

THE OFFICE OF WORSHIP

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DIOCESE OF HARRISBURG
Secretariat for Catholic Life and Evangelization

MEMORANDUM

TO: All Priests

FROM: Reverend Neil S. Sullivan, Director
Office of Worship

DATE: November 21, 2006

RE: Announcements Regarding the Reception of Holy Communion
at Wedding and Funeral Masses

The fifteen counties that comprise the Diocese of Harrisburg are home to many religions and faiths. Members of these traditions are often present at Catholic liturgical celebrations, particularly wedding and funeral Masses. While our brothers and sisters of other faiths and religious traditions must be made to feel welcomed as they join with us in prayer, it needs to be made clear that members of churches or ecclesial communions with whom we are not yet fully united cannot ordinarily be invited to receive Holy Communion. This sensitive situation is further complicated by the practice of many non-Catholic Christian churches that extend a general invitation to all present to receive communion at their services.

The Office of Worship regularly receives inquiries as to whether or not the celebrant should make an announcement regarding who may receive Holy Communion at weddings and funerals when there is the likelihood that non-Catholics are present. In addition, we sometimes receive concerns from those who have witnessed persons uncertain what to do with the consecrated host and taking the host back with them to their seats. Others have found hosts under pews and in hymnals. This important issue must be seriously considered with the greatest pastoral responsibility so as to ensure that the Most Blessed Sacrament receives the highest reverence and that the proper catechesis of what participation in Holy Communion truly means takes place.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has guidelines regarding the reception of Holy Communion that were approved on November 14, 1996. The USCCB requires these guidelines to be included in all missalettes and other participation aids published in the United States for use in Catholic liturgical celebrations. The guidelines seek to remind all those attending Catholic liturgies of the discipline of the Church with regard to the sharing of Eucharistic communion.

Redemptionis Sacramentum, the 2004 Vatican Instruction on certain matters to be observed or to be avoided regarding the Most Holy Eucharist, stated in article 84 that “when Holy Mass is celebrated for a large crowd—for example, in large cities—care should be taken lest out of ignorance non-Catholics or even non-Christians come forward for Holy Communion, without taking into account the Church’s Magisterium in matters pertaining to doctrine and

discipline. It is the duty of Pastors at an opportune moment to inform those present of the authenticity and the discipline that are strictly to be observed.” While this statement does not refer directly to parish weddings and funerals, it does speak to the same concern.

It is necessary that the Church’s teaching and practice regarding Holy Communion be clearly expressed at Masses when there is likelihood that non-Catholic may be present. An announcement, when appropriate, regarding who may receive Holy Communion would certainly help to clarify the Church’s teaching and practice. There are a variety of ways to accomplish this.

Some parishes simply use the USCCB guidelines printed in their missalettes or hymnals. Other parishes have prepared a special card that is placed in the pews that welcomes visitors, states the guidelines for reception of Holy Communion, and provides information on how to join the parish or enter the RCIA process.

An “order of service” is usually prepared for most weddings and even some funerals. A simple announcement regarding Holy Communion could be included in such programs. This announcement could also be used in First Communion booklets. It is already required for the Confirmation Mass booklets used at our eighth grade deanery Confirmation ceremonies and major diocesan events.

At his own discretion, the priest may wish to make an announcement either at the beginning of the Mass or immediately after his own reception of Holy Communion. This announcement should be short and succinct. The following example might be used.

Catholics believe that the Eucharist is the true Body and Blood of Jesus Christ and that our sharing in the Eucharist is the sign of our oneness and unity in the Catholic Church. We invite Catholics who are prepared and properly disposed to receive Holy Communion today to come forward at this time. Others present not receiving Holy Communion today are invited to join with us in prayer and song.

In the course of their November 2006 meeting, the USCCB approved a statement proposed by the USCCB Committee on Pastoral Practices, entitled *Happy Are Those Who Are Called to His Supper*. The statement addresses the question of preparing to Christ worthily in the Eucharist. Bishop Rhoades has asked that this statement be sent to all our priests. An electronic copy of this statement is attached. You may also download it at <http://www.usccb.org/dpp/Eucharist.pdf>.

As we reflect on this concern and consider how to best address this sensitive issue, let us continually pray and work for true unity among the Body of Christ so that one day we may share together in the Banquet of the Lamb.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions, concerns, or clarifications.

Attachment