

## HOLY COMMUNION (1966)

CPD states in its general account of the Methodist Church (page 4): 'The general usage of the three uniting Churches whereby the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is administered by Ministers shall continue to be observed'. This is sometimes taken to mean that not only the task of presiding at the Lord's Supper, but also the distribution of the elements, is confined to Ministers, but this meaning is by no means required by the words. The Book of Offices, containing the forms of Service authorised by the Conference for use, has a rubric as follows: 'Then shall the Minister himself first receive the Communion in both kinds, and afterwards deliver the same to the other officiating Ministers, if any be present, and then to the People in order, into their hands'. These words, taken literally, would preclude distribution by others.

But practice in the Methodist Church has, in fact, varied. In some societies the distribution has been restricted to Ministers; in others the sharing of lay people in the distribution of the elements, either because reception in the pews is preferred, or because the Minister needs assistance in dealing with large numbers, is an unchallenged practice.

In the Church of England, although a Bishop or Priest must preside, an ordained deacon may distribute the wine and the authorisation of Lay Readers to distribute the wine is now in force in several dioceses. In the Church of Scotland, where the minister must preside, lay elders distribute both the bread and the wine.

The Committee is of the opinion that the renewal of worship in the Methodist Church will be greatly assisted if in the Service of Holy Communion lay people join much more actively in the parts already assigned to them, if sometimes they read the lessons and lead the intercessions, if they say with the presiding Minister the Prayer of Humble Access, and if they bring the bread and wine to the Table as now they bring the Offertory for the Poor. In this way the corporate nature of Christian worship and the variety of gifts which the Holy Spirit gives to the Church will be rightly emphasised.

There is no theological objection to the distribution of the elements by lay people. The sentence above quoted from CPD does not preclude this, and it is wholly in accord with what the Church throughout the world is being led to see about the nature of worship.

At the present time experiments in liturgy, and not least in the administration of the Order of Holy Communion, are taking place in all Churches. The Methodist Book of Offices is under revision by the Faith and Order Committee and the questions raised by the Oxford and Leicester District Synod are being kept carefully under review. In view of the fluidity of the present situation and the prospect that the Faith and Order Committee will in due course make various suggestions to the Conference for the Order of Holy Communion and its administration in the Methodist Church, the Committee thinks it premature at present to make any regulations about the distribution of the elements.

*(Minutes 1966, pp. 252f)*

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The quotation from CPD, with which the report begins, is taken from the brief general introduction to the contemporary edition (4th edition 1963). The words come originally from a passage in the Deed of Union dealing with the period of transition after Methodist Union. As such they were dropped in 1948 (*Minutes* p. 213). In a slightly shortened form, however, they appear in the statement *Lay Administration of the Sacraments* 1946 (see above).