

# Pastoral Notes on Celiac Disease and the Reception of Holy Communion

Diocese of Madison ❖ Office of Worship

March 1, 2002

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The medical profession is identifying a growing number of people who suffer from Celiac disease. This disorder is directly related to ingestion of certain grain prolamins, especially wheat gliadin proteins (proteins found in wheat, rye, oats and barley). Since bread made from wheat is required for the Eucharist (and this bread is mingled with the wine in the chalice) it is important that parishes address this issue regularly so that those with this disease know that they are welcome at the Eucharistic feast and that they are valued members of God's family.

In January 1997, Bishop Bullock promulgated *Norms Relating to the Eucharist and to Persons Suffering from Celiac Disease for the Diocese of Madison*. These norms (which are attached) were developed in accordance with an earlier decree by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (June 19, 1995) and the Code of Canon Law (924 §2). The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops also has addressed this issue several times in the past few years through the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy (BCL), most recently in the April-May 2000 and November 2003 Newsletters.

Celiacs are welcome at the eucharistic table, and they have both the desire and need to take part as they are able. At the same time, pastors are reminded that even small amounts of gluten (for example, from a particle of the host in the chalice) can have a significant effect on those with this disease. While the canonical aspects of this matter continue to be studied, there are pastoral responses that fall within current Church norms. Pastors are reminded of several important pastoral concerns and responses:

- 1. Since the Church believes that Christ is fully present in both species, people with this disease may receive the Precious Blood alone.**
  - A. "Priests should recall the right which each Catholic in good standing has to receive Holy Communion (see Canon 843). In light of this right, the Precious Blood must be made available to sufferers of this disease who request it, even if it is not offered to the rest of the congregation." (BCL Newsletter, April-May 2000)
  - B. "Additional concerns emerge when the Precious Blood has been 'contaminated' with gluten either by *fermentum* or intinction. In such instances it is appropriate to provide a separate chalice for the benefit of those unable to tolerate any amount of gluten." (BCL Newsletter, April-May 2000)
  - C. Low-gluten hosts are available from the Congregation of Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration (1-800-223-2772; altarbread@benedictinesisters.org).

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2. **Low-gluten hosts which conform to the norms established by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith are valid matter.**
  - A. Such hosts are permitted on an individual basis only. They are not appropriate for the entire community.
  - B. Hosts made of other substances (i.e. rice) may not be substituted (see Canon 924 §2). Just as grape juice cannot be substituted for wine, other grains may not be substituted for wheat.
  - C. **A caution:** For *most* celiacs, low-gluten hosts are *not* a viable option. Even if they show no symptoms, serious damage can be done to the intestinal lining even if the host is low-gluten. Communicants should be urged to contact their physicians before considering this option. Therefore, **even low-gluten hosts may not ensure the medical safety of the communicant.** If it is determined to be appropriate, care should be taken that the low-gluten host does not come into contact with other hosts, and is not distributed by someone who has already touched the other hosts. At this time, the use of no-gluten hosts has not been approved by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.
3. **No additional permission is needed by those who wish to receive only the Precious Blood with other communicants.**
  - A. The pastor and the communicant should discuss how this will be handled in a pastorally sensitive manner. Keep in mind that a separate chalice may be needed.
  - B. This should be offered to the celiac even if the rest of the parish is receiving under the form of bread only.
4. **If low-gluten hosts are appropriate, the communicant should present a doctor's note to the pastor.**
  - A. The doctor's note, along with a petition and pastor's statement are forwarded to the Office of the Bishop, so that a decree authorizing this practice may be issued (see cautionary note 2C above). The doctor's note should make reference to the fact that the doctor understands that there is some gluten in the host, and has advised the patient whether or not this will have an adverse effect. Again, the communicant and pastor should discuss the manner in which this will be handled.
5. **Pastors should encourage those who suffer from this disease to make themselves known to him** so that he can ensure their fullest participation in the celebration of the eucharist. At the same time, discretion dictates that accommodations be made that do not draw undue attention on the person with this illness.

Questions may be addressed to the Diocese of Madison Office of Worship at (608) 821-3080 or [worship@straphael.org](mailto:worship@straphael.org).

## **Resources Regarding Celiac Disease**

### **The USCCB Committee on the Liturgy Website**

[www.usccb.org/liturgy/](http://www.usccb.org/liturgy/)

For April-May 2000 Newsletter excerpts:

<http://www.nccbuscc.org/liturgy/innews/042000.htm>

For November 2003 Newsletter: <http://www.usccb.org/liturgy/innews/1103.htm>

### **Celiac Sprue Association of the United States of America (CSA/USA)**

[www.csaceliacs.org](http://www.csaceliacs.org)

## **Low-gluten Hosts Approved for Use at Mass**

### **Congregation of Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration**

Altar Breads Department

31970 State Highway P

Clyde, Missouri 64432

Phone: 1-800-223-2772

e-mail: [altarbreads@benedictinesisters.org](mailto:altarbreads@benedictinesisters.org)

Sr. Rita, OSB, Manager

## **Mustum Approved for Use at Mass**

*For those with Alcohol Intolerance*

### **Ranelle Trading/Ojai Fresh Juice Corporation**

2501 Oak Hill Circle, Suite 2032

Ft. Worth, TX 76109

Phone: 877-211-7690 (toll free)

E-mail: [mike@ojaifresh.com](mailto:mike@ojaifresh.com)

Contact: Mr. Mike Ranelle, President

### **Mont La Salle Altar Wine Company**

385 A La Fata Street

St. Helena, Ca. 94575

Phone: 707-963-2521

Toll Free: 800-447-8466

Contact: Mr. James Cox, President