

Archdiocese of Brisbane: Admission to Communion

At Easter 1995 the Archbishop of Brisbane issued a document entitled Blessed and Broken: Pastoral Guidelines for Eucharistic Hospitality. He explained that two years earlier the Archdiocesan Commission for Ecumenism had raised the question and expressed concern about the amount of confusion existing among Catholics in matters of eucharistic hospitality, with so many people unsure of official Church teaching. He asked the Commission to carry out the consultation and research necessary to produce pastoral guidelines, which it did. He provided the following document to the clergy and laity of the Archdiocese as official policy, based on sound principles of ecumenism, which would give adequate direction to the Archdiocese and further the aims of the ecumenical movement.

Of particular interest to interchurch families is the recognition that some couples will experience a need to share communion on a regular basis, and that this need can be met.

PASTORAL GUIDELINES FOR PROVIDING ACCESS TO HOLY COMMUNION FOR CHRISTIANS OF OTHER CHURCHES

Introduction

A strong desire to see the unity of all God's people is a concern of many Christians today. The Second Vatican Council clearly committed the Catholic Church to the ecumenical movement, and the Council invited all Catholics to cultivate a positive ecumenical attitude.

Catholics are encouraged to take every opportunity to pray with Christians whose Churches, like our own, are members of Queensland Churches Together. Pastors are called to do all that they can to make such opportunities available to their parishioners. Not only is it highly desirable that Catholics participate in ecumenical services, they are encouraged from time to time to attend services of other Churches to show friendship and interest, and in order to understand how other Christians express themselves in worship. Other Christians should be made welcome at Catholic Masses.

Many Catholics have a desire to share holy communion with other Christians. They recognise that incorporation into Christ through baptism should find expression at a shared eucharistic table. Though the exact nature of the unity desired for all Christians is still unclear, it is generally agreed that it must ultimately involve the ability of Christians to celebrate the eucharist together.

Centrality of the Eucharist

Ours is essentially a eucharistic church. Catholic identity can be seen most clearly when the parish gathers for the celebration of the eucharist. It is then that we show to one another, to other Christians, and to society in general that Catholics are united in faith and worship and

life. Without the eucharist and the other sacraments, we could not maintain our Catholic identity. *For Catholics eucharistic sharing is inseparably linked to, and is the visible expression of, full church membership.* The members of the local community are not only united to one another in the eucharist, they are also united to every other Catholic eucharistic community. It is made clear in the words of every Mass that the local community, through its bishop, is united to the pope who is the centre of Catholic unity, and through the pope to every other Catholic eucharistic community.

Unity in Faith

Sadly, Christians do not always agree as to what constitutes the Christian faith. There are some elements of the faith which Catholics consider to be essential but other Christians do not. Some examples are the necessity of the divinely appointed leadership of the papacy, the role of the Virgin Mary in the life of the church, and the manner in which Christ is present in the eucharist. Official dialogue between the Catholic Church and other Churches is clarifying what we each believe about these and other matters. but agreement about all the essentials of faith has not yet been reached.

Because the eucharistic celebration is by its very nature a profession of faith of the church, it is impossible for the Catholic Church presently to engage in general eucharistic sharing. The Catholic Church does not permit her members to receive holy communion in Anglican, Lutheran and Protestant Churches, and she offers eucharistic hospitality to Christians from these Churches only in situations of serious and pressing spiritual need.

Between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches there is a very close relationship in matters of faith. When necessity requires, or a genuine spiritual need exists, it is lawful for a Catholic to receive communion in an Orthodox Church. Some Orthodox Churches, however, restrict holy communion to their own members. Although Catholic priests may lawfully administer holy communion to members of Orthodox Churches, in Australia these Churches generally prefer that their members do not receive holy communion at Catholic Masses.

Eucharistic Hospitality

There are significant events in the lives of individual Christians and their families when requests to receive holy communion at a Catholic Mass will be made. If we consider the high frequency of marriage between Catholics and other Christians in Australia, the extensive sacramental preparation programs for children which require the participation of parents, many of whom are not Catholic, and the increasingly favourable ecumenical climate in our Archdiocese, it is very likely that such requests will be forthcoming on a variety of occasions. This will be more so once our Church's openness to responding to the spiritual need of other Christians is better known. The following are some examples of possible spiritual need: for the partner at a marriage celebrated with a nuptial Mass; for the parent of a child baptised at a Catholic Mass; for the parent of a child receiving confirmation and first holy communion; for the family of the deceased at a funeral Mass. Similarly, requests may come from Christians who are denied easy access to a minister of their own Church because they are confined to a health care facility. or are subject to some form of institutional confinement.

There should not be a general invitation from the presiding priest for Christians from other churches to receive holy communion at a Catholic Mass. Each case must be considered on its merit. The person must make a request without any kind of pressure, must manifest the Catholic belief in the eucharist, and must have appropriate dispositions. In the Archdiocese of Brisbane it is sufficient for the presiding priest to establish, by means of a few simple questions, whether or not these conditions are met.

When a Christian from another Church makes frequent requests to receive holy communion, different circumstances prevail. In such cases joint pastoral care by the clergy of both Churches should be offered to help the person understand the significance of such requests.

Interchurch Marriages

The Directory on Ecumenism states that eucharistic sharing for a spouse in a mixed marriage can only be exceptional. The Directory, however, recognises a category of mixed marriages where each partner lives devotedly within the tradition of his and her Church. It sees such couples making a significant contribution to the ecumenical movement. A spouse in such a marriage, now commonly called an interchurch marriage, could well experience a serious spiritual need to receive holy communion each time he or she accompanies the family to a Catholic Mass. *Requests for this kind of eucharistic hospitality should be referred by the parish priest to the Archbishop or one of the auxiliary bishops.*

Other Sacraments

Similar principles to the above would apply to the sacraments of penance and the anointing of the sick.