

Ad Clerum 3c.2

AIDS AND THE CHALICE

The present medical evidence indicates there is no risk of infection from the AIDS virus through, for example, the common use of cups, glasses, towels, etc. The AIDS virus is very fragile and can only be transmitted into the blood stream. Surface contact is not sufficient to allow infection. There does not appear to be any known case where the virus has been transmitted by saliva. Wine by its alcoholic nature is antiseptic and the chalice is a poor medium for transmitting infection. There are no grounds for recommending any change in the traditional practice of sharing the common cup at Holy Communion.

Where an individual communicant is so seriously anxious about the risk of infection as to want to avoid attendance at Holy Communion, we recommend that he/she should be encouraged to receive Communion in one kind - the bread only - and then leave the communion rail before receiving the cup. In all cases fears can be allayed if the person who is administering the chalice is careful to wipe the rim with a purificator or paper tissue, though we accept this is not a guaranteed way to avoid cross-infection.

The practice of intinction (by which the communicant retains the wafer, if wafers are used, and dips it in the wine in the chalice) is to be commended as a considerate practice by anyone who has a cold, throat infection, lip sore or any other infection. Communion by intinction has been generally followed as a matter of courtesy to fellow communicants in such cases.

An important part of the Church's ministry is to care for people dying with AIDS and while we must retain the highest standards of hygiene, we would not want to compromise or reduce Eucharistic hospitality.

(Based on advice issued by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York)

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