

Chalice Administrators at All Saints, Hérault

Introduction

There are other names for this ministry in the Church of England: 'eucharistic ministers' or 'eucharistic assistants' rather than 'chalice administrators'. The other names are more accurate because you could be called on to administer the bread as well as the wine.

It is a real privilege and a humbling experience to be helping others to encounter God in this fairly intimate way. It is an important role: chalice administrators must be proposed by the Chaplaincy Council and priest-in-charge for licensing by the bishop, via the Archdeacon, for 3 years. The Chaplaincy Council and priest-in-charge must be satisfied that chalice administrators are respected and of good standing within the Chaplaincy. They will normally have been members of the Chaplaincy for a number of years.

Although in the past some eucharistic assistants have taken the sacrament to the sick or housebound, this is no longer allowed without further special permission from the Bishop, for safeguarding reasons.

The meaning of Holy Communion

Holy Communion means different things to different people. Some will come believing in transubstantiation, ie that the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ. Others will come believing that it is simply something to help us to remember the events of the Last Supper and our salvation through Christ's actions. There is a whole spectrum of beliefs between these two extremes.

We have only one chaplaincy to cover a large area, with people from many diverse church backgrounds and we must try to serve and respect them all. Everybody coming for Communion will have their needs and expectations and we must try to meet as many of them as possible. In practical terms this means, whatever your beliefs, not doing anything to offend against the beliefs of your fellow worshippers. Remember that the sacrament to some

will be a very precious thing to be treated with great reverence.

Practicalities

Chalice administrators should come forward as the priest is taking his or her own Communion. Communion will be administered to them by the priest the chalices and 'purificators' (linen cloths for wiping the chalices) handed to them.

Keep an eye out for anybody with crossed arms, ie coming for a blessing: do not be afraid to ask the priest for advice, but try to be discreet when doing this. A few people might take the bread only and not come to you at all.

Take great care when handling the chalice: be careful not to drop it or to spill wine.

Say 'the blood of Christ' to each person, then hand the chalice to them. This is by far the easiest way in our situation at All Saints, where we stand up to take Communion. It is the tradition in some churches for communicants not to touch the chalice (except with their lips of course). This method, when everyone is standing up, can be extremely difficult for the chalice administrator because it is impossible to see how far to tip up the chalice, especially if the person is taller or is wearing a hat. Try to encourage them to take the chalice but always do make sure they are holding it firmly before letting go. If possible steady part of the chalice with your hand, or hold your hands near in case it is dropped. The rubric in the Book of Common Prayer makes it clear that the bread and the cup (chalice) are to be 'delivered into their hands'.

The purificator should be used after each communicant has received the wine, to clean where the person's lips have been. Watch out for lipstick as it can be unpleasant to encounter that when receiving the sacrament. After wiping, the chalice should then be then turned around a quarter.

Some people prefer to dip their bread into the chalice instead of drinking from it, called 'intinction'. This might be for a number of reasons,

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such as having a cold or a cold sore, or simply for hygiene reasons: during a 'flu outbreak in Britain a few years ago all Church of England churches used intinction to help reduce the spread of the disease. Please be aware of the possibility that a communicant might want to 'dip' rather than drink and, if they do, lower the chalice so they can see what they are doing.

It might happen that, despite all your efforts to be careful, wine is spilt or the chalice is dropped. For wine on the floor use the purificator to soak it up. For wine on clothes, hand the purificator to the person for them to use. If the bread (host) is dropped on the floor, please pick it up and hand it to the priest to deal with. If it falls in the chalice when being 'dipped', please leave it there and tell the priest, who will give the person more bread and deal with the dropped piece during the ablutions (washing-up). Always try to act calmly and discreetly.

If the wine runs out, please tell the priest: there is a procedure for supplementary consecration. Alternatively, it might be that there will be enough wine in the other chalice for the remaining communicants.

When everybody has received the Sacrament please place the chalice on the 'corporal', the square white cloth on the altar.

Should there be too much wine at the end, there is a possibility that the priest might ask you to help with consuming it.

Don't panic!

Although several problems with administering the chalice have been outlined above, they are generally rare. Please enjoy exercising this ministry, which is a privilege to carry out and of real service.

Roger Smith
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