

To: Members of the House of Bishops

From: Revd Hugh Palmer, Chair – Church of England Evangelical Council

Dear Bishops

### **Holy Communion in both kinds**

Following a recent meeting of the Working Group of CEEC (Church of England Evangelical Council), I have been asked to write to you (in advance of your meeting scheduled for later this week) to express the very great concern being felt by many about the current instruction and legal opinion that church members should only be receiving Holy Communion in one kind. This of course arises out of the stated legal opinion that the use of individual cups is illegal.

You are no doubt aware of a different legal opinion that such use is *not* illegal within the Church of England. The issue the House of Bishops needs to resolve is which legal advice they are going to follow. Are they bound to hold to that offered by the senior legal team in Church House?

In addition to that legal argument, others have already made the case that there is no adequate *theological* argument against the use of individual cups in the current circumstances. Moreover, given that, as instituted by Christ, the Lord's Supper has two elements there surely need to be very powerful reasons indeed for restricting the majority of Christians in our churches to receiving just one of them. Article 30 of the 39 Articles is very clear.

But the concern I wish to express now is primarily *pastoral* – and it applies at local, diocesan and national levels.

At the most basic level of the local church, there seems to be widespread confusion (and indeed some sadness). Many clergy are deeply unhappy about being asked to be alone in receiving the cup – and some cannot in conscience preside in such circumstances. At the same time, many lay people are similarly concerned about why the cup is being denied them when there is now considered and different advice that individual cups are not illegal. Indeed, lay people have been pointing to the fact that it is normal for *more than one* cup to be used at most Communion services anyway! The results of this confusion and concern have included some congregations simply not having sacramental services at all (which cannot be right for anyone involved); others using individual cups whilst calling the service something other than “Holy Communion”; and others simply fudging the whole issue in one way or another. Indeed, we are concerned that some of the attempts to find “ways around” your current guidance are exhibiting a lack of sensitivity to the theological, liturgical and legal (and even aesthetic) issues raised by such improvisations. At the same time clergy who seek to abide by your guidance are frustrated when others – now apparently with good legal grounds – ignore it.

This increasingly chaotic state of affairs is, we believe, potentially harmful to the respect bishops receive within their dioceses – and indeed for the House of Bishops as a body. Furthermore, the unity of the Church as a whole is damaged when a particular kind of understanding of (and approach to) the sacrament seems to be affecting the guidance to an unwarranted degree. (That is not to say that only “Evangelicals” or the particularly “Protestant” have a problem; we understand that this concern is being felt quite widely across the denomination). And from an ecumenical point of view it is equally damaging to say individual cups are illegal.

The last thing any of us wish to see would be this matter ending up with a court having to decide between your current advice that individual cups are illegal and the contrary advice that they are not; a legal battle would serve no-one, least of all the unity and mission of the Church.

In view of the theological, legal and pastoral reasons for allowing the use of individual cups (for the purpose that all communicants can receive the sacrament in both kinds) we urge you to reconsider your current guidance as a matter of urgency please.

With thanks for your attention and the time you are giving to this and many other matters,

**Revd Hugh Palmer**  
**Chair – Church of England Evangelical Council**