

Hi Beloved DEWCOM colleagues,

I have recently received a request from John Wessels of Trinity Methodist Church, Linden, for some thoughts on Holy Communion in these Covid-19 times. I put these thoughts together merely to reflect with a colleague, but thought I would forward them to you as well for your consideration.

For the moment all we have to go on is the directive from the Presiding Bishop that came out a few weeks ago which pointed out that we do **not** subscribe to the High Anglican and Catholic view that the priest may celebrate and receive Holy Communion on behalf of the congregation. We could therefore not have 'online Holy Communion' in which the priest only receives Holy Communion and the people remain spectators. I believe that the PB is correct because we do not understand our ministers to be priests in the sense that priests embody all the people before God.

That, of course, leaves us Communion-less for the foreseeable future. The consensus in DEWCOM, correctly as I understand it, is that we should not rush our reflection on the issue in order to come up with some stop gap arrangement which would soon become fixed practice.

At the heart of our understanding of Holy Communion is the communal aspect of it – which is precisely what we cannot have at present. Thinking for myself now, we have to come up with a way in which those who participate in a Service of Holy Communion, however it is celebrated, in online or physical community, are able to have the sense that they are 'members one of another'. Aspects of the liturgy such as the Peace and the Fraction ('The Bread we break is a sharing in the body of Christ' and response: 'Though we are many, we are one body because we all share in the one loaf') are difficult to accommodate.

A few ideas that have occurred to me:

An online video service which includes (using the familiar 1975 Methodist Service Book):

1. *Anticipation of Holy Communion*: Set the Table and conduct the Liturgy up to and including the Eucharistic Prayer ('Lift up your hearts. We lift them to the Lord...etc' through to the Fraction) and then, instead of 'The Prayer of Humble Access' ('Lord, we come to your table trusting in your mercy...etc') as it stands, we modify it with the words: 'Lord, we long to come together to your table trusting in your mercy and not in any goodness of our own... (to)...and on that we depend. We anticipate with joy a time when we will gather together and you will feed us all with the body and blood of Jesus Christ, your Son, that we may for ever live in him and he in us'. The service could end there. That would make it a service of prayer and **anticipation** if Holy Communion in a future free of Covid-19.
2. *'Fellowship Meals'*: Ask our members to intentionally set a meal time of their own in their own homes for the purpose of remembering the larger fellowship of the church to which they belong. They could be provided with specially composed prayers and chosen Scripture readings to say and read at the beginning, during and end of the meal which would include reminders from the Gospels that Jesus often shared meals with

his friends. The prayers would also include intercessions for the church worldwide and locally, the nations of the world struggling with Covid-19, our own country and city/town/village – and prayers for specific people and situations known to the household. In a way this would recall the *seder* conducted every Friday evening in Jewish homes. To make it fun and meaningful to the congregation, folk could be invited to post pictures/videos of moments during their Fellowship Meal on Facebook and whatever other platform is commonly used by the members of the congregation. This isn't Holy Communion, but it alludes to the fellowship of Jesus with his disciples.

Not online, but which can be commended to those who would benefit by it:

Earth Communion: This one is a bit 'far out' – but I intend to do this tomorrow morning when I get to walk on the mountain near us, with Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma's permission at last! It's an idea I have been toying with which I got from Teilhard de Chardin's 'Mass on the World' in his book, 'Hymn of the Universe'. Here's a link to a service at Georgetown University <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gNyaf8nJY8s> in which much of it is read, just in case you don't know it. I will take my copy with me up the mountain and read some of it.

There are a few thoughts!

Blessings,

Tim