

# Lutheran Church of Australia: Commission on Worship

## STATEMENT 4

### THE COMMON CUP AND THE POSSIBILITY OF INFECTION THROUGH AIDS

---

*Originally adopted by the Commission on Worship, January 1988 under the title 'The distribution of holy communion with reference to possible infection'. The Department of Liturgics, with help from Dr D Overduin, prepared the statement in response to concern about the possibility of infection, particularly by AIDS, through use of the common cup. After later discussion about the best way of putting the alternatives of intinction and the use of individual glasses into practice, the Department revised the statement, which was then adopted by the Commission in February 1993.*

Reformatted and revised: 1 May 1998

---

1. In Lutheran circles it has been normal for the consecrated wine to be distributed by means of a common cup to emphasise the communion which believers have through the blood of Christ.
2. Though celebrants are usually careful to cleanse the rim of the cup and turn it during distribution, some communicants fear contracting diseases like AIDS, hepatitis B, and herpes.
3. Current expert medical opinion says that both hepatitis B and herpes can be transmitted by means of the common cup, but the possibility of contracting AIDS through the use of the common cup is 'highly unlikely'.
4. However, in spite of well-founded assurances that risk of infection is minimal, some people still have anxieties. In some cases these are so acute that people prefer to abstain from partaking of the Lord's supper rather than risk contracting disease.
5. Pastors and congregations need to display understanding and Christian love (see Romans 14) for anxious members; pastorally it is not appropriate simply to say that their faith is weak and that they should trust more in the healing power of Christ's body and blood to protect them from infection.
6. Pastoral concern and Christian love will prompt pastors and congregations to take steps to allay fears, and to make it possible also for anxious members to partake of the Lord's supper with the assembled congregation.
7. To make this possible we suggest the following options:
  - **Intinction.** The communicant does not eat the bread on receiving it, but retains it until the celebrant brings the wine. Instead of presenting the common cup to the communicants who have retained the bread, the celebrant may provide another container of wine, saying these or similar words: 'The blood of Christ, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins'. The communicant then dips the bread into the wine and consumes it.

- **Individual glasses or cups.** A tray (or trays) of small glasses containing portions of the consecrated wine is carried by an assistant as the celebrant distributes the wine via the common cup. Communicants who are concerned about the common cup may indicate their preference to the celebrant (eg with a hand gesture), who then presents them with an individual glass, saying the normal words of distribution. The communicant drinks from the glass and places it on a tray reserved for empty glasses. Where a small number of glasses is used, the other side of the same tray could be used, provided that no confusion is possible between used and unused glasses. It is preferable for the celebrant to hand the glass to the communicant, rather than allow the communicant to take the glass from the tray. If individual glasses are placed on a table (for instance, in the aisle) for communicants to take with them to the altar rail, the presiding minister should ensure that these glasses are present on the altar for the consecration of the elements before they are taken to the distribution point. In this case, the communicant should also wait for the celebrant to say the words of distribution before consuming the wine.
  - **Procession.** The ministers remain stationary, while the communicants file past, pausing to receive the bread and wine in turn. If there is one minister distributing the wine, he may have a tray of glasses close at hand and serve the communicant with either the common cup or a small glass. The communicant will then deposit the empty glass in another tray further on. If two ministers are available for the distribution of the wine, one may have the common cup, while the other distributes individual glasses. Communicants will then choose which minister to approach according to their preferences. In all these cases, the normal words for distribution are used.
- 8 The use of individual glasses has disadvantages:
- Loss of symbolic significance — the oneness and communion of the body of Christ are better symbolised by the common cup.
  - Hygiene — it is very difficult by normal means to clean glasses well enough to eliminate all traces of bacteria. They certainly need to be washed in hot soapy water.
- 9 The use of disposable plastic cups caters for the hygiene concern, provided they are not reused. They are aesthetically less pleasing than glass, in addition to the loss of symbolism involved.
- 10 In any case, celebrants need to observe meticulous hygienic techniques in distributing the elements. Minimum precautions are thoroughly washed hands, the copious use of purificators, the thorough wiping of the rim of the cup on an unused part of the purificator, and the turning of the cup after each use.
- 11 Pastors can help to avoid the spread of anxiety by treating concerned communicants discreetly and sensitively, taking seriously the concerns of members.