

Gestures and procedures at the eucharist

The reason for recommending adoption of certain gestures and procedures is not to stifle individuality. Instead, the purposes are—

- To make certain actions sufficiently automatic that the person doing them is free to give attention to primary matters, including the needs of others.
- To avoid idiosyncrasies that tend to distract or annoy other people.
- To help ordinary people appear less awkward.
- To avoid accidents.

Some traditional gestures and practices are derived from the customs of the cultures in which Christianity first took root; some are the result of the historic experience of the Christian community; some are more or less arbitrary; some are simply practical common sense.

—Howard E. Galley, *The Ceremonies of the Eucharist, A Guide to Celebration*, Cowley Publication, Cambridge, Mass., 1989

Guidelines for everyone

In Anglican churches, as in the early church, members of the congregation take an active part in the liturgy: responses, songs, hymns, etc., and by “Amen,” we ratify and make our own the prayers spoken by others.

In addition, members of the congregation *may* do the following:

- Reverence the altar with a deep bow before taking your place.
- Genuflect instead if the sacrament is reserved in the chancel (if the sanctuary candle is burning).

Note: The original canons speak of reverencing the altar only twice during the course of the service: on arrival before the altar at the beginning, and before departing at the end.

- Stand and face the reader during the reading of the gospel, and make the sign of the cross with the right thumb on the forehead, lips, and breast when it is announced.
- During the Creed, bow the head at the mention of the name of Jesus, and bow low at “of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human.”
- Kneel or bow low for the confession of sin
- Make the sign of the cross at the absolution.

Note: Those serving in the chancel should adopt the practices of the celebrant. Bow only if the celebrant bows, make the sign of the cross when the celebrant makes the sign of the cross, etc.

- If incense is used, bow before and after being censed.
- Stand for the eucharistic prayer. Optionally, kneel after the Sanctus, but stand again for the Lord’s Prayer.
- Reverence the sacrament (genuflect or low bow) before going forward to receive it.
- Receive the bread in the palm of the right hand, with the left hand supporting it. Respond “Amen” before eating it and before drinking from the chalice. Guide the chalice to the lips with both hands.
- Stand during the postcommunion prayer.

- Make the sign of the cross at the final blessing.
- Reverence the altar before leaving the church or, if the sacrament is reserved, genuflect.

Guidelines for lectors (readers)

- While eye contact with the congregation is important *before* the reading, so the reader can be assured that the people are comfortably seated and ready to listen, it is not at all necessary, and frequently distracting, to make eye contact during the reading itself.
- A “dramatic” reading of the text is not appropriate, because it focuses the people’s attention on the reader rather than on what is being read.
- Congregations lose their ability to follow if the lesson is being read too fast.
- A distinct pause needs to be made between the end of the reading and the acclamation, “Here ends the reading.”
- I can be helpful for the reader to “lead” the silence that follows the lesson by remaining at the lectern, either with eyes closed or fixed on the book.

Guidelines for moving about the chancel

- Persons carrying objects to be used in the liturgy do not bow or genuflect (when carrying communion vessels, offering plates, the gospel book, candles, the thurible, water, wine, etc.).
- Never back down steps, even when only one step is involved. Turn completely around and move forward.
- When going from one place to another, go by the shortest route (unless it would appear to be discourteous).
- When standing or bowing, if hands aren’t otherwise occupied, join them before the chest. Three options:
 - Fingers lightly intertwined
 - One hand over the other
 - Palms pressed together and the right thumb over the left

Note: The idea is to not call attention to yourself in any way.

- When bowing the head, the neck is bent, but the shoulders are not hunched forward.
- When making a deep bow (“profound bow”), bend the body from the waist and bow low enough that you can place your hand on your kneecap.
- Sit upright, both feet on the floor, hands in your lap or on your knees, unless otherwise occupied.
- When making the sign of the cross, touch forehead, breastbone, left shoulder, then right shoulder, using your right hand.

Guidelines for lay eucharistic ministers

- The proper vesture of lay eucharistic ministers is an alb (or cassock and surplice), and it is desirable that they be vested.
- When carrying vessels containing consecrated sacrament, do not reverence the altar or the cross—or anything (or anyone) else.

Duties of acolytes

The crucifer

- Carries the processional cross in and out.
- Serves at the altar in the absence of other acolytes.

Server

- Places the altar book (*sacramentary*) on the altar for the eucharistic prayer and may turn pages for the celebrant.
- Assists in administering communion, if licensed.
- After communion, assists as needed taking the vessels to the credence or sacristy.
- Replaces the altar book under the credence table.

Plate-and-gate acolyte

- Assists the deacon or priest in receiving the people's offerings.
- Bows when receiving plates and gifts from ushers.
- Closes the gate following the words, "The gifts of God for the people of God."

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