcomed and required for any symptoms of cold or allergy.
- Masks should remain available, kept in a visible location.
- Hand sanitizer should be widely available, including in the sanctuary for required use by the altar party.
- Holy water should be available in fonts (wall or standing).

Use of full-service bulletins:

My preference is for the use of the BCP and the Hymnal to the greatest extent feasible for each context. Full-service bulletins are often used as an act of hospitality in congregations that have a lot of visitors. When that is not the demographic of the parish, the bulletin can be limited to page numbers, service music, special music (with appropriate copyrights), Gospel responses, locally written Prayers of the People, alternative approved liturgies, and announcements.

The response that the full service should be printed to make our services more welcoming is questionable. Members of the parish make our services more welcoming. Two simple acts of hospitality ease the short-lived difficulty of the newcomer:

1. Guests should have someone sitting with them to assist in the page turning, practices of communion, a warm greeting at the peace, and to provide a genuine invitation to the fellowship time to be introduced to others. The thoughtful query of, "We alternate between two books, would it be helpful for me to find your pages as we move through the service?" is a simple and hospitable act.
2. The officiant of the service announces the page number anytime there has been a move to another book or to the bulletin AND gives pause until the page rustling has subsided.

As new people come into our churches, their experience with the Book of Common Prayer is essential to their welcome and integration into the church. If one never opens a book during worship, it is relegated to something unseen and unused. The profound offering of prayers, the Outline of the Faith, and the full array of services are gifts that our faith offers to everyone who holds the Book of Common Prayer. We believe that “Praying shapes believing”, and so it becomes part of our primary work to teach people how to use the BCP, not simply for corporate worship but in their daily lives. This starts on Sunday mornings.

Communion:

Jesus held up the bread, broke it, and gave it to his disciples. He held up the cup, gave thanks, and said, “Drink this, all of you.” The shared bread and the Common Cup are lived expressions of the gathered people being made one body in Christ through his body and blood.

All elements must be placed on the corporal on the altar for the Eucharistic prayer. The act of the epiclesis (invocation of the Holy Spirit) is what makes communion the sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ. The bread and the wine come from Christ’s table.

The common cup, the host, and wafers must be present and offered as the normative method of distribution. Otherwise, we are denying the shared bread and common cup and their primacy at communion.

Bread: Knowing that COVID does not spread through touch, the bread should be placed in the hands of communicants.

Wine: Many of our congregations have grown to prefer the use of individual cups, and the move back to the common cup will receive resistance. This requires prayer, reflection, and thoughtful guidance by the clergy and, where absent, the Bishop’s Committee. The thinking, “People like it this way” is insufficient. Emergency instituted policies are rarely meant to be permanent; the central practices of our faith passed down for generations are meant to be.

Many congregations returning to the common cup instruct communicants that do not feel comfortable drinking from the chalice to hold their wafer to the bowl of the chalice as the words, “The blood of Christ...” are spoken. Celiacs and people in recovery have received in this manner for years.

Any desired exceptions or alternative offerings should be directed to the bishop’s office.

A Pastoral Word about this directive:

Teaching is key to any change, and the best teaching is based in our tradition, scripture, and reason.

A suggested approach is to gather worship leaders and the altar guild to talk about communion. Perhaps beginning with a reading of the Last Supper. (Mt. 26:17–30, Mk. 14:12–26, Lk. 22:7–39 and/or Jn. 13:1–17:26). Note the connectivity of touch and the acts of giving and receiving. What does touch, the

intimacy of the passing of bread and wine allow us in our relationship with Jesus? What are earliest memories of receiving communion? When is a time when the power of the bread and the wine stunned you? What is different in our experience when our connectivity to Jesus' gift of communion remains as close as possible to the shared bread and wine? What is the impact of our children growing up without the experience of the chalice, or being handed bread, as a part of their worship experience?

Of note: Studies have shown that, while bacteria is present in the high alcohol of communion wine, it is not high enough to provide an increased chance of disease on an airborne virus.

Summary:

It is time to return to the practices of our faith, and the return should be done, with pastoral sensitivity, teaching grounded in our theology, and In the love of Jesus. The return to the liturgical and communion practices of our faith should be completed by Ash Wednesday.

+Bp. Phyllis Spiegel