

## Spiritual Communion

Bishop Brad Billings

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The celebration of, and participation in, the Sacrament of Holy Communion is an important part of Anglican worship, being described by the Articles of Religion (28) as “a Sacrament of our Redemption by Christ’s death.”

Many Anglicans are feeling acutely the present inability for us to meet in places of worship and to share in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. For many, digital forms of worship have greatly assisted in helping to meet this need, enabling fellowship remotely, and participation in the reading and proclamation of scripture, prayer and praise, and the pronouncing and reception of the absolution and blessing.

For some, Spiritual Communion may be of assistance, especially for those especially feeling the absence of Holy Communion, and for those unable or unwilling to take part in online forms of worship.

### Spiritual Communion

The term “Spiritual Communion” broadly describes a means of grace whereby a person who has been unable to share in the celebration of Holy Communion for some unavoidable or serious reason, nonetheless shares in the communion of Jesus.

Provision for what has come to be known and referred to as Spiritual Communion is made in the *1662 Book of Common Prayer* service for “The Communion of the Sick.” It provides in a rubric that, if a person is unable to physically receive the sacrament of Holy Communion, and if that person “truly repents” and “steadfastly believes” that Jesus shed his blood for their redemption, that person “doth eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ profitably,” even though not physically receiving the Sacrament.

The rubric sets out a number of reasons that might prevent a person physically receiving bread and wine. These are:

*extremity of sickness*  
*want of warning in due time to the Curate*  
*for lack of company to receive with him*  
*or by any other just impediment.*

The *Book of Common Prayer* provision as described above is present in *A Prayer Book for Australia 1995* (p. 693), in the context of the ministration to the sick. It provides that, “if for good reason it is not possible for the sick person to receive the sacrament, the minister shall give assurance that all who repent of their sins, trust in Christ, and celebrate his saving work with grateful thanks, truly eat and drink the body and blood of Christ, even though the bread may not have been eaten, or the wine drunk.” The advice that a person in these circumstances may “engage in spiritual communion” is commended as a possibility in *A Pastoral Handbook for Anglicans* (3<sup>rd</sup> edn, 2018, p. 254).

Circumstances of personal sickness or affliction are assumed in most of the Anglican liturgies providing for Spiritual Communion. Indeed, the rubric occurs in the context of “The Communion of

the Sick". But this is not exclusively the case – for example, the 1951 "Armed Forces Prayer Book" of the Episcopal Church (USA) makes provision for it in the context of battlefield conditions.

It is instructive that the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* rubric points to, and recognises, that Spiritual Communion is not limited to reasons of physical sickness or a physical inability to receive the Sacrament. As noted above, the rubric points also to situations in which the curate may not have been provided with adequate notice, or in which there may be an insufficient number of communicants. Significantly, provision is also made for "any other just impediment."

This describes broadly the present circumstances in which we find ourselves both globally and in this nation. Most Anglicans are being prevented from physically receiving the sacrament by the current pandemic. We are unable to gather in sufficient numbers, being rightly obliged to abide by the government regulations regarding public gatherings. Whether experiencing the sickness ourselves in a physical way, or not, we are certainly experiencing its ramifications, with a result that we are being impeded from receiving the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

### **An act of Spiritual Communion**

The Church of England has commended to its clergy and parishes the following "Act of Spiritual Communion" which is published at the link below:

- <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches>

*You may wish to find a space for prayer in front of a cross, a candle, or a special place. You might choose to make your Spiritual Communion at a particular time of day, or after viewing a live streamed service.*

*Reflect on the day and on your relationships.*

- What good things have come from God today?
- Where have I fallen short?
- What might I do tomorrow?

*You may wish to say or pray*

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

*Read the following words from Scripture. If you have access to today's readings for Holy Communion, you may wish to read and reflect on them.*

Jesus said, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.' John 6.35.

*Pray for the needs of the world, for your local community, and for those close to you. End with the Lord's Prayer.*

Our Father...

*Give thanks for the saving death and resurrection of Jesus and ask him to be with you now.*

Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ, for all the benefits you have given me,  
for all the pains and insults you have borne for me. Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,

I ask you to come spiritually into my heart.  
O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother, may I know you more clearly,  
love you more dearly,  
and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen. (*after the Prayer of St Richard of Chichester*).

*You might then add one or more of the following prayers:*

Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your disciples,  
'I am with you always'.  
Be with me today, as I offer myself to you.  
Hear my prayers for others and for myself, and keep me in your care. Amen.

O God,  
help me to trust you,  
help me to know that you are with me,  
help me to believe that nothing can separate me from your love revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

Lord, in these days of mercy, make us quiet and prayerful; in these days of challenge, make us  
stronger in you;  
in these days of emptiness, take possession of us;  
in these days of waiting,  
open our hearts to the mystery of your cross. (Angela Ashwin)

Almighty God, Father of all mercies,  
we your unworthy servants give you most humble and hearty thanks  
for all your goodness and loving kindness.  
We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life;  
but above all for your immeasurable love  
in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace, and for the hope of  
glory.  
And give us, we pray, such a sense of all your mercies that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful,  
and that we show forth your praise, not only with our lips but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to  
your service,  
and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be all honour and glory,  
for ever and ever.  
Amen.

*Conclude with the following:*

The Lord bless us, and preserve us from all evil, and keep us in eternal life. Amen