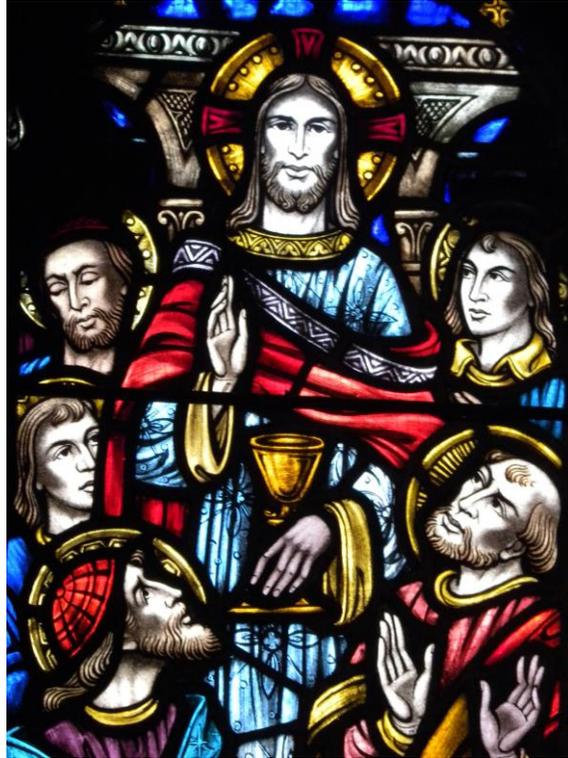


Emmanuel Church, Bel Air



A Curriculum for Lay Eucharistic Ministers

Introduction

Most chalicists and Lay Eucharistic Ministers are trained more or less informally, with an eye toward mastering the manipulation of chalices and purificators, learning how to vest, and understanding where to stand, sit and kneel. This curriculum is a scriptural, historical and theological primer on the Sacrament of the Eucharist itself, aimed at putting those mechanical skills in the fullest context possible given this brief presentation. Nothing we say or do in worship was created by the Church *ex nihilo*. Our words and actions are all rooted in scripture, tradition or human reason. When those who serve at the altar are grounded in this understanding, they can be more confident and more capable ministers of the gifts entrusted to them

In the paragraphs below the reader will notice many things that have been highlighted in **bold face** type. Some are scriptural passages which are meant to be looked up and read. Others represent words or ideas that the reader might

want to look up on the internet or in other places. Wikipedia.org turns out to have accurate and useful articles on many features of Christian, Anglican and Episcopal practice, and is often a useful place to begin.

Part I – History & Theology

Bread in the Hebrew Scriptures

The word “bread” appears 272 times in the New Revised Standard Version of the Hebrew Scriptures. Many instances are simply included in descriptions of meals; many also are symbolic of the needs we have that God continually meets for us. Here are a few references that help to shape the use of bread by the Church as a symbolic or sacramental agent.

Abraham & Melchizedek

Look up and read **Genesis 14:1-24**. This includes the story of “The Battle of the Five Armies” (among other battles -- and Tolkien fans may remember a battle with the same name at the end of *The Hobbit!*) -- where Abram (his former name) and his tribe rescue his nephew Lot who has been taken captive from his home in Sodom. At the end of the battle, Melchizedek (whose name means “King of Righteousness”) who was the Priest of Salem (later called Jerusalem) comes to pray over and bless the victorious Abram. He offers gifts of bread and wine and a tithe of his possessions as a sign of thanksgiving. These become key elements of worship from then (about 1800 BC) on.

Abraham (once his name is changed) in turns offers bread to the three angels that visit him in the wilderness, here as a sign of hospitality, rather than of thanksgiving. [**Genesis 18:5**] That Holy Communion is a sign of hospitality, as well as a theological claim on our relationship with God, is not always remembered or celebrated!

Passover: The Unleavened Bread

The story of Moses leading the people of Israel out of bondage in Egypt to the Promised Land of Canaan is well known. Some of the movie versions are even pretty good! The last meal before they escape from Egypt is the Passover, so-called because the signs painted in blood on the Israelites’ doors would cause the angel of death to pass over their houses. Moses was told that the terror of that night would quickly turn to the need for revenge, so the Passover meal was directed to be prepared and eaten in haste. The dough for the bread would not have time to rise, and so was eaten “unleavened.” Read **Exodus 12**. It is an interesting combination of the narrative of the Israelite escape interwoven with a

description of how succeeding generations are to celebrate it. To remember the urgency of that event, Jews are told to eat no bread but unleavened bread for seven days following the celebration of Passover. (This has led to a wonderful culinary tradition in Judaism, featuring, for example, matzo ball soup and *matzoh brei*.)

Once across the Sea of Reeds and safe from Egyptian soldiers, suddenly the Israelites fear that God will let them die of hunger in the wilderness. This story is told in **Exodus 16**, and it describes the “bread” that God sends them each day. This *manna* had never been seen before – and, in fact, the word *manna* means “what is it?” It is described as a “white, flake like thing” (the King James Version of the Bible further describes it as “round”) and that is one of the reasons why the Church has offered communion wafers in that shape.

The rituals of Passover are recapitulated in **Exodus 23**, which includes a series of laws given along with the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

Chametz

The Israelites and later the Jews were in no way restricted from eating leavened bread beyond the feast following Passover. Look up **Leviticus 7:13**. Among the many sorts of offerings that were commanded in the law, this one specifically calls for leavened bread. Because the yeast and other bacteria that we know cause fermentation and therefore leavening in bread were unknown in those days, the very process of bread rising was thought to be a sign of God’s grace, signified by the word *chametz*.

Contemporary Jews will often welcome the Sabbath with a meal including Challah, a rich egg bread leavened with yeast. On the day before the Passover, the house is ceremonial swept clean to rid it of any leftover *chametz*, insuring that the festival bread will indeed be unleavened.

As a result of the variety of forms of bread found in scripture, it is not surprising that different Church communities choose one form or another to share in Holy Communion, from wafers to cubes of Wonder Bread® to homemade loaves.

“Shew Bread”

In **Exodus 25:30**, the priests serving in the Tabernacle (and later in the Temple) are directed to prepare fresh bread every day to place on a table near the Ark of the Covenant. It was called “shew bread” in the King James Version, the “bread of the Presence” in more modern versions, because it was a visible reminder of the great mystery that lay hidden behind the great curtain of the Holy of Holies. In our own day, many Episcopal and Roman Catholic churches

keep consecrated bread (and/or wine) in a tabernacle or aumbry near the altar, often with a lit candle nearby – again symbolizing the invisible presence of God.

In a dramatic scene found in **1 Samuel 21: 1-6**, the priests of the Tabernacle assist David in a dire moment by offering him and his comrades the shew bread to eat while they were escaping from Saul’s soldiers. Jesus refers to this incident in **Matthew 12** as he explains how the Law was always supposed to work.

Wine in the Hebrew Scriptures

The word “wine” appears 249 times in the NRSV Hebrew Scriptures. Wine is frequently distinguished from “strong drink,” which seems to refer to beverages brewed from grains, like beer from barley.

A Blessing and a Curse

Unlike bread, the gifts of wine and strong drink come with both a blessing and a curse. Though enjoying them properly produces “glad hearts” [**Zechariah 10:7, Psalm 104:15**], overindulgence is roundly condemned [**Leviticus 10:9, Psalm 60:3, Isaiah 5:11**]. In fact, it seems that everyone who becomes drunk – for example, Noah [**Genesis 9**] or Lot [**Genesis 18**] – suffers immediate and dire consequences. Nevertheless, the presence of vineyards was prevalent enough for **Isaiah** to use them as a figure of Israel in his “Song of the Vineyard” [**chapter 5**]. There are many other references to wine in the prophets, and the faithfulness of the people is often measured by how sharply they are condemned for their misuse of the beverage or how they rejoice in its use to make glad hearts.

Ritual Uses of Wine

Several sections in the Book of **Numbers** detail the use of wine as a sacrificial element. **Chapter 15** suggests that wine was often poured out on the ground (sometimes called a “libation”) to release its aroma which was “pleasing to the Lord.” **Chapter 18** directs some of the offerings to be reserved to use by the priests and Levites for their daily food, including a share of wine.

Vow of the Nazirite

Numbers 6 describes the Vow of the Nazirite, which could be declared on a child at birth or adopted for a period of time later in life. It explicitly forbids the consumption of wine or strong drink, along with a handful of other requirements. Nazirites in Scripture include Samson and the prophet Samuel. St. Paul takes a similar vow in **Acts 18:18**, as do the hoodlums who try to kill him in **Acts 21:23**. In part because of this long-standing tradition, a person receiving communion is never required to receive wine if they would prefer not to.

The Eucharist in the New Testament

“Eucharist” is the anglicized form of the Greek word for “Thanksgiving.” In *The Book of Common Prayer*, the portion of the texts used to bless the bread and wine are referred to as “The Great Thanksgiving.” Functionally, Eucharist is equivalent to Holy Communion – though the truth is that in the 21st century hardly anyone who isn’t a member of a church understands what either term means!

First Record

Chronologically speaking, the first record describing the institution of Holy Communion was written by St. Paul. [1 **Corinthians 11:23-27**] Paul is explicit that he has received this account directly from the LORD, rather than as a tradition handed down from other disciples. The “Words of Institution” that are included in each of our Eucharistic prayers includes, more or less verbatim, what Paul records here.

The “Four-Fold” Action

There is a remarkable uniformity in the accounts of how Jesus handles bread in the New Testament. Whether *via* Paul’s description-by-revelation in 1 Corinthians or by common agreement about what other disciples saw, it seems clear that Jesus was intentional about the symbolic value of what he was doing. Look up and read the story of the Feeding of the 5000 in **Mark 6:35-43**. Verse 41 succinctly lays out the four actions – indicated by four verbs – that constitute the Eucharist.

“**Taking** the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and **blessed** and **broke** the loaves, and **gave** them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all.”

To this day churches which keep to a liturgical tradition (that is, use a standard form for worship week by week), and which celebrate Holy Communion as a primary form of worship, repeat this pattern exactly, usually narrated within the text of the communion prayer.

The celebrant **takes** the bread and wine which are often brought forward from the rear of the congregation, or at least are set on a nearby “credence” table. The elements are **blessed** in the course of the prayer of the Great Thanksgiving, which ends with the LORD’s Prayer. The celebrant **breaks** the bread, offering a word of commemoration in a motion now called the “Fraction.” And, after

receiving the elements first (as a servant would eat before serving the master) the celebrant **gives** the bread and wine to the communicants. (Episcopalians who grew up with the 1928 version of The Book of Common Prayer, used in a church with an altar against the wall, may not have noticed that the “Fraction” actually took place in the midst of the Great Thanksgiving.)

The Last Supper

It is clear that Jesus asks us to remember in the Eucharist what he for us at the Last Supper. The specific use of the Four-Fold Action and the Words of Institution may be found at **Matthew 26:26**, **Mark 14:22** and **Luke 22:19**. This is commemorated with particular clarity in the Eucharist of Maundy Thursday, during Holy Week, which explicitly calls to mind the scene of the Last Supper.

The Gospel of John recounts the Last Supper with a different emphasis. Perhaps because the Letters of Paul and the three earlier Gospels were in such wide circulation by the time John wrote, he chose to emphasize the foot washing and the “High Priestly Prayer” of Jesus in his account, as opposed to the actions over the bread and wine. Nevertheless, his account of the Feeding of the 5000 [**John 6**] indicates that he, too, understood what Jesus was doing.

Norms

The New Testament records enough of the history of the early Church that it is apparent that norms around the celebration of the Eucharist developed quickly. St. Paul admonishes his audience [**I Corinthians 11: 20-22**] about proper decorum, even as he reminds them of the revelation he received. It is worth noting how his admonition reflects the Hebrew Scripture about drunkenness.

The Eucharist in the Early Church

The literature of the Christian experience beyond the New Testament expands exponentially. The debates about what is orthodox, heterodox or heretical will continue endlessly. Nevertheless, there are some patterns from this literature.

It seems like **Sunday Evenings** were the preferred time for Christians to gather to celebrate the Eucharist. Evidently it represents both the day of the resurrection and the first appearance to a large gathering of the disciples (notably excepting Thomas!) all at once. In Greco-Roman society, it was, by all accounts, a time when a citizen or a slave might easily slip away for a few hours of private time.

The first Christians gathered in small groups that could fit in a typical member’s home, now referred to as **House Churches**. From early on worship

included reading letters from apostles or important local disciples (some recently received), singing hymns, preaching, and sharing a meal which culminated in blessing a portion of the bread and wine for Holy Communion. A famous relic of those days is the House Church found at **Dura-Europas**, in ancient Syria – the oldest extant building dedicated to Christian worship. At the frontier of the Roman Empire, this small city also gave had a synagogue, a temple to Mithras, a temple to Bel and other religious sanctuaries – many of them painted by the same artist!

It is evident that Christianity had an appeal that helped it to grow more quickly, comparatively speaking, than many other Roman cults. As a result it was quickly noticed and quickly condemned. A particularly viruluous charge was that Christians were cannibals, because they continually talked about eating the body and drinking the blood of their god. A debate recorded by **Minucius Felix** between the pagan Caecilius and the Christian Octavius, in the 2nd or 3rd century, lays this charge out in great detail – but it is found in several other sources as well. It is easy to see how the Words of Institution and the poems of **John 6** could be misinterpreted in this way by outsiders.

Worship in the early Church came to be known as *Liturgy*, that is, as a public work of the faithful. Modern use of the word is a reminder that there are particular roles and responsibilities for clergy and laity alike and that no worship is complete without that cooperation.

Across the Centuries

Quite a number of the things we say and do at celebrations of Holy Communion are meant to remind us of the practices of the early Church. Within 100 years of the resurrection, Christians were persecuted by the authorities in many jurisdictions. Roman Christians were forced to take their worship into secret places – notably the catacombs, which, because they served as city sewers, were also used as lower class burial caves and became an ideal place to hide illegal activities (like the Eucharist) from the authorities. Imagine what they would need to be mindful of in order to practice their faith.

To navigate to a place safe enough to celebrate the Eucharist, they would need a supply of **candles or oil lamps**. Special occasions, like the commemoration of a local Saint or the particular celebration of Easter, might call for a special, brighter light than usual.

Dripping water and sewage were frequently present, and though they provided the security necessary, they were not pleasant to deal with. Worshippers, especially those presiding, did well to protect themselves from these hazards. Capes with hoods and ponchos were typical garb – recognizable in the **cope** worn by bishops and the **chasuble** worn by priests. Long separated

from their original function, they now serve to decorate the sanctuary to the Glory of God and as a reminder of how our worship changes over the seasons.

Likewise, the elements of bread and wine would also need to be protected from drips and drabs. A heavy **veil** would keep a chalice and a plate (or **paten**) safe during the early portions of the service. A **burse** (sounds like purse!) would safely contain extra linens and bread. At the right moment, a plain linen cloth from the burse would be placed on the surface used as a table to hold the body (the **corporal**, from the Latin *corpus*) and another (a **purificator**) to keep the chalice neat. While the chalice was unveiled, it might be temporarily covered by a **pall**, again to keep the elements clean and pure during the communion prayer.

For those who understand the origin of the hardware and software that we use on Sundays, the Eucharist is not just an immediate connection between worshippers and Father, Son and Holy Spirit: it connects us also to the generations of the earliest Christians who forged the iron of our tradition.

Constantine's Influence

The Emperor Constantine's Edict of Milan in 313 may not have been the first official declaration of religious toleration in the Roman Empire, but it marks a watershed in the life of Christianity nonetheless. With confiscated property restored and the way clear to establish itself publically, the Church underwent a period of unprecedented growth. As a result patterns of worship (among other things) had to be redeveloped in order to meet the increasing demand.

Where worship once normally took place in a home or a small, secret place with just a few family groups in attendance, large groups now wanted to worship together. The typical structure in the Roman world used to gather large groups of people was the **basilica**, a hall which featured a raised platform for a dais at one end (sometimes framed by an **apse**) and a large space with a middle aisle and often side aisles. Basilicas were used for tribunals and hearings of various sorts, the magistrate sitting on the dais conducting business presented from those seated or standing in the aisles. The configuration of most church buildings to this day is a larger or smaller variation of this basic pattern, the altar replacing the dais and aisles now filled with pews or seats.

The growth of the Church also brought about changes in the roles of the clergy. The oversight function of the Bishop now began to include administrative duties. Because bishops could no longer be present as often with their congregations, the priest became the primary liturgical and pastoral presence for them. The hierarchical structure, especially with respect to clergy, that has come to mark liturgical churches, really becomes established at this time as well.

The Theology of Holy Communion

Though practices vary widely from congregation to congregation, the bread and wine of Holy Communion are treated with great respect, especially consecrated elements that are reserved for later use. Some churches have an **aumbry** or **tabernacle** where consecrated elements are stored, often with a large candle or other **sanctuary lamp** nearby. Members of the congregation might bow or even **genuflect** as they pass in front of the aumbry.

These practices arise out of theological claims about the Eucharist. It is helpful to think about a continuum of belief with endless shades of understanding between two poles. One pole thinks of the Eucharist as a **Sacrament**, that is (in Augustine's words) "a visible sign of an invisible reality." The other pole thinks of it as an **ordinance**, an action that Jesus Christ asked us to repeat in remembrance of the Last Supper.

Key to the sacramental understanding of Eucharist is the belief that Jesus Christ becomes somehow "present" in the elements of bread and wine. Transubstantiation is the belief that the bread and wine actually become the historical body and blood of Jesus Christ during the Great Thanksgiving – though their outward appearance remains unchanged. This position was described in the 9th century work of **Radbertus Paschasius** and is the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. Interestingly, his contemporary **Ratramnus** (they were successive abbots at the same monastery in Corbie!) held a surprisingly different position, highlighting the fact that a range of beliefs about the Eucharist could be held by people in the same community who both affirmed the "**real presence**" of Christ in the sacrament.

On the opposite pole, the Eucharist was seen as a memorial to and a reminder of the saving activity of Jesus Christ on the cross and through the resurrection. The many shades on meaning possible near this pole can be seen in the transcripts of the **Marburg Colloquy**, a conference on the Eucharist held in Hesse, Germany, in 1529 and featuring such Protestant luminaries as Martin Luther, Huldrych Zwingli, Philipp Melancthon and Martin Bucer.

Archbishop **Thomas Cranmer**, chief author of the first Anglican Prayerbook in 1549 corresponded with Martin Luther about many matters including the theology of the Eucharist. The Great Thanksgiving included that first Prayerbook steers away from the doctrine of Transubstantiation but likewise stands apart from the memorialist doctrine of the Reformers. It is common to hear the Anglican position named **Consubstantiation**, which affirms the real presence of Christ in the elements without negating their physical being. This also requires the presence of a community (not just a priest) not only to remember but actually to bring about the **sacramental union**.

Early Anglican Prayerbooks

The First **Book of Common Prayer** was authorized for use beginning of the Feast of Pentecost in **1549**. This was in the midst of the brief tenure of Edward VI as king, and represented pretty much a translation of what churches had formerly done in Latin into English. The Protestant reforms of Catholic liturgy were reinforced by a revision of the book in **1552**, published just before Queen Mary reintroduced Roman worship on her ascent to the throne. Following her reign, a third revision of the Book of Common Prayer was issued in **1559**. The differences between the different versions seem almost innocuous in the 21st century, but represented much debated theological (and one might say even political!) points in their own day. A remnant of those debates continued well into the 20th century with congregations identifying themselves publically as “High Church” or “Low Church” or “Broad Church,” and church members often traveling some distance to find a comfortable place to worship. A charming account of the early days of this history may be found at

http://anglicanhistory.org/liturgy/daniels_ornaments.html.

After the restoration of the British crown in 1659 a reexamination and revision of the Prayerbook was again in order. **The Book of Common Prayer of 1662** -- still authorized for use in England to this day, although with alternatives also available -- stands as a masterpiece of balance between high and low church practice and Catholic and Protestant theological viewpoints.

The American Anglican Experience

The reorganization of the Anglican Church in post-colonial America was not easily achieved. A great many of the clergy were loyalists during the war, and though some remained, a large number left for Canada or England. (The story of the Rev'd **Jonathon Boucher**, one-time Rector of St. Anne's, Annapolis, is illustrative of the point.)

The Rev'd Samuel Seabury was elected the first American bishop by the clergy of Connecticut -- a wise choice given his own loyalist position during the war. He reached an impasse in London where the consecration of a bishop included an oath of loyalty to the crown. Traveling to Scotland, he was consecrated by Scottish bishops (so-called “**non-jurors**” given their position on the accession of William and Mary nearly a century before) who required no such oath. It is often suggested that, in exchange for agreeing to consecrate Seabury, they requested that he advocate for the use of the Scottish Eucharistic prayer, which included elements not found in the 1662 Prayerbook version. In any event, when the first American version of the *Book of Common Prayer* was

adopted in 1789, it included the “**prayer of oblation**” and “**epiclesis**” found in the Scottish rite but missing from the English one.

Though patterns of worship varied by local custom and sometimes architectural necessity, throughout the 19th century a typical Sunday service included Morning Prayer, followed by the Great Litany followed by Ante-Communion (the service up to the Offertory). All of the above could be led by a **lay reader** -- important in an era where church buildings often outnumbered ordained clergy in many regions. When a priest was present the service could continue with full communion, though except in Eastertide the number of communicants was often just a few (explaining the continued presence of the **Exhortation** even in the current BCP).

The understanding of the importance of the Eucharist as the central act of Episcopal worship grew steadily during the 20th century, hand-in-hand with widespread liturgical renewal across Christianity. As a direct result, the number of persons coming to Communion, when offered, increased, and with it the difficulty of offering the sacrament in a timely way during the service. The first Lay Chalcist (or Lay Eucharistic Minister) licensed to assist at the altar rail in the Diocese of Maryland was Dr. Charles Pickett of Emmanuel Church, Bel Air, in 1962. Since then bishops have authorized LEM’s in every congregation.

By the time the Prayerbook was revised in 1979, it was normative for lay persons to participate in every aspect of worship, up to and including vocal participation in the Eucharistic prayer, as in Prayer C. Lay Eucharistic Ministers in some congregations assist in the distribution of bread as well as wine, and Lay Eucharistic Visitors are authorized to take Communion directly from a Sunday service to congregants who are hospitalized or otherwise shut in.

Part II – Customary

In church language, a Customary refers to the norms and conventions preferred by a local diocese or congregation. Bishops circulate customaries which detail how to prepare for their official visitations, while altar guilds will have very local customaries around the placement of silver, **paraments** and linens before services can begin. Though each congregation will have its own customary around the ministry of Chalcists, there are some basic elements that will be present in most places. Please note that in many congregations the customary is never written down, but handed on by oral tradition!

Vestments for Lay Eucharistic Ministers

In the majority of congregations LEM's vest for the service. However, in an increasing number of congregations persons without vestment will serve as chalicists without vesting, often approaching the altar after the prayer of consecration. Both choices have their merits: the first adds to the beauty and majesty of divine service, and can even provide visual clues as to who is playing what role; the second emphasizes the importance of the participation of the laity in all aspects of ministry. From the earliest days of the Church, the preferred garment for leading worship was white, recalling the heavenly robes described in **The Book of Revelations** [3:18; 4:4 and 7:14]. The typical choices listed below derive from that tradition.

Cassock & Cotta or Cassock & Surplice

A **cassock** is a full length, sleeved robe of plain material worn as an undergarment beneath other vestments. It is similar in form to the gowns worn by academics in medieval universities and Reformation era clergy adopted it as the sufficient dress for leading worship. Recalling the climate and the lack of central heat in old English churches and schools, the cassock was above all else a practical garment. It was put on coat style, with a number of buttons according to its style, and often held together with a rope or cloth cincture. It is normally black, but some cathedral congregations adopt a purple shade, and there are occasionally dark blue or gray versions in some places. Acolytes may wear a red cassock, which may help to distinguish them from other servers at the altar. Bishops may wear cassocks of red-purple or blue-purple, especially when further vested in "**Rochet** and **Chimere**." Cathedral Deans often wear purple cassocks, while Canons may wear black cassocks trimmed with red cording and buttons.

A **cotta** or **surplice** is generally worn over a cassock. Both are white, sleeved garments, mostly of plain material (though increasingly featuring woven or lace trim). A cotta is shorter, falling just to the waist, with the sleeves ending between the elbow and wrist. The surplice is longer, falling from knee to floor length, with sleeves reaching the wrist, sometimes in a wide flare.

Over time, the cassock and surplice became the typical dress for Morning or Evening Prayer and was referred to as "choir dress." Clergy often wore their academic hood as part of choir dress, and a black scarf called a tippet, sometimes decorated with the seal of their seminary or of the diocese.

The Alb

"Alb" derives from the ancient Latin word *alba* meaning "white." It is the oldest form of liturgical wear, and early Christians were dressed in an alb as they emerged from the waters of baptism. In form and shape it is similar to a cassock, and may have buttons or be tied with a cincture or pulled on over the head. As it

developed from the time of Constantine through the Reformation it too became a kind of an undergarment. Bishops wore them under their **cofes**, priests under their **chasubles** and deacons under their **dalmatics**. In some forms it had a separate, scarf-like collar called an **amice**. When worn under another vestment the alb is likely to be very plain; when worn alone it may have woven or lace inserts at the sleeves and hem, much like the cotta or surplice, and many different styles are now available.

The Alb – Decorated

Though there is beauty in the simplicity of the alb itself, there are any numbers of ways that it may be decorated. **Pectoral crosses**, once in the provenance of the bishop only, are now frequently seen on clergy and laity alike. Some are designed to represent the ministry of the chalice or lay reader or acolyte.

Often decoration is used to highlight the color of the liturgical season. One way this is done is by varying the color of the rope or fabric **cincture**, to match the green, white, red, blue, violet or rose colors that are featured in the paraments and vestments. Some congregations use a variation on the monastic **scapular**, a large garment that looks like a cross between a vest and an apron, as a form of decoration – either in liturgical colors or in a pattern that picks up some feature of the sanctuary. Generally, Emmanuel Chalicists wear these.

The most elaborate and elegant way of decorating an alb is with **apparels**. Five pieces of colored material (often in richly trimmed brocade) are applied to an alb: two large pieces, near the bottom hem at the front and back; one to each of the sleeve cuffs; and a final one lining the back of the collar or amice. Most congregations that use apparels design them to snap into place on the alb or amice, allowing one garment to be decorated for any liturgical occasion.

Duties at the Altar

The preparation of the altar for Holy Communion has always been a special responsibility of **Deacons**, recalling the original ministry of care and feeding in **Acts 6** that caused them to be set apart from the beginning. Since there are far fewer deacons than congregations, many priests (who were ordained deacons for at least a short time before they became priests!) take on this responsibility. However, in an increasing number of congregations, Lay Eucharistic Ministers may assist in this process. It is good to know, therefore, what lies beneath the **burse** and **veil**!

Next to Godliness: Cleanliness!

The Archbishop of Canterbury has asked that clergy around the Anglican Communion be mindful of the potential that flu and other diseases might spread in church due to the close proximity of many people together at worship and especially around the distribution of the bread and wine. There is scriptural warrant for such attention to hygiene. In **Mark 7** Jesus and the Pharisees engage in a debate about the disciples eating without washing hands. Jesus responds to their criticism by addressing their interest in the letter of the law over the spirit of the law, but in the process a brief catalog of things washed before use is reviewed. The custom of washing hands was brought from Judaism to the Church in the use of the **lavabo**, which in modern usage amounts to no more than a symbolic rinse of the fingertips of the celebrant, who often recites **Psalm 26:6** or some other prayer in the process.

There have been many reports in the media detailing practices recommended by the medical profession to prevent the spread of disease, notably highlighting the importance of frequent and thorough hand washing with ordinary soap. (The use of anti-bacterial soaps remains environmentally controversial.) Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are also effective. It is strongly recommended that anyone handling the elements or vessels used in Holy Communion wash their hands prior to the beginning of the service, or better following the Peace. If soap and water are not immediately available (for example, in a nearby sacristy) hand sanitizer should be used. It is good for these actions to be carried out in view of the congregation as a sign of pastoral carefulness. Many dioceses have issued further recommendations (some concerning actions at the Peace, for example) or even directives, and it is important to incorporate them into local custom.

The Typical Setup

With the altar as the base and moving upward, the following are typically found. If there is a **frontal**, it probably has some base material that covers the top of the altar, to keep it in place. On top of that is some sort of padded or waterproof material to keep the frontal from any stains. The first visible layer is the **fair linen**, a plain white cloth that covers the entire surface, often hanging below each side. In most congregations the altar is fully dressed before the service begins. That means that a corporal is already laid out on top of the fair linen, on which is placed the chalice and paten, vested in the burse and veil. Typically, the paten will already contain a larger “priest’s host” and a purificator will sit between chalice and paten, both to protect the silver and to be readily available when needed.

(Please see below about personal preparation, especially concerning sanitation, if the LEM is to perform any of these tasks.) To prepare the altar for the Eucharist, first the burse is removed and then the veil. The local customary

will dictate where they are to be placed and/or how the veil is to be folded. The paten is removed from the chalice and placed on the front-center of the corporal. The elements for the Eucharist may be kept on a small **credence** table near the altar or brought forward by members of the congregation as a symbolic offering. Typically, additional wafers are placed on the paten, or in a **ciborium**, representing the number of worshippers present, and the larger host placed on top. First wine and then a little water are poured into the chalice. If additional wine is needed, it may be kept in a cruet or flagon on the altar, to which a little water is added. In some congregations, two or more chalices are prepared and placed on the corporal.

Distribution of Communion

The Prayerbook rubrics direct that the “ministers” receive communion first and then “deliver it to the people.” This is meant to include ordained clergy, the Lay Eucharistic Ministers and any acolytes who may be assisting.

It is important for everyone to know in advance what role they will be playing before the service begins. Typically the clergy will distribute the bread and LEM’s the wine. In larger congregations there may be more than one communion station.

The chalicist is directed to offer the wine with a sentence or two, which varies between Rite I and Rite II. There may be some local variation on this practice, such as including the name of the communicant if known.

It is not easy to offer someone a sip of wine from a chalice that you are holding! Mindful that this is a holy and prayerful moment, the chalicist must also maintain full control of the chalice and its contents. Dark sanctuaries, people coming and going from the altar rail and hats all present challenges. In the best of all possible churches there are clear directions for communicants to follow as they receive communion – perhaps printed in the bulletin – indicating that they should feel free to guide the chalice to their lips. For whatever reason many people believe they shouldn’t touch the chalice with their hands at all. LEM’s are permitted, politely, to remind congregants that their help with the chalice is welcome.

After a person has received the wine, the chalicist wipes the rim of the cup (inside and outside) with the purificator and then turns it so that the next person can sip from a clean spot. This action, combined with the alcohol content of the wine and the imperviousness of the silver make reception of the wine a comparatively safe action.

Intinction

Intinction, or dipping the bread in the wine before consumption, has always been permitted by Anglican custom. It can be done in two ways. A communicant

can take the bread that has been given them and dip it themselves into the chalice, or the LEM can take the bread from the communicant's hands, dip it in the chalice and place it in his or her mouth. The latter is now almost universally recommended, especially in places where children receive communion by intinction. The goal is to keep the many (potentially unsanitary) fingertips out of the wine.

[A very few congregations use separate chalices for sipping and intinction (sometimes carried by the same person!). The US Naval Academy, which offers communion only by intinction, has a set of uniquely designed vessels with a gold paten molded around a silver and gold chalice so that the same LEM offers both elements at once.

At the End of Communion

The Lay Eucharistic Ministers return the vessels to the altar for the **ablutions**. The "Additional Directions" given by the Prayerbook following the Communion Services offer the ways in which consecrated elements may be reserved for subsequent use. Wine from a chalice should never be returned to a flagon or cruet. If there is too much for the altar party to consume reverently and without embarrassment the wine (and also bread, for that matter) may be returned to the ground whence it came.

"Other Duties as Assigned"

Many congregations offer multiple services on weekends and it is often the case that a Lay Eucharistic Minister will be called upon to perform other functions, especially as more sparsely attended services. These may include lighting the candles and assisting at the altar as an acolyte, carrying a processional cross as a crucifer, leading the "Prayers of the People" or reading the lessons as a lay reader. There should be a local customary for each of these tasks, though again it may be written or passed down orally.

Lay Eucharistic Visitors

Current Church practice allows some Lay Eucharistic Ministers to take the bread and wine directly from a service in the church to someone in hospital or shut in at home. This is meant to supplement, not replace, pastoral visits from the clergy.

Additional Training Requirements

Because Lay Eucharistic Visitors interact with congregants in less public circumstances than Sunday worship, they need to be trained and certified

according to current “Safe Church” standards. These standards are uniform throughout the Episcopal Church, which means that certification can travel with an LEV if he or she moves from one diocese to another. The certification needs to be renewed periodically, and dioceses have regularly scheduled programs to insure that this can be done conveniently.

The Form of the Pastoral Visit

There are three distinct parts involved in a Lay Eucharistic visit. First, at church, following the usual Post-Communion Prayer, the celebrant will invite any visitors scheduled to exercise this ministry to the altar to receive the communion kit. A commissioning prayer is said, shared by the celebrant and the congregation, and the visitor leaves directly from the altar to travel to the person being visited. An important part of this ministry is to connect the recipient as much as possible with the worship of the local community. It is therefore inappropriate for the LEV to dally at coffee hour or stop for lunch.

Second, once the visitor arrives at the assigned hospital room or home, the prayers and sharing of Holy Communion should take place before any distracting conversation. This may mean doing some preparation with the recipient by way of expectations. It is important that communion be shared, so the LEV should partake of the bread and wine along with the recipient. Any other member of the household who is present is also welcome to participate.

The form of the service itself is essentially the **Communion Under Special Circumstances** rite found in the Prayerbook following the other Holy Eucharist services. Many congregations print this in a booklet to take along, often in large print format. Local custom may include the addition of other prayers and perhaps a reading. Bringing a copy of the day’s service bulletin is usually welcome!

Finally, once the sacrament has been shared and prayers have been offered, the visit should continue with some appropriate pastoral care. Taking the time to sit and have a conversation with the recipient *at this point* is an important part of the visit and should not be cut short.

The Hardware and Software of the LEV Kit

Lay Eucharistic Visitors use communion kits that are similar to those used by clergy for home communion visits. They typically include a cruet for the consecrated wine, a pyx holding several consecrated hosts, a small chalice and paten and small scale communion linens. More elaborate kits might include candles and a standing cross. They are often housed in a wooden box or a fabric bag with dividers protecting the various pieces.

At the time of the visit the linens are laid out first, including a corporal and a purificator. Wine is poured from the cruet into the chalice (which may then be covered with a small pall) and bread from the pyx is placed on the paten. Once the prayers and the sharing of communion have been completed, the chalice should be rinsed with clean water in a way similar to the ablutions at the altar in church.

Any leftover bread and wine should be treated with the same respect with which consecrated elements are treated in the church. The communion kit should be returned to the sacristy as soon as possible after the visit, so some thought should be given to how and under what circumstances that can reasonably happen. (It would, under any circumstances, be highly inappropriate for the kit to rattle around on the back seat of a car all week until the next Sunday!)

Final Thoughts

Whatever your theology – whether you believe in the “real presence” or in the sharing of the bread and wine as a “memorial” – there is no question that the rites of Holy Communion are an “inestimable gift” from God to the Church.

Augustine reminds us “to preach the Gospel always; if necessary use words!” The ministry of the chalice or Lay Eucharistic Minister can be one of few words but powerful proclamation of God’s grace.

*The Rev’d Canon Dr. Mark Gatzka,
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