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**Communion by Extension: discrepancies between policy and practice**

**David S Walker**

## **Abstract**

*The growing practice of Communion by Extension was given formal authorisation by the Church of England General Synod in 2000 with the expectation that it would be used in particular circumstances, including explicitly the rural multi-church benefice. This paper reviews the historical origins of the practice of Communion by Extension and clarifies the intentions of the authorisation given in 2000. Then the intentions of the 2000 authorisation are compared and contrasted with current parochial practice within one English diocese. Considerable divergence is found. Five main themes are identified and discussed: the relationship between worship and mission; the pressures on clerical time; sacramental self-sufficiency; the value given to familiarity; and the choice between reservation and congregationalism.*

## **Introduction**

Two opposing trends have been at work in the Church of England over the last 50 years. While the view has developed that most main acts of public worship should be sacramental, there has been a relentless reduction in the number of stipendiary priests able to preside at eucharists. One particular response to this has been the increased usage of bread and wine consecrated at some previous service, the worship in church then being led by an authorised layperson.

In 2000 the General Synod authorised two rites for this practice as “Communion by Extension” and the House of Bishops produced guidelines printed with the rites in *Public Worship with Communion by Extension* (Archbishops’ Council: 2001). The historical roots of these rites lie in two distinct but related practices which grew up over the previous century: the use of the reserved sacrament in church and the taking of consecrated bread and wine

from the communion service to the sick and housebound. Although the 2001 provision is more explicitly related to the latter, both inform parochial practice.

### **Sacramental reservation**

*The Book of Common Prayer 1662* is unequivocal:

But if any remain of that which was consecrated, it shall not be carried out of the Church, but the Priest, and such other of the Communicants as he shall then call unto him, shall, immediately after the Blessing, reverently eat and drink the same.

The sacrament exists wholly within the context of a specific act of worship, and, for the avoidance of any doubt, is to be fully consumed as soon as the service is over.

The practice of reserving the sacrament re-emerged in the Church of England as part of the Anglo-Catholic Movement in the mid-nineteenth century. It remained, however, uncommon outside the most catholic parishes until the First World War when, as Vidler (1961: 164) notes, in the context of ministry taking place on the battlefield, the full communion service as set out in *The Book of Common Prayer* was felt by many chaplains to be inappropriate to the needs of providing the sacraments to soldiers. From then on the question of how to permit reservation for communion, but not for adoration, taxed the minds of liturgical revisers.

Many high church parishes had no qualms about adopting practices seen in the life of the Roman Catholic Church. The real presence of Christ does not depart from the elements with the blessing and dismissal. Consecrated bread and wine could be used at future eucharists, mixed with, or supplementing that consecrated at the service itself. Hughes (2002) notes that in 1988, in response to rapid reductions in the numbers of Roman Catholic clergy, the Vatican published a “Directory on Sunday Celebrations in the absence of a Priest”, and that

various episcopal conferences have produced appropriate service books. It was not a huge step, especially after the Parish Communion Movement had made regular reception of communion the norm even in evangelical parishes, for this to cross over into the Church of England, well beyond Anglo-Catholic circles. By the end of the twentieth century such rites had become relatively common across a swathe of the Church of England.

### **Communion of the sick**

Another consequence of the increasing focus on sacramental worship in the twentieth century was the growth in the demand for communion to be taken to the sick and housebound. Lloyd (1998) notes that in 1911 all four Houses of Convocation agreed to a rubric drawn up by the bishops acknowledging that a full celebration at the bedside would not always be appropriate and that the priest might, on any day when there was a eucharist in church, take the consecrated sacrament from the altar, as speedily as possible, to the sick person.

As clergy numbers reduced, but expectations on their time increased, this was an obvious area for lay ministry. The fears about inappropriate reservation had not, however, gone away and the Church of England struggled to authorise liturgies at a national level. Indeed the Church of England (1965) service book contained a reference to such a rite in its contents list, which led only to a blank page with a pasted-in slip indicating it to be still under consideration.

In order both to emphasise the link between the sick communicant and the worshipping congregation, and to minimise the focus on the elements, a number of practices developed, especially in parishes where reservation was not well established. These included: drawing the attention of the congregation to the specific purpose (in some cases including the names

of communicants) for which additional elements were being consecrated; using readings and propers from the original service when the sacrament was received; having the sacrament brought by a person who had been present at the original service; and minimising the time between consecration and reception.

### **The 2001 Rites and Guidelines**

The primary intentions of the Bishops are set out succinctly in a single paragraph:

In making authorized provision for Communion by Extension, the House of Bishops has in mind the needs of a single cure with a number of authorised places of worship, or a group or team ministry. In such circumstances worshippers gathered in one of the places where Holy Communion has not been celebrated may receive communion by extension from a church where Holy Communion is celebrated, with a minimal interval of time between the services. The provision is intended primarily for Sundays and Principal Holy Days, but may be appropriate on other occasions. A particular congregation should not come to rely mainly upon this means of eucharistic participation, and care should be taken to ensure that a celebration of Holy Communion takes place regularly in each church concerned. (Archbishops' Council 2001: 32).

The rites contain material referring explicitly to the link between the two acts of worship. In Order 1, which is in modern language, following the initial greeting the minister is required to read a passage which begins with the Lukan Institution Narrative then goes on to explain the purpose of the gathering, including the words:

In union with those who celebrate [have celebrated] the Eucharist at N... this day, we seek God's grace in Holy Communion" (Archbishops' Council 2001: 2).

Order 2, which follows *The Book of Common Prayer* in structure and language, begins with almost identical mandatory wording (Archbishops' Council 2001: 17).

Order 1 contains a further reference in an optional Introduction to the Peace:

In fellowship with the whole Church of God, with all who have been brought together by the Holy Spirit to worship on this day, and particularly with our brothers and sisters at N... who have celebrated the Eucharist, let us rejoice that we are called to be part of the Body of Christ" (Archbishops' Council 2001: 9).

The intentions of Synod are clearly that those attending the service of Communion by Extension should be left in no doubt about the origin of the bread and wine they are to receive and their link, via those elements, to the wider church which alone has authority to consecrate them.

The texts quoted above are explicit. While there is no explicit statement that the service is not to be used for reasons such as holiday cover, sickness and vacancies, or for managing the general workload of the priest, the phrasing makes it clear that these latter circumstances should be much rarer occurrences. The provision is not designed with the multi-parish benefice in mind, where more than one church desires to hold a eucharist at the same time.

In addition the Guidelines also state:

Public Worship with Communion by Extension will normally take place on Sundays and Principal Holy Days. Exceptionally, the rite may be appropriate on other occasions (Archbishops' Council 2001: v note 2).

While midweek usage is not prohibited, it is certainly intended to be uncommon.

Nowhere in the texts does the word “reservation” appear. The practice is largely that advocated by Russell (1993: 172) where lay ministers leave after the consecration to take the elements to another church or churches and the linkage is explicit. The communion rail is being extended beyond the current building. By extrapolation from communion of the sick, a theologically coherent foundation has been sought that can permit sacramental reception in church, at an act of worship where no priest can be present, without the need to have reservation as part of it. In particular, the Guidelines suggested that bishops were already wary of particular patterns developing over midweek usage, sacramental storage and the rite becoming the principal form of receiving communion in some churches.

Tovey (2001) provides a succinct summary of the somewhat tortuous path of Communion by Extension through General Synod. The complexity of the matter and difficulty in achieving agreement provides a good indication that implementation was also unlikely to be straightforward.

The present study aims to test this hypothesis by examining the implementation of the practice within one diocese and to do so in the tradition of Empirical Theology as defined by Francis, Robbins and Astley (2005). What people do, including what they do liturgically, together with how they articulate it, forms an important strand alongside any formal teaching or official church position in expressing and determining what they believe and any direction of development in those beliefs. The concerns of the study are thus as much with the theological implications of practice as with practice itself.

It was decided to undertake a two stage process: first to see how, relatively unprompted, parishes expressed what they were doing or wanted to do; and second to follow up such



issues as emerged by designing a questionnaire survey.

### **Method 1**

During the period January 2004 to August 2005 some 22 applications for permission, or substantial items of correspondence relating to Communion by Extension, were received in the office of the Bishop of Worcester from benefices covering 55 churches. These represented about 20% of the churches and a similar proportion of the benefices of the diocese. A total of 6 letters were from rural benefices, 10 from urban or mixed settings with multiple churches sharing a stipendiary priest, 5 from parishes or churches with a priest who did not have any other churches, and 1 from a religious order. There was no recognisable difference in the nature of requests coming from urban or rural parishes.

The diocese did not provide any standard pro-forma; in consequence the information supplied varied considerably. While this made analysis of the data more difficult, it meant that what was written was uncontaminated by a desire to fit into an approved framework.

Analysis of the correspondence was undertaken in order to highlight recurrent themes, including those mentioned explicitly in the Guidelines, and to test those areas where there was particular potential for divergence between the synodical intentions and local practice. Individual statements from the correspondence were picked out where they suggested further areas that would benefit from study. On this basis a questionnaire was prepared for the second stage.

### **Results 1**

Only 3 applications fell fully within the Guidelines. Two of these related to providing

Christmas and Easter Services. The other originated in a recently formed team with a reduced number of priests, in an area to which few clergy retire. The other applications breached the Guidelines in a variety of ways. Moreover, several applications contained comments which suggested the theological assumptions of the Guidelines were being contravened.

### **Breaching the Guidelines**

There were four ways in which applications repeatedly breached the Guidelines: regular midweek services, clergy workload management, early Sunday services, and the length of “reservation”. The applications cover all but one of the points that the Guidelines appear to have been anticipating. The exception is that there was no request in this diocese that would lead to Communion by Extension becoming the main sacramental liturgy in any building. Mills (2006), however, provides evidence of that development elsewhere in the Church of England.

*Midweek Services:* The permission requested most frequently was for Communion by Extension to be authorised for use at regular midweek services. Nine applications came into this category: four seeking to cope with holiday or vacancy periods, the remainder being general requests to help clergy manage their workloads. Some clergy had churches with incompatible times for midweek eucharists; others found regular commitments clashing with service times. There was no evidence of retired or neighbouring priests being asked to preside at midweek eucharists as an alternative to Communion by Extension. Anticipating that their request would lead to many communicants receiving twice from elements consecrated on the same occasion a Reader saw no problem, “as all eucharists are linked to the one original celebration”.

*Clergy workload management:* As noted above, a number of requests for midweek provision related to clergy workload management. Direct reference to clergy holidays as a reason for Communion by Extension at a main service on a Sunday occurred in 5 applications. These all suggested that the provision would be rarely required, and was intended as a fallback against the failure to obtain clergy cover from among neighbouring priests, active or retired. The difficulty of obtaining acceptable cover from other priests was mentioned in several letters. Clergy expressed reluctance to make demands on busy colleagues. One noted that fewer colleagues without parochial charge are around. Some felt disproportionate time was required to arrange cover.

*Early Sunday services:* Early Sunday services were mentioned in 6 requests. Some mentioned the particular difficulty of obtaining cover from retired priests at an early hour. In the majority of cases the application suggested that early morning services were likely to be followed by a further eucharist or Communion by Extension in the same building later in the day. There was no suggestion that the sacrament would be brought to an early service from an even earlier one elsewhere.

*Reservation:* The intention in the Bishops' Guidelines that the sacrament be brought from another church "with a minimum interval of time between the services" was picked up in only 2 applications. One of these was specifically seeking permission for Christmas Midnight, with staggered starting times allowing the sacrament to be carried to the other churches in the benefice. The other was a more general request stipulating that the sacrament would be used on the day it was consecrated. A layperson felt that there was a contradiction between requiring the sacrament to be used as soon as possible and how, during a vacancy, they had to deal reverently with mouldy elements found in the aumbry.

## **Contravening the theological assumptions**

The correspondence indicated a number of issues suggesting a theology, explicitly stated or implicit in the practice, potentially at variance with what the Rites and Guidelines pre-suppose.

*Known internal leaders and self-sufficiency:* A number of letters indicated a preference for having sacramental worship led by known leaders. In 2 applications the congregation were said to prefer a known lay leader to a “strange” priest. Several noted that those leading the worship find the experience rewarding and deepening of faith. The implication was that the local church considered the offering of such opportunities to be a proper part of their nurturing of (lay) ministerial talents. Two parishes in poorer areas expressed concerns that priests brought in from outside would expect payment. Given that the figure operating in the Diocese was £10 plus travelling expenses, and not all priests choose to claim, this seemed unlikely to be a critical factor. Taken together these various comments indicated that there was value in exploring further to see if a congregational theology of the local church is emerging.

*Shaping for mission:* One application had a very clear missionary focus. In a multi-parish benefice the priest wrote that on some occasions his priority was to be leading non-eucharistic worship that was drawing in new members. However, this non-eucharistic worship clashed with a eucharist elsewhere. This drew attention to the lack of a missionary theology in the Rites and Guidelines.

*Lay presidency:* A priest wrote of concerns that congregational desires to have worship led by one of their own were effectively creating a movement in favour of lay presidency. The contentious nature of this issue, which has been put forward by the Archdiocese of Sydney,

but widely rejected in other parts of the Anglican Communion, made it worthy of further study.

## **Method 2**

The questionnaire was designed to provide information about the regularity with which Communion by Extension was being used; picking up the issues of midweek and early services along with clergy time pressures. It was also possible to investigate the reasons (the diocesan correspondence having largely focussed on circumstances) which led to Communion by Extension being preferred to other alternatives.

Questions about the place and time of consecration of the elements in relation to when they were to be consumed, and about the specific texts meant to link the two events, offered the means to explore the polarities of extension versus reservation.

Lay presidency, self-sufficiency, known leaders and mission were addressed both directly and by seeking to tease out reasons for preferring Communion by Extension to alternative authorised liturgies (Morning Prayer, Service of the Word) or to different patterns of worship.

Twenty individuals, lay and ordained, representing urban and rural parishes across a broad spectrum of churchmanship, with experience of using Communion by Extension, were invited to attend lunchtime meetings, in two groups of ten. A week in advance they were sent a questionnaire; 15 completed questionnaires were returned, a response rate of 75%.

## **Results 2**

*Patterns of Usage:* The rite had been used in 9 benefices on Sundays during the previous six

months, the same number had used it for regular midweek services, and 4 indicated both. Communion by Extension provided for holiday cover in 10 benefices, 6 used it for sickness cover and 6 during a vacancy. In 10 benefices it was used to maintain the regular pattern of communion beyond what the available priest(s) could service. In 8 cases the benefice had been using Communion by Extension since before the time Synod authorised it.

*Extension or Reservation:* Some 4 responses indicated that the sacrament was customarily used on the day of consecration; the remaining 11 gave periods of storage of up to a week. Almost always the sacrament was consecrated at a regular scheduled service; however one benefice held an extra Friday night service in order to consecrate sufficient elements for the Sunday. In 2 benefices the sacrament was consumed so quickly as to make storage not an issue, 9 had an aumbry, and 3 used the church safe. One parish had a separate wall safe. In most cases the sacrament was being reserved in the church building where it was to be used. Respondents from 8 benefices indicated that they were using the authorised wording on page 2 of the rite, which draws attention to the service at which the consecration took place, but 7 made no direct reference either here or elsewhere. Moreover, half those present at the meetings had never seen a copy. In conversation one person indicated that the villages in the benefice do not like to be reminded that they are joined together.

*Alternatives to Communion by Extension:*

Varied reasons were given as to why Communion by Extension was being used in preference to other forms of non-eucharistic service. In a minority of cases the conversations drew out that the benefice already had a mixed provision, which needed to be held to month-by-month despite clergy absences. In other cases there was clearly a variety of views about the attractiveness to congregations of Matins or of Service of the Word. It was observed that

using some such service primarily as a stopgap when a priest was unavailable sent out signals that it was second best, and did not encourage attendance. Participants at one meeting agreed with the comment that the eucharist has an “event” quality which these other services did not always achieve. The importance for mission of good worship was repeatedly stressed. None of the alternatives to Communion by Extension listed in the questionnaire got a high positive response rate: 5 felt that ordaining more clergy to unpaid positions would be preferred; 3 would like to consider more non-Eucharistic services; 2 were prepared to consider inviting congregations to move around the benefice more; nobody wanted to look at closing church buildings. This was consistent with the finding of Mills (2006) that Communion by Extension is seen as a defence against closure.

*Internal leadership and self-sufficiency:* A known worship leader was a factor for 7 respondents in choosing to use the rite; 4 mentioned along with this a positive wish for the local church to be self-sufficient in its leadership requirements. In conversation one person indicated that it was important that all those leading worship (and especially preaching) prepared together to produce a consistent teaching. Some, however, expressed concern that using Communion by Extension to maintain a known leadership risked the congregation becoming isolated from the wider church.

*Lay Presidency:* Out of 12 responses 7 were in favour of lay presidency with 5 against. Of the positive responses 2 indicated that this was a cautious response and 5 that they were replying as an individual rather than conveying the views of their parish. Those in favour included 4 clergy and 3 laypeople, 4 of the 5 against were lay. The responses in favour showed a strong correlation with those who said that the “known leader” factor was important as an influence towards their use of Communion by Extension: 5 expressed both views. Interest in lay

presidency in the Church of England has historically been motivated by that strand within evangelical theology which considers sacramental priesthood as either irrelevant to the work of the church or even inimical to it. However, in this study, the respondents showing in favour came from much wider across the churchmanship spectrum.

## **Discussion**

In the great majority of cases Communion by Extension was not in any credible sense the extension of an act of worship. The typical service took place in the same church as the original celebration, some days later, in order to allow worshippers who had already received the sacrament on the first occasion to do so again, in the absence of a priest. While some churches used the liturgical passages referring to the original place and context of consecration, in many cases the only direct links to the service in which the sacrament was consecrated were the bread and wine themselves. Even on Sundays and Principal Holy Days, where the priest was leading worship at another church in the group or benefice, the sacrament used was more likely to have been consecrated on an earlier day than brought from another service on the same day.

Accepting this as the actual context within which Communion by Extension was taking place, the issues identified earlier fell into five main categories. The much wider circumstances in which the rite was used suggested an understanding of worship in relationship to the Church's mission that had moved on from the position in the Guidelines. The use of the rite to relieve pressure on clergy workload may have disguised pressure points. The preferences for internal lay leadership suggested churches were making options for both self-sufficiency and the familiar. Finally, the practice of reservation without a liturgically expressed theology,



together with the movement towards lay presidency, raises crucial issues about the relationship of the local congregation to the wider church.

### **Worship and Mission**

From the perspective of the worshipping congregation there was no evidence of a distinction being made between Sundays and midweek along the lines of the different treatment given in the present Guidelines, nor indeed between “early” services or those designated “main”.

Many Anglicans have a rhythm to their spiritual life that is rooted in several eucharists per week. Communion by Extension allows this pattern to persist without either unduly constraining the priest’s availability for wider ministry or requiring external resources. For others a midweek communion is their main act of worship. There is also something inherently disparaging about declaring early Sunday services to be of a minor nature, as though those attending were deemed less important by virtue either of their smaller numbers or because they are somehow not participating properly in the life of the parish.

An increasing number of churches hold services away from mid-morning on a Sunday to cater for some specific group (for example, older adults or persons with disabilities). Often midweek worship is linked with a more prolonged social gathering, with food and drink, than is practicable on a Sunday morning. Some such services are both growing numerically and attracting congregations not previously active in church membership. The influential report *Mission Shaped Church* (Archbishops’ Council 2004) invites the church to consider such mid-week congregations on a par with traditional Sunday congregations. The churches surveyed in this study would seem to have grasped this in a way that the Rites and Guidelines failed.

### **Clerical workload**

The Guidelines focussed on reasons for a priest's absence that reflect what were seen as recent developments in the parochial life of the Church of England. The implication was that in other circumstances clergy should continue to arrange cover for eucharists from other priests, or offer non-sacramental services. However, once any link between the sending eucharist and the receiving service of Communion by Extension is lost, it becomes harder to make sense of this from the perspective of the priest. Absences through holiday, to fit in an urgent funeral service or visit, or because of attendance at a meeting convened by an external agency, were not seen as less valid reasons for absence than was presiding at another service in the minister's cure.

In consequence, Communion by Extension was adopted as a way of managing the time demands on clergy in order to sustain a pattern of worship that may have been manageable in normal circumstances, but did not have sufficient slack to handle holidays, vacancies and peak demands. An issue for future study would be whether the use of Communion by Extension to "plug the gaps", together with the reported low level of interest in considering alternatives, allows a situation to persist where unreasonable expectations are placed on clergy.

### **Sacramental self sufficiency**

The Guidelines explicitly linked the gathered community to a sister church where the initial act of worship had just taken place. The rotation of such provision in a benefice would express, at least at the next level up from a district or parish, the interdependency of congregations. This is demonstrated even more visibly when a congregation receives the ministry of a priest from outside its own parish family. The sacrament points the

congregation outwards both to Christ and to the wider Church.

Across the Church of England the expectation is for lay people to take responsibility with their ministers for a wide range of church activities. The rapid growth in the number of Readers (and, in some dioceses, other authorised ministries) and the development of Local Ministry Teams are very strong signs of how responsibility for ministry is being accepted. Lay ministers are often highly motivated and profess significant satisfaction with what they are doing, including, leading services of Communion by Extension. Some dioceses have made financial self-sufficiency a requirement for having a full-time stipendiary incumbent.

Where local practice was diverging from the Guidelines, in each aspect (the service was free standing, the leader local), it was such as to promote a view of self-sufficiency. Indeed several parishes were seen to acknowledge this as part of their motivation. By contrast, most Anglican theology would stress how receiving communion places both the worshipper and congregation in the context of the universal Church, represented not only by the scriptural and liturgical texts but also by the priestly president acting under the authority of the bishop. Communion by Extension would appear to be part of an emerging theology of self-sufficiency in the local congregation that is at variance with Anglican ecclesiology; though it may have much in common with that very English heresy of Pelagianism.

### **Safe and familiar**

There are many positive things that can be said about familiarity. Whether our focus is on those who are practising their faith through regular worship or, following the definitions of Francis and Robbins (2004), to that wider group who belong by virtue of “self defined religious affiliation”, familiarity remains a significant attractor. Churches that wish to avoid

losing either congregational members or the goodwill and sense of belonging of their wider parishioners manage the introduction of novelties carefully. Moreover, the Christian faith speaks of the changelessness of God's love, the familiarity of the relationship to which God calls the people of God and the absolute certainty that God is "the same, yesterday, today and forever". All of these suggest that familiarity is a positive theological concept.

The adoption of Communion by Extension in circumstances well beyond the Guidelines can be seen to allow a congregation to remain with the familiar. The liturgy is very close to that of a eucharist, with the same climax of receiving the sacraments. Furthermore they have been spared having either to change service times or to attend worship in another church, both options which we saw received little support.

Known worship leaders are not only familiar faces but may be felt to be less likely to present a congregation with unfamiliarity in either theology or style of preaching than are clergy from elsewhere, and that this may be a further reason why they were supported so strongly. It is also arguable that parishes may have been opting in favour of a liturgy that is less often presented in ways that confront the congregation with the unfamiliar.

In practice the gap between reflecting divine attributes such as "changelessness" and becoming a substitute for them is very small. It is not uncommon in church circles for there to be some transference of the role of "guarantor of stability" from God onto the church's liturgy and its worship leaders. The use of Communion by Extension to preserve the familiar colludes with this.

Finally, there remains a huge debate about the extent to which the Church is to be the safe

place that equips Christians for the rigours of life beyond, and how far it needs, even in its liturgies and rituals, to imitate the Christ who repeatedly broke down boundaries and called his followers to risky living in faith. Discussion of Communion by Extension should both feed into, and make us more aware of the need for, that debate.

### **Reservation or congregationalism**

Within a Catholic (Roman or Anglican) ecclesiology the sacrament, as Christ's presence among us, carries with it a high estimation of the office and authority of the priest. This travels beyond priests to the bishops who ordain, send and oversee them. The priest, remaining episcopally accountable and obedient (at least in theory if not always in practice), mediates between the wider Church and the local gathered worshipping community. The sacrament itself both represents the divine mystery in our midst and points us beyond to the unfamiliar and "other". Ornate aumbries or tabernacles and permanent lights, and the reverence shown towards the sacrament, help to maintain this sense of otherness. Within the Roman Catholic Church attention has also been paid to deriving a coherent theology for the practice itself. Hughes (2002) quotes at some length from Nathan Mitchell who writes of the "symbol matrix" of the eucharist which is not destroyed by Communion by Extension, and which links the act of reception to something much wider than the elements themselves.

From his own particular perspective Hughes rejects Mitchell and makes a central pillar of his criticism of Communion by Extension that the local gathered worshipping community is "the true and complete manifestation of the church in a given place". Whereas for Mitchell the link to the wider symbol matrix is essential, for Hughes any dependence, even on elements brought from elsewhere, "undermines" the local congregation's "integrity".

In the light of what is in effect a reserved sacrament practice without any wider underpinning theology it is perhaps not surprising that a significant number of respondents questioned the need for an ordained minister to consecrate the elements. The figure is sharply higher than the 26% support for lay presidency found in rural congregations by Littler, Francis and Martineau (2000, p 50) albeit, in this case, on a very small sample. Taken together with the use of the provision to achieve self-sufficiency one theological consequence would appear to be an impetus towards congregationalism, where the prime unit of the Church, both in terms of ministry and authority, is the local gathered community.

### **Conclusion**

The liturgical practice of Communion by Extension has diverged fundamentally from what was intended. Rather than being a means of extending the Sunday communion rail to other church buildings in a (usually rural) multi-church benefice, it has been adopted across a wide range of settings to offer more midweek sacramental worship, manage general clergy workload, and retain congregational self-sufficiency. Saving valuable time, by not chasing after substitute clergy or transporting freshly consecrated elements, has been seen as more important than following the Guidelines.

What has emerged may well satisfy both pastoral and mission requirements better than the intended provision, but it brings with it unintended consequences and poses questions that would repay further study. These vary from the practical level (how Communion by Extension may detract from a timely regard for clergy overwork) to the theological (where self-sufficiency unpicks Anglican ecclesiology and familiarity dilutes the challenge of the gospel).

The longstanding difficulty the Church of England has had over any attempt to develop a theology and practice of reservation remains central. The authorisation of Communion by Extension was an attempt to see if this problem could be bypassed. What this study suggests is that the attempt to find a “middle” position between reservation and congregationalism has failed at the practical level, where the links between two separate acts of worship proved insufficient to sustain the theological edifice contained in the 2001 Rites and Guidelines.

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