

POLICY 2.5.4 Celiac Disease and Communion

Directives to be considered in the storing, preparation and distribution of communion to persons with Celiac disease.

Communion Bread

Storing: When storing special hosts used for communion to persons with Celiac disease, the following steps should be taken.

1. Low-gluten hosts should NOT be stored in the same cabinet as regular hosts, but especially if regular hosts are of whole wheat.
2. Low-gluten hosts should be stored in a clean glass or plastic container that has a sealed cover and that the container be identified as low-gluten hosts for use for Celiac disease.
3. Before handling low-gluten hosts, hands should be thoroughly washed.

Preparation: When preparing the elements to be consecrated at a Mass, the sacristan or person who prepares the elements should;

1. Wash hands, vessels (ciboria, plate or paten, chalice or cup) thoroughly before any low-gluten hosts are handled. If tweezers are used to handle low-gluten hosts, they must be thoroughly washed before use.
2. The presider must be made aware of the use of low-gluten hosts prior to the celebration and reminded of the attention to be given so that contamination does not take place. A pyx reserved specifically for low-gluten hosts may be used.
3. An extra-ordinary minister for communion could be assigned specifically for distribution of low-gluten hosts and his/her distribution station be identified as such.
4. All extra-ordinary ministers of communion should thoroughly wash their hands prior to the celebration and avoid contamination by touching any products that contain gluten or any wheat products.
5. Attention should be taken to avoid the consecration of an abundance of low-gluten hosts at a Mass.

Distribution: The presider who handled the main host should not be the minister who distributes communion to those who suffer from Celiac disease.

1. An extra-ordinary minister for communion could be assigned specifically for distribution of low-gluten hosts and his/her distribution station be identified as such.
2. An extra-ordinary minister who is distributing low-gluten hosts at communion should not receive communion for him or herself in the hand, but on the tongue to avoid hand contamination.
3. All low-gluten hosts that have been consecrated at a Mass should be consumed at the Mass rather than placed as a reserve in the Tabernacle.
4. When consecrated low-gluten hosts are reserved in the Tabernacle, the ciboria should not be handled by a priest or extra ordinary minister who has distributed or touched regular hosts.
5. When consecrated low-gluten hosts are reserved in the Tabernacle, they should be used as soon as possible to avoid risks of contamination.

Communion Cup

When storing or preparing wine used for communion to persons with Celiac disease, the following steps should be taken.

1. All chalices and cups used for the distribution of Communion should be thoroughly washed prior to use.
2. A chalice or cup may be identified specifically for Communion to persons suffering from Celiac disease.
3. An extra-ordinary minister who is distributing the Sacred Blood to persons suffering with Celiac disease should avoid receiving Communion of whole wheat hosts in the hands but should receive on the tongue to avoid contamination of the outer surface of the chalice or cup.
4. The extraordinary minister who distributes the Sacred Blood should not receive from the cup by which it will be distributed to persons with celiac disease.
5. Chalices or cups that have been handled by persons who have been in contact with materials containing gluten should not be used in the distribution of communion to persons who suffer from Celiac disease.
6. A specified distribution station should be identified for persons suffering from Celiac disease.
7. Attention should be given to avoid contamination of the purificator used in the distribution of the Sacred Blood to persons with Celiac disease.

Alternative

When there are known members of the community who suffer from Celiac disease, low-gluten host consecrated at the Mass may be placed in the tabernacle and communion could be given after the Mass to those persons who present themselves in the sanctuary or sacristy. There would be NO communion of the Sacred Blood in this instance. All extra consecrated low-gluten hosts should be consumed.

Zero Tolerance

Attention should be given the Cautionary Note offered in the document published by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops – Celiac Disease and Communion, published in the National Bulletin on Liturgy 32/159 (1999) pages 248-25.

An Act of Spiritual Communion

My Jesus, I believe that You are present in the Most Holy Sacrament. I love You above all things, and I desire You into my soul.

Since I cannot at this moment receive You sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace You as if You were already there and unite myself wholly to You. Never permit me to be separated from You. Amen.

N.B. In smaller communities, adjustments may be made that honour the principles set out above to meet local needs.

Accepted by the College of Consultors on 28 September 2011

Amended by the College of Consultors on 16 February 2012

Celiac Disease and Communion – Background Information

Introduction

In 1998-1999, the **National Liturgy Office** of the **Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops** circulated a questionnaire to bishops and priests concerning the number of parishioners who have celiac disease. The priests were asked to distribute the questionnaire to people in their parish who are affected by the disease. One hundred and five responses were received. The questionnaire was also circulated in a newsletter published by the **Canadian Celiac Association** and, as a result, an additional fifty-five responses were received from individuals who saw the questionnaire in the newsletter.

One unanswered question is whether all parish priests are aware that some members of their parish have celiac disease. One priest commented that he was not aware that there was anyone in the parish who had this disease until he received the questionnaire and began to inquire among the parishioners. Many of these people have suffered for years in silence.

Although statistics are not readily available, it is estimated that one in every two thousand persons in Canada has celiac disease.

Purpose

The purpose of this article is to present some of the facts concerning celiac disease and to look at the ways in which our parishes can help parishioners who have it to participate fully in our Eucharistic liturgies. Although this is not a medical report, some medical information is necessary if our entire Church community is to deal compassionately with these individuals in helping them to cope with their medical condition and still participate in the fullest way at our celebration of eucharist. “The Church earnestly desires that all the faithful be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations called for by the very nature of the liturgy.” (*Constitution on Sacred Liturgy*, no. 14)

What is celiac disease?

Celiac disease is essentially an intolerance to gluten. Gluten is a protein found in wheat, rye, barley and oats. Although gluten sensitivity is not a food allergy, individuals with celiac disease avoid foods containing wheat, rye, barley and oats in the same way those with food allergies avoid the foods to which they are allergic. For persons with celiac disease, the toxic part of the gluten molecule is the prolamin portion: gliadin in wheat, secalin in rye, horedin in barley and evedin in oats. The gluten found in corn and rice does not contain this toxic portion.

Food is digested and absorbed in the small intestine. The small intestine is lined with microscopic finger-like projections called *villi* designed to provide the maximum area for nutrient absorption. These *villi* contain digestive enzymes.

In individuals with celiac disease, gluten ingestion results in damage to and destruction of the *villi*. This damage can be compared to the image of shag carpet changing into linoleum. Individuals who have this disease, consequently, cannot get any kind of nutritional benefit from any food until their damaged *villi* are healed.

The only way to get the damaged *villi* healthy and able to absorb goodness from other foods again is to completely eliminate gluten from the diet. Basically, gluten is a glue that keeps much of our food together. It is found in wheat, oats, rye, barley, wheat starch, hydrolyzed vegetable protein, hydrolyzed plant protein, and some spices. A person with celiac disease cannot ingest anything with gluten in it. All food, medications and even toothpaste must be gluten-free. A failure to follow this rule will cause damage to the *villi*, immense pain, and, if a great amount of gluten is taken, a comatose state and even death. Consuming even small amounts of gluten can eventually lead to cancer of the bowel.

Communion

For members of our Church (this is not just a Roman Catholic issue, but crosses ecumenical lines) the difficulty lies in what makes up our communion hosts or Eucharistic bread. The problem is more complicated in the Roman Catholic Church because Canon Law requires the use of “wheat flour” for hosts and Eucharistic bread and as a result people with celiac disease are unable to receive communion. Other denominations are not bound by Canon Law but most use wheat flour for their communion wafers.

Recent Ecclesial Legislation

The latest guidelines coming from the Holy See on this issue is a letter dated July 24, 2003 from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to the presidents of the Episcopal conferences regarding a change in the norms regarding the use of mustum and low-gluten hosts. It reads:

Letter from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith

Prot. N. 89/78 – 17498

July 24, 2003

Your Excellency,

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has been for many years studying how to resolve the difficulties that some of the faithful encounter in receiving Holy Communion when for various serious reasons they are unable to consume normal bread or wine.

A number of documents on this question have been issued in the past in the interest of offering Pastors uniform and sure direction (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Rescriptum*, 15 December 1980, in *Leges Ecclesiae*, 6/4819, 8095-8096; *De celebrantis communione*, 29 October 1982, in AAS 74, 1982, 1298-1299; *Lettera ai Presidenti delle Conferenze Episcopali*, 19 June 1995, in *Notitiae* 31, 1995: 608-610).

In light of the experience of recent years, it has been deemed necessary at this time to return to the topic, taking up the above-mentioned documents and clarifying them wherever necessary.

A. The Use of Gluten-free Hosts and Mustum

1. Hosts that are *completely* gluten-free are invalid matter for the celebration of the Eucharist.
2. Low-gluten hosts (*partially* gluten-free) are valid matter, provided they contain a sufficient amount of gluten to obtain the confection of bread without the addition of foreign materials and without the use of procedures that would alter the nature of bread.

3. *Mustum*, which is grape juice that is either fresh or preserved by methods that suspend its fermentation without altering its nature (for example, freezing, is valid matter for the celebration of the Eucharist).

B. Communion under One Species or with a Minimal Amount of Wine

1. A layperson affected by celiac disease, who is not able to receive Communion under the species of bread, including low-gluten hosts, may receive Communion under the species of wine only.
2. A priest unable to receive Communion under the species of bread, including low-gluten hosts, when taking part in a concelebration, may, with the permission of the Ordinary, receive Communion under the species of wine only,.
3. A priest unable to ingest even a minimal amount of wine, who finds himself in a situation where it is difficult to obtain or store mustum, when taking part in a concelebration, may, with the permission of the Ordinary, receive Communion under the species of bread only.
4. If a priest is able to take wine, but only a very small amount, when he is the sole celebrant, the remaining species of wine may be consumed by a layperson participating in that celebration of the Eucharist.

C. Common Norms

1. The Ordinary is competent to give permission for an individual priest or layperson to use low-gluten hosts or mustum for the celebration of the Eucharist. Permission can be granted habitually, for as long as the situation continues which occasioned the granting of permission.
2. When the principal celebrant at a concelebration has permission to use mustum, a chalice of normal wine is to be prepared for the concelebrants. In like manner, when he has permission to use low-gluten hosts, normal hosts are to be provided for the concelebrants.
3. A priest unable to receive communion under the species of bread, including low-gluten hosts, may not celebrate the Eucharist individually, nor may he preside at a concelebration.
4. Given the centrality of the Eucharist in the life of a priest, one must proceed with great caution before admitting to Holy Orders those candidates unable to ingest gluten or alcohol without serious harm.
5. Attention should be paid to medical advances in the area of celiac disease and alcoholism and encouragement given to the production of hosts with a minimal amount of gluten and of unaltered mustum.
6. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith enjoys competence over the doctrinal aspects of this question, while disciplinary matters are the competence of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments.
7. Concerned Episcopal Conferences shall report to the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments at the time of their *ad limina* visit regarding the application of these norms as well as any new developments in this area.

Asking you kindly to communicate the contents of this letter to the members of your Episcopal Conference, with fraternal regards and prayerful best wishes, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Joseph Ratzinger
Prefect

Summary

- The letter reaffirms the right of laypeople (and deacons) who are gluten intolerant to receive communion under species of wine alone.
- It also reaffirms that any permission granted stands as long as the condition persists.
- The new norms make it easier to receive permission to use mustum and/or low-gluten communion bread. It is now within the competence of the local authority to grant all such permissions. Furthermore, under canon 137.1, he may delegate pastors to grant this permission to laypeople.
- Medical certification is no longer required for the use of mustum and/or low-gluten hosts.
- Presiding priests (sole celebrants and principal celebrants at a concelebration) must receive communion under both species, i.e., either regular or low-gluten communion bread and either wine or mustum.
- Priests who are not able to eat even low-gluten bread or mustum may not celebrate individually, nor may they preside at a concelebration.
- Pastors are encouraged to reach out to members of the faithful who might need this accommodation in order to heighten their full, conscious and active participation in the liturgy. A sample parish bulletin announcement is provided following the letter.
- Pastors are advised to discuss specific needs with the individuals concerned. In some cases it might even be necessary to reserve for those who are severely gluten-intolerant a cup in which a fragment of a regular host has not been commingled.

Suggested Bulletin Notice

This notice (below) could perhaps be printed once or twice a year so that new parishioners will notice it.

Communion for All

Is your participation in communion limited due to an inability to take gluten or alcohol?

We now have access to approved low-gluten hosts (approx. 0.01% total gluten content) and “mustum” (a wine substitute with less than 1.0% alcohol) that might enable you to partake more fully in the communion rite. Please contact the pastor for more details.

Suppliers

The National Liturgy Office is attempting to compile a list of sources, especially sources within Canada, of mustum and low-gluten hosts that meet the norms. If you can help us to add to the list below, please submit complete contact information (and the approximate gluten content of hosts in terms of percentage) to: National Office of Liturgy, 2500 Don Reid Dr, Ottawa, ON. K1H 2J2 or Fax 613-241-8117 or E-mail: liturgy@cccb.ca .

Low-Gluten Hosts

Sisters of the Precious Blood
Altar Bread Department
P.O. Box 1046, LCD 1
Hamilton, Ontario, L8N 3R4
Phone: (905) 527-9851
Fax: (905) 527-2888

Congregation of Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration
Altar Bread Department
31970 State Highway P
Clyde, MO 64432
U.S.A.
Phone: 1-800-223-2772 (toll-free)

Mustum

Ranelle Trading/Ojai Fresh Juice Corporation
2501 Oak Hill Circle, Suite 2032
Fr. Worth, TX 76109
Phone: 1-877-211-7690 (toll-free)

Mont La Salle Altar Wine Company
385-A La Fata St.
St. Helena, CA 94575
Phone: 1-800-447-8466 (toll-free)

A Cautionary Note

In a conversation with someone who does dietary counseling with people living with celiac disease we were advised that any gluten at all acts as a poison to someone with celiac disease. Therefore, offering low gluten communion wafers is of no value to a person who must be on a gluten-free diet. Some people may not react to low gluten, but the gluten is still damaging their small intestine. This is the reason that companies are no longer providing low gluten communion wafers. Medical data says that 1 in 133 people have celiac disease. Unfortunately, because it is so hard to diagnose many of these people are still suffering. For further information on celiac disease, see www.celiac.ca.

Sources:

- Celiac Disease and Communion, in *National Bulletin on Liturgy* 32/159 (1999) pages 248-251;
- *New Guidelines for the Use of Mustum and Low-Gluten Communion Bread*, in *National Bulletin on Liturgy* 37/177 (2003) pages 108-111.

CCCB – Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops – Celiac Disease and Communion