



Clarifications on the Current Holy Communion Policy

October 16, 2009

Dear Priests, Deacons, and Liturgical Ministers:

In light of Bishop John D'Arcy's direction on October 13th that the administration of the Precious Blood via the chalice is to be suspended indefinitely throughout the Diocese because of health concerns surrounding the H1N1 influenza, several questions have been posed as to how to implement this new policy properly.

In the interest of clarification, some of the most common questions have been answered below after consultation with Bishop D'Arcy, and these are sent with the Bishop's full approval.

1. Q. **Must the celebrant consecrate wine at Mass, and must concelebrants receive from the chalice?**
 - A. The answer to both of these questions is always yes (cf. *Code of Canon Law*, 927 and *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, 98). The consecration and consumption of the Precious Blood by the priests is necessary to maintain the integrity of the Mass, and the fact that all concelebrating priests drink from the chalice is an exercise of their office on behalf of the assembly, whereby "they unite the votive offerings of the faithful to the sacrifice of Christ their head" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1566).

Deacons exercising their ministry during Mass must also receive from the chalice (cf. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 182), since they are ordained ordinary ministers of the Eucharist.
2. Q. **Do extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion still receive from the chalice when they come forward during Mass?**
 - A. No: extraordinary ministers should be included under the same policy as for the general assembly, because there is no need or obligation for them to receive the Precious Blood. Extraordinary ministers who have typically administered Holy Communion from the chalice may be asked to administer the host as needed, but the number of extraordinary ministers employed to distribute the Body of Christ should not be increased simply to maintain the same level of involvement for all extraordinary ministers, since this would be contrary to their proper function.
3. Q. **In the interest of still being able to offer the Precious Blood, is Holy Communion by intinction permissible under this current policy?**



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- A. No: Bishop D'Arcy has determined that intinction should not be utilized as a response to the current policy on the chalice, especially in light of the catechesis and stringent regulations that would be necessary for this practice to be executed well.
4. Q. **Should distribution of Holy Communion on the tongue be avoided as well?**
- A. Holy Communion on the tongue cannot be denied. Reception on the tongue is the first listed option for communicants (cf. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 161), and is a universal norm. The possibility of a minister's fingers touching a communicant's mouth can be avoided with proper technique or training on the part of those distributing, as well as by urging the faithful to make it as easy as possible for the host to be placed on their tongues.
5. Q. **May extraordinary ministers still give "blessings" to those not receiving Holy Communion, especially when the common practice is to touch the person in line?**
- A. No: extraordinary ministers should not place their hands on anyone in the Communion line. Only priests may impart an actual blessing in the Communion line – and especially under the current circumstances, this should be done without touching the person. Extraordinary ministers should understand that they cannot impart blessings in the manner reserved for priests, though they can say, "May God bless you," to someone who comes forward and does not receive – but again, without touching. Not touching those in line is actually a sound practice at all times, since Eucharistic particles could be on the fingers of those administering Holy Communion.
- This is also a good opportunity to remind the congregation that there is no obligation to come forward in the Communion line if an individual is not receiving the Eucharist, and that making a good spiritual communion is more important than being blessed or prayed over at this time during the Mass.
6. Q. **In light of the statement from October 14th about providing a small chalice for those suffering Celiac disease, is the use of low-gluten hosts no longer allowed?**
- A. Low-gluten hosts are still permitted for those who suffer from Celiac disease, and can tolerate the low amount of gluten. The provision for small amounts of Precious Blood is intended for those who cannot tolerate even the low-gluten hosts. Also, please bear in mind that the only type of low-gluten host currently approved by the USCCB's Secretariat of Divine Worship is the bread supplied by the Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration in Clyde, MO (altarreads@benedictinesisters.org).
7. Q. **Should liturgical music repertoires be reevaluated to avoid songs with references to receiving the Blood of Christ, such as "take and drink this cup"?**
- A. For the most part, this should be left to the discretion of individual music directors. As always, any liturgical song referencing wine or the cup/chalice should accurately and consistently convey our belief in the Real Presence. It also should not be



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forgotten that the chalice is still always present at Mass, and that the priest drinks from it while offering the Mass on our behalf. In addition, as Bishop D’Arcy emphasized, we must ensure that the faithful understand and appreciate the venerable doctrine of concomitance: that the entirety of Christ – Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity – is fully present under both species of the Eucharist. So, the Body and Blood of Christ are indeed both being received in the host.

8. Q. **May an exception be made so that couples may receive Holy Communion from the chalice during their wedding Mass?**

A. Yes: at a wedding Mass, the couple being married and they alone from the congregation may receive the Precious Blood from the chalice. The Rite of Marriage itself deems that the couple should have this special option on so solemn an occasion (cf. *Rite of Marriage*, 36). No exceptions within other liturgical rites are envisioned.

I hope that these clarifications will prove helpful. Only Bishop D’Arcy may grant additional exceptions.

Keep in mind also that many other liturgical practices related to hygiene (such as keeping holy water fonts clean, and the optional sign of peace) need to be overseen with care during this time.

And this Spring’s diocesan communication on the Sunday obligation still holds: “Anyone who is seriously ill with a cough and fever should be reminded that they do not have an obligation to attend Sunday Mass. In fact, it would be better if they did not attend Sunday Mass and infect others.”

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have additional questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brian MacMichael".

Brian MacMichael

Director, Office of Worship

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