

ADMISSION TO COMMUNION IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

FOR THE OTHER CHRISTIAN PARTNER IN AN INTERCHURCH MARRIAGE

(references are to the norms of the 1993

Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism)

In general the Catholic Church allows access to communion only to those who share its oneness in faith, worship and ecclesial life. In certain circumstances, by way of exception, and under certain conditions, access may be permitted, or even commended, for other Christians (129).

Circumstances of need:

Danger of death has long been identified as a situation of possible need, in which Catholic ministers can admit to communion so long as certain conditions are present (130). The Directory also identifies mixed marriages between baptized Christians as a possible situation of need, because the partners share the sacraments of baptism and marriage (160). (Catholic bishops or episcopal conferences are also able to make additional norms identifying other possible circumstances of need (13,0): e.g. the French episcopal conference has identified "some long-lasting ecumenical groups".)

Conditions for admission:

Where there are recognized circumstances of need, admission is by way of exception, so that in each case the conditions for admission have to be verified by the Catholic minister (131). These are: a spontaneous request; Catholic eucharistic faith; proper dispositions. (The other condition, the unavailability of a minister of his/her own church is always fulfilled in the case of interchurch families, since their need is recognized as the need of the couple to share communion.)

A couple who ask for communion have made their request. The Catholic minister needs to discover: is there a real need in this case? is the eucharistic faith of the other partner adequate? is he/she properly disposed to receive the sacrament?

(The Association of Interchurch Families can give the background to this brief statement with detailed studies of canonical evolution since *Vatican II: Sharing Communion pack KS*)

Since the above was written, Pope John Paul II has given us an even simpler statement, in speaking of his 'joy that Catholic ministers are able, in certain particular cases, to administer ... the eucharist ... to Christians who are not in full communion with the Catholic Church but who greatly desire to receive (it), freely request (it) and manifest the faith which the Catholic Church professes with regard to (this sacrament).

(Encyclical letter Ut Unum Sint of the Holy Father John Paul II on Commitment to Ecumenism, 25 May 1995 (46).