

Refurbishing the Communion Vessels at the Cathedral Parish of Christ the King

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Most communicants in Anglican churches have never examined the communion vessels in their parishes closely. After all, these Eucharistic wares are only visible to them when they are at the altar rail and, even then, are usually filled with sacramental wine or communion wafers. For those few members of the parish who serve in the altar guild, the communion vessels will be more familiar but they may not have, even then, an opportunity to examine them in a way that will make them familiar with their intrinsic character. Recently, the Cathedral Parish of Christ the King in Washington, DC has had occasion to have their Eucharistic appointments completely refurbished and this has provided everyone with an opportunity to reflect on what these communion vessels really are and how they ought to be constructed.

The chalice (shown in Figure 1 on the following page) had been bent so that the bowl of the cup was at an angle from the stem. Because it had been in use for some 30 years, it had also lost almost all of its interior gold plating. (It has been the custom in the church for a very long time to have as much as possible of the church plate that comes into contact with the Eucharistic elements be at least coated in gold, both as a sign of the preciousness of the elements as well as because of gold's incorruptible nature.) The paten (the plate on which the consecrated hosts are kept) had also lost almost all of its gold plating. In fact, the small engraved cross which represents the front and center of the paten was virtually invisible to the naked eye. The ciborium (the vessel, usually fitted with a lid, which is used to keep the reserved host in the tabernacle on the altar, shown in Figure 2 on page 3) was discolored through age, pitted with corrosion, missing the cross on the top of its lid and almost completely lacking in its interior gold plating. Such was the state of the communion vessels at the Cathedral Parish of Christ the King! Since the parish community had just refurbished the interior of the



Figure 1: Refurbished chalice with platen.



Figure 2: The refurbished ciborium.

church, the next logical project in facility restoration was the renewal of the Eucharistic appointments.

After investigating numerous possibilities, a decision was made by the clergy to engage the services of a prominent metalware refurbishing firm in the state of Maine. The vessels were carefully packaged and shipped to the repair facility for examination and refinishing cost estimates. The company provided a reasonable quotation and authorization was granted to initiate the project. Progress reports were given by the repair facility on a regular basis and the work was completed within the prearranged four-week time schedule. When the vessels arrived at the parish following the refurbishing service, everyone was simply astonished at the magnificent appearance of the items.

During the initial conversation with the firm, craftsmen stated that the goods would look just like new. Of course, much of this claim was thought to be merely an assertion of advertising practices so often employed in the marketplace. To everyone's surprise at the Cathedral Parish in Georgetown, the claim made at the outset turned out to be a promise kept in the end! In all honesty, the refinished vessels rival the appearance of brand new appointments.

This undertaking has demonstrated that, at a relatively small expense, a church can continue to preserve dignity and elegance within its liturgical celebrations. Those attending services at the Provincial Cathedral can attest to the understated beauty of the historic church as well as its newly refurbished appearance and restored Eucharistic appointments.

The Cathedral Parish of Christ the King in Washington, DC now has a set of communion vessels that look like new and these precious heirlooms continue to enhance the rich legacy of a long history with the church. It should be pointed out that the chalice was a gift of the congregation at the parish's founding almost 30 years ago. This unique chalice was used by Archbishop Morse shortly after he acquired the property in Georgetown nearly three decades ago and is now poised to serve future generations of traditional Anglicans in the nation's capital.