

HOLY TRINITY, PRESTWOOD AND ST. MARY MAGDALENE, GREAT HAMPDEN

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Eucharistic Worship Summary Proposal

This document is a summary of the proposal for Exposition in our Sunday Online worship taken from the PCC briefing paper “**Eucharistic Worship during the COVID-19 pandemic**”.

Background

1. This benefice suspended Eucharistic worship when the lockdown began. (and we have live-streamed ante-communion on Sundays before the diocesan live-streamed communion service since then.)

The Current Position

2. In many places Spiritual Communion has become the norm. This is a way of observing a Eucharist remotely online, and engaging with the liturgy by listening, singing, making responses as if one were there.
3. Does this approach give us full participation in the sacrament? In thinking about this in our own day, an illustration will help. When it snowed last year we took a last minute decision to live stream the Eucharist. Those that made it through the snow were in church, those who didn't watched at home. We did not think at the time those at home were doing the same thing as those in church—they weren't, they were watching. It was the best they could do in the circumstances. It provided singing, prayer, scripture and sermon, and those at home were truly worshipping alongside those in church. But those at home were observing the Eucharist whilst those in church were participating in it. The little jokes at the end confirmed this. “I'll stay in bed next week!”, etc., because everyone knew it wasn't in fact the same.

4. Are we right to just consider this form of 'spiritual communion' as truly conferring the full benefit of the sacrament because of the circumstances, or should we admit that it does not and see if there is something else which, whilst also imperfect, is better?

'Church-going' in the near future

5. Now let's turn to what 'church life' might be like for us in the months to come. For the foreseeable future 'church-going' at Holy Trinity is going to be very different to how it used to be.
6. For as long as social distancing measures are in force, the maximum capacity of Holy Trinity church is somewhere between 10-20 people¹.
7. For as long as vulnerable people are advised to shield or self-isolate we must presume a large proportion of our worshipping community will have to remain in their homes.
8. Whilst it is nice that the church is available in a limited way, we should remember that any worship, including the Eucharist, can take place anywhere.
9. But the canons of the Church of England and the BCP presuppose that the Eucharist will be celebrated in a church, and their provisions require it to be so. Canon B14 1 begins "The Holy Communion shall be celebrated in every parish church at least on all Sundays...".
10. A consequence of moving to online worship, live streamed across Facebook and our website, has been a renewed sense of mission and engagement across a wide section of the community, and we don't want to lose this.
11. We have also worked hard to build a community around our online worship, encouraging engagement, hearing and seeing different people in our worship, and sharing Zoom coffee afterwards. This has been well received.
12. For a number of weeks alongside our actively streamed online worship there was a second feed: a 24/7 live stream from the chancel, as an aid for private devotion under the tag line *You can't come to your church, but your church can come to you*. This was focussed on the altar and the

¹ Based on 2m distance between any two people.

tabernacle. It was taken down for purely operational reasons of not wishing to leave the equipment running when no one could enter the building.

13. There has been no eucharistic element to our worship since Mothering Sunday, and this has been very painful to many, particularly over the Easter season.
14. Now one person (and people from their household) is allowed in the church for prayer and to worship, including streaming worship. Over time we expect this to include more people, but there is no timescale and we must be prepared for the lockdown to continue in some form for the foreseeable future.
15. What is the best balance that we can achieve to meet the different strengths and weaknesses we have identified?

Exposition and Benediction

16. There is another tradition of Eucharistic worship that can offer us a different way to participate together at a distance and through the internet.
17. *Exposition* is the practice of praying before the consecrated communion bread that has been reserved. It is a particularly Roman Catholic practice, but it has a history in the Church of England, and at Holy Trinity, Prestwood was a regular feature of our worship up until the 1980s.
18. It is not a novelty. It has a long history as a way of strengthening the bond between Christ and his people through the sacramental presence. There is a body of theology underpinning it.
19. Incorporating exposition into our current pattern of worship once the celebration of the Eucharist is resumed might be a good way for all of us—priest and people alike—to share equally in the sacrament of the Eucharist in our main Sunday act of Online Worship until we really can do again as Jesus intended.

A way to Feed us

20. A way forward might be:
 - a. Reinstate the 24/7 live feed from the chancel.
 - b. Reinstate a weekly Eucharist from the church, at 8am on a Sunday, available on the 24/7 live stream. Anyone could join in

the liturgy and join in the prayers online, and it would be a comfort and a benefit as an act of worship. But we would not stream it on Facebook as an act of corporate Online Worship and it would not replace or compete with our main Sunday act of Online Worship.

- c. The Sunday morning Online Worship would follow at 9.30am as usual, and would culminate in a short time of exposition, where the scene cuts to the live stream of the chancel and the altar with the sacrament on it. Worshippers would be invited to make that their 'spiritual communion'.
- d. Immediately following this the blessing is given, and the service formally ends with the dismissal, followed as usual by Zoom coffee.
- e. Following that, the altar is cleared and the sacrament is placed in the tabernacle.

21. As he prepared to leave his disciples Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. This is the Spirit of truth." In everything we do during this crisis we are doing our best to keep his commandments, as are all church communities. In all of this we rely on the guidance of the Spirit of truth, the Holy Spirit, who is with us always.

NB. Thursday is Ascension Day, so we plan to reinstate the Eucharist on this date with a simple Online Service at 6pm.