

Covid-19 Regulations and Liturgical Life in Protestant and Anglican Churches in Europe

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1. Protestant Churches

1.1. Lutheran World Federation and Lutheran Churches

Among the Protestant and Anglican Churches in Europe, it seems to be natural to see the Covid-19 caused safety regulations and restrictions in the societal life, including worship life, as necessary for the health well-being and as part of neighbourly love. I can hardly recognise any discussion among them which would put this in question. Safety precautions are followed: distance kept and hygiene rules followed. During the pandemic's first wave, when at the deepest, there was mostly no public Eucharists, then for a smaller group using individual cups or in some cases the Eucharist only in one form. A digital leap has been taken - streamed online services are broadcast and other digital gatherings provided. However, there are liturgy-related theological questions and discussions, like the online Eucharist.

In my Lutheran tradition the idea of real presence of Christ in the Eucharist is traditionally important. It implicates a Trinitarian and holistic way to understand Christian life. Body and soul are together the one human being. The Eucharist manifests union with Christ. The minister says *in persona Christi* the words: this is my body, this is my blood (CA XIV). From this point of view administering the Eucharist online in remote control is seen in a critical light. Yet some Lutherans have argued for the online Eucharist, but not as much as those traditions which do not teach real presence or do not have a similar understanding of ordained ministry.

LWF reflections along these lines are given by Prof. Dr. *Dirk Lange*, the deputy General Secretary of the LWF for ecumenical affairs. In his "Large Catechism," Luther rejects the dismissal by some of the "external" sign. Bodies are important. In terms of the Eucharist, a fully participatory meal is important. Real bread and wine and people eating and drinking *together*. A faith community, with its careful and deeply respectful attention to the body (and especially the body of the most vulnerable) can help all of society organize towards decreasing the spread of the coronavirus and towards healing.

In another Lutheran confessional writing, “Solid Declaration”, article 7, the Holy Supper names an “entire action rule” which lays special emphasis on the complete liturgical celebration of the Eucharist or Holy Communion. The “Words of Institution of Christ by itself does not make a valid sacrament”. Rather, the whole liturgical celebration culminates in this great thanksgiving in the Holy Spirit that evokes God’s radical, self-giving gift, God’s gift of God’s self, Jesus Christ, Mercy, in our midst. Again, there is an insistence on the fullness of the rite and on the people gathered doing something together. Both texts indicate to us a clear “No” to virtual communion or Eucharistic celebration online. The church has in many times and places not been able to celebrate the Eucharist together.

2. German Evangelical Church

In the German Evangelical Church the question of online Eucharist is also the core theological question with subquestions: a) How do we understand emergency situation? b) Who is allowed to consecrate the Holy Supper? c) How should we understand the physical presence of those who celebrate the Eucharist?

In the situation of emergency when no worship services are celebrated in Churches some have argued that because of the emergency, and on the basis of the priesthood of all believers a lay person could install the Holy Supper. Others have argued against it, because there is no analogy to the situation of emergency baptism. Some point out that for the spiritual presence of Christ only inner trust and faith in the promise of Christ is needed. Others see that the consecration words to implicate that the congregation and bread and wine are present in a concrete place. Yet it is recommended that no sudden decisions are made and that both the Evangelical traditions and the ecumenical commitments are taken into consideration in the further reflections which are needed.

3. Anglicans – the Church of England

“8 Those who participate remotely in this way, but who are unable to be present physically, can practise a form of Spiritual Communion. The term ‘Spiritual Communion’ has been used historically to describe the means of grace by which a person, prevented for some serious reason from sharing physically in a celebration of the Eucharist, nonetheless shares in the communion of Jesus Christ. An Act of Spiritual Communion is available on the Church of England website.

11. ... In some cases, participants in online services have consumed bread and wine in their own homes during the service. Whilst we recognize that this practice may have spiritual value for some, participants should not be encouraged to believe that any bread and wine brought before screens during online Holy Communion has been 'remotely consecrated'. However, we commend the questions raised by this practice for further theological reflection."

4. Methodists

Among the Methodists there are voices for and against the online communions. **Nordic and Baltic Episcopal Area Bishop Christian Alsted** has issued [guidance regarding online communion](#). The requirement is: • "Communion should only be offered during live streamed worship services, where people participate in real-time.