

Holy Communion under Special Circumstances: Celiac Disease and Gluten Sensitivity

There are a number of people in our parishes who either have Celiac Disease or who have an adverse reaction to the gluten in wheat and wheat products. In order to help persons who suffer from either of these conditions to receive Holy Communion, some accommodations are necessary at the parish level. In order to facilitate these accommodations, four different solutions are proposed based on the circumstances. Please note that the use of the term “sensitivity” below is not meant to be a medically precise definition but merely to help outline different accommodations.

1. **Moderate Sensitivity** (*tiny piece of the Body of Christ*): some people can tolerate only a very small piece of the consecrated host.

2. **Severe Sensitivity** (*gluten reduced host for the Body of Christ*): for people with a severe sensitivity, even a small piece of the regular altar bread we typically use in the parish contains too much gluten. Special hosts can be purchased that contain reduced amounts of gluten. Some gluten must be present in order for the bread to be valid matter. Hosts that contain no gluten, that are truly “gluten-free” made, for example, with rice or potato flour are invalid matter and are forbidden to be used. It is advisable that parishes have on hand a supply of approved gluten-reduced hosts and a pyx to use exclusively for containing them at Mass. A pyx dedicated for this use only will reduce the chance of contamination from regular hosts containing gluten.

3. **Very Severe Sensitivity** (*consuming only the Precious Blood*): for those who cannot tolerate even a small amount of gluten, they may receive Holy Communion under one species only - the Precious Blood. In parishes where Holy Communion is not regularly offered under both species, some special arrangement needs to be made so that the sacristan and celebrant are aware of the presence of a person or persons who need to receive from only the chalice. How this is arranged is left up to discretion of the pastor and the communicant based on good sense and adhering to the rubrics.

4. **Complete Intolerance** (*consuming the Precious Blood from a special chalice used only for this purpose*): in some circumstances communicant cannot receive the Precious Blood from a chalice that is shared with communicants receiving the Body of Christ. In this case, a separate chalice needs to be provided for the exclusive use of these persons. Care should be taken to avoid contamination from particles adhering to the minister’s fingers when handling the chalice for communion for persons with this degree of sensitivity to gluten. How these arrangements are made depends on the discretion of the pastor and the resources of the parish.

In all four cases effective communication is required between communicants, sacristans and the celebrants well before the start of Mass to ensure that the procedures in place in the parish are known to all parties to prevent confusion. Please note that it is not

possible to mandate one solution for all parishes.

It is advantageous for communicants who are visitors to the parish to consult the sacristan at least 10 minutes before Mass begins so that the necessary accommodations can be made and the local procedure for receiving Holy Communion under these special circumstances be explained.

Please ensure that sacristans, parish administration staff and catechists involved in sacramental preparation are educated in this matter.

It is recommended that periodic mention of these accommodations be made to parishioners through the usual channels for parish communications to inform those suffering from Celiac Disease or gluten sensitivity of their options.

We rely on the common sense of those concerned and an adherence to the rubrics and teaching of the Church with regard to valid matter to meet the special needs of communicants.

The Tradition of a Spiritual Communion:

It is advantageous to periodically remind all parishioners of the Church's tradition of spiritual communion for those who cannot receive Holy Communion. Sometimes we are not able to physically receive the Blessed Sacrament for any number of reasons including illness, allergies, other medical conditions or mortal sin.

The Church has a long standing practice of promoting a "spiritual communion" for those unable to receive Holy Communion whereby we invite the Lord to dwell more fully in our hearts. St. Thomas Aquinas once described Spiritual Communion as "an ardent desire to receive Jesus in the Most Holy Sacrament [in Communion at Mass] and in lovingly embracing Him as if we had actually received Him."

St. Alphonsus Liguori composed this prayer in the 18th century for those seeking to make a spiritual communion that many have found helpful:

My Jesus, I believe that you are present in the most Blessed Sacrament. I love You above all things and I desire to receive You into my soul. Since I cannot now receive You sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace You as if You have already come, and unite myself wholly to You. Never permit me to be separated from You. Amen.