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PASTORAL DIRECTIVE: CELIAC DISEASE AND THE COMMUNION RITE

Within our parish communities an increasing number of people are dealing with dietary restrictions due to celiac disease. One in one hundred and thirty-three people have celiac disease. Many of them refrain from receiving communion and have suffered for years in silence. Others have approached their pastor identifying specific ways to healthfully receive the Sacrament.

As a diocese we choose to be attentive to their restrictions, ministering Communion to them in appropriate ways approved by canon law. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith studied the difficulties and in 2003 the Congregation clarified particular questions raised by this pastoral concern. The complete text may be found at <http://www.cccb.ca/site/eng/commissions-committees-and-aboriginal-council/sectoral-commissions/liturgy-and-the-sacraments-english-sector/documents/2124-celiac-disease-and-communio>

A few pertinent points from this directive:

1. **A**Hosts that are completely gluten-free are invalid for the celebration of the Eucharist. @
2. **A**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. @

The Diocese of London is aware that low-gluten hosts may be detrimental to the health of persons with celiac disease.

3. **A**The Ordinary is competent to give permission for an individual priest or layperson to use low-gluten hosts for the celebration of the Eucharist. Permission can be granted habitually, for as long as the situation continues which occasioned the granting of permission. @

In the Diocese of London the bishop has granted general permission.

4. **A**A lay person 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. @
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In the Diocese of London Communion from the Cup has been restored to be offered at all parish liturgies. Communion from the cup represents the fullness of the eucharistic symbol.

Low-Gluten Hosts

Although low-gluten hosts are valid matter for communion, persons suffering with this disease have varying perspectives on the danger of their health.

While the magazine **AGluten-Free Living@** expresses a positive attitude toward the use of low-gluten hosts, local leaders in the London Celiac Society recommend they do not be consumed since even the smallest amount of gluten over a period of time is dangerous.

A cautionary note is found in the article, **ACeliacs and Communion@**, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (see web link indicated above):

Those who do dietary counseling about living with celiac disease advise 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.

Communion Practices in the Diocese of London

From the Cup

Best practice: offer Communion from the Cup at all liturgies

If the communicant fears that the cup is contaminated with small particles of the consecrated host by those who have received before them, a separate cup will be provided. A communion minister will be designated to serve this cup at a particular location, at the end of the communion procession.

If the parish has not yet moved to the practice of offering communion under both species, arrangements should be made for the person(s) to receive from the chalice. A separate chalice, other than the priest=s, is to be prepared. This is offered at the end of the communion procession. In this circumstance it is the responsibility of the communicant to make their presence known prior to the beginning of Mass, in good time to prepare the additional chalice.

If the communicant is unable to consume alcohol, *mustum* may be made available. Mustum is type of wine with a minimal alcohol content.

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If an individual is unable to tolerate mustum there is little else the Church can do except recommend that the person make a **A**spirital communion[@]. The Roman Catholic Church believes that it is impossible to consecrate anything except wheat bread and grape wine.

With Low-Gluten Hosts

If the communicant decides to use low-gluten hosts, the following procedures are followed:

1. The parish purchases and stores the low gluten host.
2. Before Mass the communicant prepares the low-gluten host in a pyx and places it with the ciborium.
3. The presider ministers communion from the ciborium which contains the low-gluten host.
4. The communicant receives communion from the presider.

Low-gluten hosts are available from:

Benedictine Sisters
Clude, Missouri, U.S.A.
Telephone: 1-800-223-2772
Fax: 1-660-944-2132
E-mail: altarreads@benedictinesisters.org

Prior to taking this route the pastor encourages the communicant to talk with a medical professional about the effects of consuming low-gluten hosts, and assures the communicant that communion from the cup is readily available.

Twice a year a bulletin announcement should alert new parishioners to these procedures.

Approved by Most Rev. Ronald Fabbro, C.S.B.

Bishop of London

December 14, 2010
