

HOLY COMMUNION

In many parishes, including this parish, the practise of intinction has become common. This is an extract from 'Vade Mecum' (the Ministry Handbook of the Diocese of Perth).

'It is the duty of a priest to offer regular teaching on the place of the Lord's Supper, reminding the congregation that whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes (1 Corinthians 11:26). The command of our Lord 'do this in remembrance of me' not only makes holy the common people of God, but is an evangelistic proclamation of Christ crucified and risen. Time and effort are required of presiders, that they may reverently and responsibly discharge the immense privilege of presiding over the holy mysteries as pledges of God's love for a continual remembrance of his death to our great and endless comfort (BCP, Exhortation).

Hygiene

In the event of a hygiene alert, common sense should prevail. In such circumstances receiving the bread alone is an accepted practise, or the bread slightly dipped in the wine. Infections are borne in the air that we breathe, and short of not breathing (not an advisable option) we need to take appropriate and reasonable steps to keep the symbolic actions whilst assessing the risks involved. Intinction, however, is not to be encouraged as a general practise within eucharistic administration.'

The following is from a (more recent) letter to the clergy from Archbishop Kay:

'Intinction

Since 2020 I have received a number of requests regarding the distribution of Holy Communion. This matter has been discussed at the Archbishop's Leadership Forum with Area Deans and Archdeacons. They will have raised this in deanery meetings. There have been various practices; bread only; individual cups until we were COVID-free or had people with immune deficiencies; and nursing homes/aged care priests intincting for the frail. I am now willing to allow in those places where the common cup is used for the priest to also intinct the bread (using only one hand to intinct) from an intinction cup, being mindful that the most hygienic practice be followed. This step will, I am told, assist those in aged care and other such settings.'

In order to comply with our Archbishop's direction, we will now:

- maintain the practice of having two chalices, one for intinction
- continue to have a Liturgical Assistant and one other assistant at the altar
- people who take the common cup will turn to their left
- those who so choose will move slightly to their right so the priest knows to intinct (dip) the host into the intinction cup
- the bread that has been dipped can be put into the communicant's hand or directly into their mouth

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Can You Get Sick From a Communion Cup?

- January 9, 2026 [Can You Get Sick From a Communion Cup? - Biology Insights](#)

The shared communion cup, a practice central to religious ceremonies for centuries, often raises concerns about public health and the spread of illness. Modern scientific scrutiny explores the possibility of pathogen transmission during this ritual. An objective look at the mechanics of microbial transfer, mitigating factors, and existing evidence provides clarity on the actual level of risk.

How Pathogens Transfer in Shared Rituals

The theoretical risk of infection transmission stems from direct contact between the communicant's mouth and the chalice rim. Saliva, containing a person's oral microbiome and potential pathogens, transfers to the cup's surface during drinking. This contact deposits microbes onto the rim, creating a pathway for transfer to the next participant.

The stability of microbes on the cup's moist surface determines the potential for transfer. Respiratory viruses, certain bacteria, and some gastrointestinal viruses can persist on surfaces for varying periods. However, the mere presence of a microbe is distinct from the transfer of an infectious dose, which is the minimum number of organisms needed to cause a new infection.

Factors That Reduce Contamination Risk

The communion ritual incorporates several elements that reduce the microbial load on the chalice rim between participants. The most significant is the physical act of wiping the rim with a purificator, a small cloth. This mechanical action removes a large percentage of saliva and microbes, often reducing the bacterial count by up to 90% in laboratory settings.

The wine itself offers a degree of antiseptic effect due to its alcohol content, typically 12% to 14.5% in sacramental wine. While alcohol is a disinfectant, the wine's effect is modest because it primarily contacts the cup interior, not the exterior rim where saliva is deposited. Furthermore, chalices are often made from precious metals like silver or gold, which possess a natural oligodynamic effect—a toxic action of metal ions on certain microbes.

Empirical Evidence on Disease Transmission

Despite the theoretical mechanism for germ transfer, numerous studies consistently find the risk of actual disease transmission to be extremely low. Although a low level of bacterial contamination is often detectable on the chalice rim after use, research indicates this does not translate into a significant public health hazard. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has indicated that the risk of contracting an illness from the common cup is "so small as to be undetectable."

There has never been a documented outbreak of any disease definitively traced back to the use of a common communion cup. Studies comparing illness rates of regular communicants with non-communicants found no increased frequency of sickness in the former group. This suggests that the combination of mechanical wiping, alcohol, and metal effects effectively mitigates the minor theoretical risk.

Options for Safe Participation

For individuals with heightened concerns about infection, especially those who are immunocompromised or experiencing symptoms of illness, alternatives exist for safe participation. Many congregations offer the option of receiving only one element, such as the consecrated bread or wafer. This is a common practice that still represents full participation and is the simplest way to avoid contact with the shared cup.

Another widely accepted alternative is intinction, where the minister dips the host into the wine and places the moist wafer directly onto the communicant's tongue or hand. Although this method still involves contact with the wine, it eliminates direct lip-to-rim contact.

Individuals who feel sick should, as a courtesy to others, abstain from using the common cup entirely until they are well.