



PASTORAL GUIDELINES FOR SACRAMENTAL SHARING

A condensed version of the document

Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations within the Catholic Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle

*The “Directory for the Application of the Principles
and Norms of Ecumenism”*

issued by the

Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity

in 1993

strongly recommends

episcopal conferences or diocesan bishops

to establish local norms

for the application of the general norms

given in the Directory.

(No. 130)

***Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations within the Catholic Diocese of
Maitland-Newcastle provides a comprehensive treatment of the
foundation and growth of ecumenism and interfaith relations within the
diocese. Real Yet Imperfect is a condensed version of this document.***



My dear Sisters and Brothers,

As a relative newcomer to the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle, I have been struck by many encouraging aspects of Church life. One of the more important influences on me has been the emphasis given to ecumenical and interfaith relations.

It came as no surprise then, that the Diocesan Ecumenical and Interfaith Commission made it a priority to produce pastoral guidelines for relationships with other Christians and other faiths.

The document *Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations within the Catholic Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle* draws upon a broad range of similar documents and is based on Vatican II ecclesiology, recent decrees and study reports. *Real Yet Imperfect*, its condensed version, has been published for wider use.

Pastors and people will find these guidelines most useful. Their application in pastoral situations will be of assistance. Their interpretation needs to balance wise counsel, best practise and pastoral sensitivity.

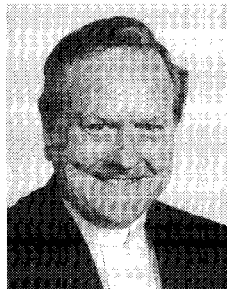
These guidelines are an attempt to promote the unity for which Jesus Christ prayed, and for which we also pray. The Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle is firmly committed to this process towards unity. May this document be a sign of that commitment.

I remain,

Yours in Jesus Christ,

Catholic Bishop of Maitland-Newcastle

March 2001



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The generous assistance of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe in New Mexico, USA through their document *Guidelines for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs*, 1996, is gratefully acknowledged.

The following documents have also been invaluable:

Eucharistic Hospitality: Note from the Swiss Roman Catholic Episcopal Conference, June, 1986. The text was published in *One in Christ*, XXIII, No. 3, 1987, 280-283.

Eucharistic Sharing in Interchurch Marriages and Families: Guidelines from the German Bishops, February 1997. The text was published in *Interchurch Families, Journal of the Association of Interchurch Families*, 6, No. 1, Jan. 1998, 10-13.

Directory on Ecumenism for Southern Africa, issued by the Southern African Catholic Bishop's Conference, especially section six, dealing with sharing sacramental celebrations, and section seven, dealing with interchurch marriages.

Blessed and Broken: Pastoral Guidelines for Eucharistic Hospitality, Archdiocese of Brisbane, 1993.

Guidelines for Eucharistic Sharing in the Catholic Church for the Diocese of Rockhampton, 1999.

One Body Broken: Pastoral Guidelines for Eucharistic Hospitality, Diocese of Broken Bay, 1999.

One Bread, One Body: A Teaching Document of the Eucharist, Catholic Bishops of England and Wales, Scotland and Ireland, 1998.

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 invited all Catholics to cultivate a positive ecumenical attitude. Through the approval of the Decree on Ecumenism, the Catholic Church joined other Christian Churches in the movement for Christian unity. Since then, both the pope and bishops of the world have repeatedly indicated that the Catholic Church is irrevocably committed to the unity of the Church and all Christians.

All those who are baptised and believe Jesus Christ is Lord and Saviour are bound together by the Holy Spirit as the Body of Christ.

Catholics are encouraged to take every opportunity to pray with Christians whose Churches, like our own, are members of the National Council of Churches in Australia and the NSW Ecumenical Council. Not only is it highly desirable that Catholics participate in ecumenical services, they are encouraged from time to time to attend liturgical services of other denominations, so as to pray together, to show friendship and interest, and to understand how other Christians express themselves in worship. At the same time, other Christians should be made welcome at Catholic Masses.

Many Catholics desire to share some sacraments, especially the Eucharist, with other Christians. While that remains a delicate issue, 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.

SHARING OF PRAYER AND SACRAMENTS

Prayer is essential and vital to the ecumenical movement. Principles to guide Church authorities, individuals, and ecumenical partners in this important yet sensitive area are well established. The general rule given by Canon Law and the *Directory for Ecumenism* is that Catholic ministers may lawfully administer the Sacraments of Penance, Eucharist and Anointing of the Sick only to Catholics. However, under certain circumstances, by way of exception and under certain conditions, other Christians may receive these sacraments in the Catholic Church.

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 holy 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.

GUIDELINES FOR SACRAMENTAL SHARING

The Eucharist lies at the heart of Christianity. Eucharist is both the fount and apex, the summit and source of Christian life. 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.

At the same time, the Catholic Church teaches, that by Baptism, members of other Churches and ecclesial communities are brought into real, even if imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church.

Refraining from shared sacramental worship is the normal state of affairs. However, circumstances can occur in which such a sharing becomes not only permissible but advisable and justified. These are danger of death, and any other grave need.

The conditions to be met are that the person admitted to such sharing: must seek it of his/her own initiative; must be unable to receive the sacrament from a minister in his/her own Church; must manifest Catholic faith in the sacrament; and must be properly disposed to the sacrament.

Being unable to receive the sacrament from one's own minister need not be an inability that exists over a period of time, but could arise out of the nature of the situation in which the person finds himself/herself.

Baptismal Celebration: Christians of other denominations who so wish are to be encouraged to participate as fully as possible. At a Catholic Baptism, one sponsor must be a Catholic who has been confirmed and has received the Eucharist. Catholics are to be encouraged to participate, where invited, in baptismal celebrations of other Christian denominations.

Sacraments of Anointing of the Sick and Penance: A serious request for such sacraments can be taken as evidence of a pressing spiritual need and the sacrament may be administered.

Eucharistic Celebrations: 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. Given 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 diocese, 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 needs of other Christians is better known.

The traditional pastoral practice in the Catholic Church is not to refuse someone who comes to receive the Eucharist in good faith. However, it may be advisable and even necessary to inform such a person afterwards of the Catholic position.

An explicit prohibition on receiving the Eucharist should not be given publicly on occasions when Christians of other denominations may be attending. Neither should an explicit invitation be given publicly to all on such occasions.

Communicant members of other Christian traditions who manifest Catholic belief in the Eucharist, and who wish to receive the Eucharist, may do so on certain occasions by way of exception, and provided the conditions set out above are met. Such occasions for individual decision-making may include celebrations of Baptism, Confirmation, First Communion, Nuptial Masses, Ordinations, Ministry to the Sick and Dying, Funeral Masses and special Eucharistic celebrations.

A grave spiritual need can well arise for a Christian from another denomination or ecclesial community when attending a celebration for a special feast or event. Such a spiritual need can be seen as expressing the real if imperfect communion that already exists between that Christian and the Catholic Church.

The guidelines outlined above must not lead to a situation where the divisions between Christians are no longer taken seriously.

Should Catholics seek to receive the sacraments from pastors in other denominations, they 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.

INTERCHURCH MARRIAGES

Marriage: In preparing Christian couples for Marriage, the problems which arise when persons from different Christian traditions marry should not be minimised. At the same time, this opportunity for catechesis and ecumenical formation should not be lost. Pastoral ministry may need careful adaptation. The religious conviction and commitment to their denominational Church is different for each person. Normally, such marriages are celebrated without the Eucharist because of the problems arising for eucharistic sharing. The bishop may give permission should the non-Catholic spouse wish to receive the Eucharist at a marriage celebrated with Mass. At such times, the general rules for eucharistic sharing apply. Clergy should make the fullest possible use of the opportunities afforded by ecumenical celebrations at interchurch marriages.

Baptism: When the issue of Baptism for children of interchurch families is raised, the traditional practice of only one minister performing the act of Baptism (i.e. the pouring with water while proclaiming the baptismal formula) is to be retained. This is because the Catholic Church acknowledges the validity of Baptism by clergy of some other denominations. According to Catholic liturgical and theological tradition, Baptism is celebrated by one celebrant.

However, wherever appropriate, a minister of another Christian denomination should be invited to participate in the other parts of the baptismal liturgy, e.g. by reading a lesson, offering a prayer or reflection, giving a blessing, etc.

Eucharist: The situation for eucharistic sharing between spouses in mixed marriages (interchurch families) has been specially noted in the *Directory for Ecumenism* (#145-151). Those who attend Mass together in a Catholic Church, present a unique case in that their baptismal unity has been further sealed by the Sacrament of Marriage. Both may experience a real need to express that unity by receiving the Eucharist whenever they attend Mass together.

If this occurs infrequently, both may receive the Eucharist provided that it is the spontaneous desire of the non-Catholic spouse to do so. This need may arise on the occasions listed above, and other special occasions known to the family.

If this occurs frequently, the non-Catholic spouse may request permission to receive the Eucharist every time s/he attends Mass with his/her spouse, but joint pastoral care by the clergy of both denominations should be offered to help the person understand the significance of such requests.

Cases where the only Church the non-Catholic partner attends is the Catholic Church should be referred to the bishop through the parish priest.

Funerals: Deceased members of interchurch families may be buried with Catholic rites, especially in the case of a deceased spouse. Deceased Catholics may in turn be buried using the rites of another Christian denomination should there be a justifying reason to do so.

These recommendations are to assist in the pastoral care and spiritual well being of interchurch spouses and their families. Joint pastoral care by clergy of both denominations may be helpful.

CONCLUSION

The movement for Christian unity is part of God's will for our time. It is God's gift to be received. Unity can come only as a result of fervent prayer and openness to the Spirit speaking to Christians of every Church and tradition.