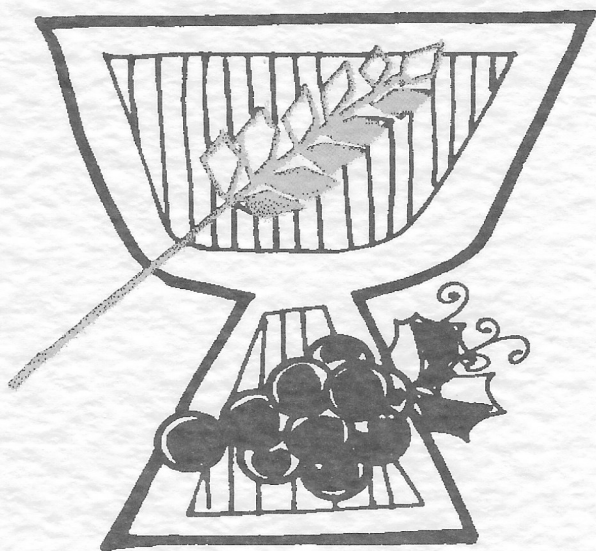


GUIDELINES FOR
EUCHARISTIC SHARING
IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH



Archdiocese of Adelaide

Prepared by the
Diocesan Commission for Ecumenism
in accordance with
***The Directory of Principles and
Norms for Ecumenism***
approved by Pope John Paul II
on March 25th 1993.

Published by
Diocesan Commission for Ecumenism
39 Wakefield St, Adelaide SA 5000
Telephone: (08) 8210 8108

Distributed with the approval of
Archbishop Leonard Faulkner,
Archbishop of Adelaide.
March 1997

© March 1997
Reprinted March 1998

ISBN 1 86420 128 2

Graphics: Mediacom and
Minh-Tam Nguyen © 1994

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THE DIRECTORY

INTRODUCTION

THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

committed the Catholic Church to the Ecumenical Movement and an invitation was extended to each of us to cultivate a positive attitude towards ecumenism.

We are encouraged to take opportunities to pray with Christians of other traditions. Participation in ecumenical services is one way of doing this. Attending services in other churches is another way, enabling us to gain an insight into ways other Christians express themselves in worship.

Conscious that there is more that unites us with other traditions than divides us, there is a natural desire to express this unity through sharing in the Eucharist. However, since the Eucharist is the fullest ritual expression of our union with one another in Christ, the present degree of unity amongst the Churches makes this difficult.

Nonetheless, ever since Vatican II there has been significant development in the Catholic Church's position as it has responded to the pastoral needs of people in particular circumstances.

THE DIRECTORY

POPE JOHN PAUL II approved *The Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms for Ecumenism* on March 25th 1993.

The Directory deals with the question of Eucharistic sharing in paragraphs 122–136 under Section IV of the Document, *Communion in Life and Spiritual Activity among the baptised*. (pars 92-160)

Paragraphs 122–128 focus on the sharing in sacramental life with members of various Eastern Churches. The Directory notes that “although separated from us, these Churches still possess true Sacraments, above all – by apostolic succession – the priesthood and the Eucharist.”

According to the understanding of the Catholic Church, there are grounds for allowing and even encouraging some sharing in the liturgical worship, even of Eucharist, with these Churches, “*given suitable circumstances and the approval of Church authorities*. (N.122)

The key statements regarding Eucharistic sharing with members of the Eastern Churches are as follows:

Whenever necessity requires or a genuine spiritual advantage suggests, provided that the danger of error or indifferentism is avoided, it is lawful for any Catholic for whom it is physically or morally impossible to approach a Catholic minister, to receive the sacraments of Penance, Eucharist and Anointing of the Sick from a minister of an Eastern Church. (N.123)

Catholic ministers may lawfully administer the sacraments of Penance, Eucharist and Anointing of the Sick to members of the Eastern Churches, who ask for these Sacraments of their own free will and are properly disposed. (N.125)

Regarding the sharing of sacramental life with Christians of other churches, paragraph 129 of the Directory states:

A Sacrament is an act of Christ and of the Church through the Spirit. Its celebration in a concrete community is the sign of the reality of its unity in faith, worship and community life.

As well as being signs, sacraments — most especially the Eucharist — are sources of the unity of the Christian community and of spiritual life, and are means for building them up. Thus Eucharistic Communion is inseparably linked to full ecclesial communion and its visible expression.

At the same time, the Catholic Church teaches that by baptism members of other Churches and ecclesial communities are brought into a real, if imperfect communion with the Catholic Church and that “Baptism, which constitutes the sacramental bond of unity existing among all who through it are reborn ... is wholly directed toward the acquiring of fullness of life in Christ.” (Decree on Ecumenism N.3)

The Eucharist is, for the baptised, a spiritual food which enables them to overcome sin and to live the very life of Christ, to be incorporated more profoundly in him and share more intensely in the whole economy of the Mystery of Christ.

It is in the light of these two basic principles, which must always be taken into account together, that in general the Catholic Church permits access to her Eucharistic Communion and to the sacraments of Penance and Anointing of the Sick, only to those who share in its oneness in faith, worship and ecclesial life. For the same reasons, she also recognises that in certain circumstances, by way of exception, and under certain conditions, access to these sacraments may be permitted, or even commended, for Christians of other churches and ecclesial communities.

In danger of death, the following norm applies:

Catholic ministers may administer the sacraments of the Eucharist, of Penance and of the Anointing of the Sick to a baptised person, who, unable to have recourse for the sacrament desired to a minister of his or her own Church or ecclesial community, asks for the sacrament of his or her own initiative, and manifests Catholic faith in this sacrament to be properly disposed. (N.130, 131)

The Directory continues:

In other cases, it is strongly recommended that the diocesan bishop, taking into account any norms which may have been established for this matter by the Episcopal Conference or by the Synods of Eastern Catholic Churches, establish general norms for judging situations of grave and pressing need ... Catholic ministers will judge individual cases and administer these sacraments only in accord with these established norms... (N130)

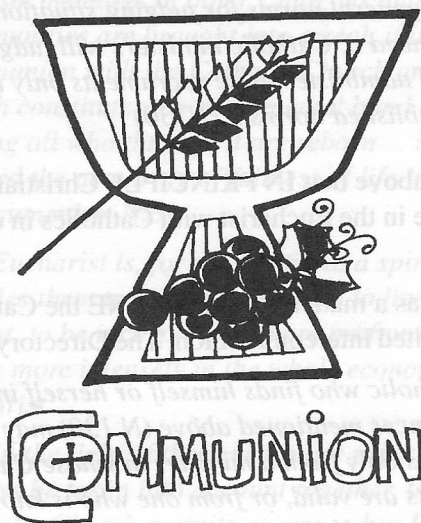
It is clear from the above that IN PRINCIPLE Christians of other traditions may share in the Eucharist with Catholics in certain circumstances.

In PRACTICE and as a matter of DISCIPLINE the Catholic Church has very strictly limited intercommunion. The Directory reads:

“... a Catholic who finds himself or herself in the circumstances mentioned above (N.130) may ask for these sacraments only from a minister in whose Church these sacraments are valid, or from one who is known to be validly ordained according to the Catholic teaching on ordination.” (N.132)

The Eucharist is both the summit and source of the Christian life. The Roman Catholic Church has traditionally emphasised the Eucharist as the **sign** of unity of faith amongst communicants and therefore it has normally been considered inappropriate to encourage intercommunion.

Some Christian Churches follow a different tradition and put the emphasis on the Eucharist as a **means** of unity and offer a general invitation to members of other churches to share Communion. The varying practices of Roman Catholic, Anglican and Protestant Churches in this matter of Eucharistic sharing sometimes gives rise to difficult and painful situations. This is particularly true of couples in an inter-church marriage, where both spouses are committed to their respective traditions.



GUIDELINES

TO ASSIST PRIESTS and others involved in pastoral work in the Archdiocese of Adelaide, the following guidelines are offered:

1. Ecumenical services in Catholic Churches with Christians of other traditions present are best planned on a non-Eucharistic basis.
2. Eucharistic celebrations:
 - a) An explicit prohibition on receiving Communion should not be given publicly on occasions such as weddings, baptisms, first Communions, confirmations and funerals, when Christians of other traditions may be attending.
 - b) Neither should an explicit **invitation** to all be given publicly on these occasions.
 - c) Any response to a query before the celebration must indicate clearly the teaching and practice of the Church.
 - d) In the context of preparing for such celebrations the practice of coming forward to receive a blessing can be explained and encouraged.
3. Communicant members of other Christian traditions who manifest Catholic belief in the Eucharist and who are relatives of a Catholic can be admitted to reception of the Eucharist in cases such as these:
 - a) a parent attending the baptism, first Communion or confirmation of his or her child;
 - b) a bride or groom at a nuptial Mass;
 - c) when attending the funeral of a family member.

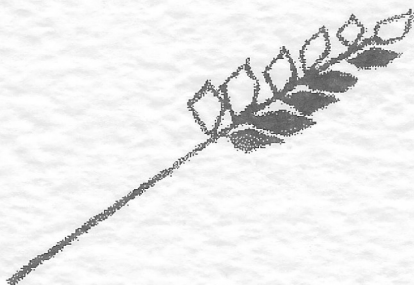
The Directory on Ecumenism recognises the special needs of those in inter-church marriages where both spouses are faithful to their religious duties in their respective churches (cf N.145-151)

4. Such spouses who experience a pressing need to receive Communion whenever accompanying the family to Mass can request admission to the Eucharist. This request is ordinarily made to the parish priest, but in exceptional cases can be referred to the Archbishop or Vicar General.

5. No persons presenting themselves for Communion at the time of distribution should be refused.

Such persons can be considered to be acting in good faith.

- 
- a) when attending the funeral of a family member;
 - b) a bride or groom at a nuptial Mass;
 - c) confirmation of his or her child;
 - d) first Communion or
 - e) a parent attending the baptism;
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