

## Celiac Disease and Communion

### 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 prolamins 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 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.

### 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-- Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith

July 24, 2003  
Prot. N. 89/78 – 17498

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 the 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.

## **Suppliers**

### **Low-Gluten Hosts/Mustum**

Sisters of the Precious Blood  
2210 - 25th Ave.  
Regina, SK, S4S 4E6  
(306) 586-2150

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

Burns Hanley Church Supplies  
2727 - 13th Ave.  
Regina, SK, S4T 1N4  
(306) 522-6636



Prot. N. 320/17

## **Circular letter to Bishops on the bread and wine for the Eucharist**

1. At the request of the Holy Father, Pope Francis, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments is writing to Diocesan Bishops (and to those who are their equivalents in law) to remind them that it falls to them above all to duly provide for all that is required for the celebration of the Lord's Supper (cf. Lk 22: 8,13). It is for the Bishop as principal dispenser of the mysteries of God, moderator, promoter and guardian of the liturgical life in the Church entrusted to his care (Cf. CIC can. 835 § 1), to watch over the quality of the bread and wine to be used at the Eucharist and also those who prepare these materials. In order to be of assistance we recall the existing regulations and offer some practical suggestions.

2. Until recently it was certain religious communities who took care of baking the bread and making the wine for the celebration of the Eucharist. Today, however, these materials are also sold in supermarkets and other stores and even over the internet. In order to remove any doubt about the validity of the matter for the Eucharist, this Dicastery suggests that Ordinaries should give guidance in this regard by, for example, guaranteeing the Eucharistic matter through special certification.

The Ordinary is bound to remind priests, especially parish priests and rectors of churches, of their responsibility to verify those who provide the bread and wine for the celebration and the worthiness of the material.

It is also for the Ordinary to provide information to the producers of the bread and wine for the Eucharist and to remind them of the absolute respect that is due to the norms.

3. The norms about the Eucharistic matter are given in can. 924 of the CIC and in numbers 319 – 323 of the *Institutio generalis Missalis Romani* and have already been explained in the Instruction *Redemptionis Sacramentum* issued by this Congregation (25 March 2004):

- a) "The bread used in the celebration of the Most Holy Eucharistic Sacrifice must be unleavened, purely of wheat, and recently made so that there is no danger of decomposition. It follows therefore that bread made from another substance, even if it is grain, or if it is mixed with another substance different from wheat to such an extent that it would not commonly be considered wheat bread, does not constitute valid matter for confecting the Sacrifice and the Eucharistic Sacrament. It is a grave abuse to introduce other substances, such as fruit or sugar or honey, into the bread for confecting the Eucharist. Hosts should obviously be made by those who are not only distinguished by their integrity, but also skilled in making them and furnished with suitable tools" (n. 48).
- b) "The wine that is used in the most sacred celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice must be natural, from the fruit of the grape, pure and incorrupt, not mixed with other substances. [...] Great care should be taken so that the wine intended for the celebration of the Eucharist is well conserved and has not soured. It is altogether forbidden to use wine of doubtful authenticity or provenance, for the Church requires certainty regarding the conditions necessary for the validity of the sacraments. Nor are

other drinks of any kind to be admitted for any reason, as they do not constitute valid matter” (n. 50).

4. In its *Circular Letter to the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences regarding legitimate variations in the use of bread with a small quantity of gluten and the use of mustum as Eucharistic matter* (24 July 2003, Prot. N. 89/78 – 17498), the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published the norms for the celebration of the Eucharist by persons who, for varying and grave reasons, cannot consume bread made in the usual manner nor wine fermented in the normal manner:

- a) “Hosts that are completely gluten-free are invalid matter for the celebration of the Eucharist. 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” (A. 1-2).
- b) “*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” (A. 3).
- c) “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” (C. 1).

5. The same Congregation also decided that Eucharistic matter made with genetically modified organisms can be considered valid matter (cf. Letter to the Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, 9 December 2013, Prot. N. 89/78 – 44897).

6. Those who make bread and produce wine for use in the Mass must be aware that their work is directed towards the Eucharistic Sacrifice and that this demands their honesty, responsibility and competence.

7. In order to facilitate the observance of the general norms Ordinaries can usefully reach agreement at the level of the Episcopal Conference by establishing concrete regulations. Given the complexity of situations and circumstances, such as a decrease in respect for the sacred, it may be useful to mandate a competent authority to have oversight in actually guaranteeing the genuineness of the Eucharistic matter by producers as well as those responsible for its distribution and sale.

It is suggested, for example, that an Episcopal Conference could mandate one or more Religious Congregations or another body capable of carrying out the necessary checks on production, conservation and sale of the Eucharistic bread and wine in a given country and for other countries to which they are exported. It is recommended that the bread and wine to be used in the Eucharist be treated accordingly in the places where they are sold.

*From the offices of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, 15 June 2017, Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ.*

Robert Card. Sarah  
*Prefect*

✠ Arthur Roche  
*Archbishop Secretary*

