

## **Celiac-Sprue Disease, Low Gluten Hosts and the Eucharist**

In recent years pastors have received questions from those afflicted with various manifestations of gluten intolerance, such as Celiac-Sprue disease. These questions are in regard to the reception of Holy Communion. Many gluten-intolerant sufferers are unable to ingest wheat flour commonly used in the preparation of communion wafers in the United States. Here are some common questions and answers.

### **1. Can a person with gluten intolerance receive Communion?**

The common advice given to many Celiac-Sprue sufferers and gluten-intolerant patients is to receive only the Precious Blood at Holy Communion. However, even then, the Precious Blood must be carefully ministered to make sure it has not been contaminated with gluten during the commingling rite when the presider places a particle of the host in the chalice, or at any other time.

A separate vessel of wine should be reserved for a gluten-intolerant communicant and care should be taken that the wine does not come into any contact with hosts or particles of hosts. The separate vessel of wine can be placed on the altar when the gifts are prepared during Mass.

### **2. May bread or a wafer made of rice flour be used?**

No, because rice wafers are invalid matter for Eucharist according to the *Code of Canon Law* (c924.4). The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) has ruled in 2003 that a completely gluten-free host is invalid matter for the sacrament.

### **3. Are there any low-gluten hosts that can be used?**

The CDF has determined that a low-gluten host is valid matter for Eucharist. For a number of years, those suffering from celiac-sprue disease have been able to obtain low-gluten hosts from only one source in the United States: the Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration in Clyde, Missouri. The Secretariat of Divine Worship has now been made aware of a second supplier of low-gluten hosts for those with gluten intolerance.

As reported in the November 2003 issue of the Newsletter, before the Benedictine Sisters were able to develop and manufacture its own low-gluten hosts in the United States, low-gluten hosts were only available to parishes from European suppliers. In addition to the Benedictine Sisters, low-gluten hosts may now also be obtained from Parish Crossroads of Zionsville, Indiana. The low-gluten hosts distributed by them are manufactured in Germany, contain 162 parts-per-million of gluten (which equals 0.016%), and were certified in 1996 (and again in 2003) as suitable for the Sacred Liturgy by the Diocese of Würzburg, Germany. Individuals wishing to receive Holy Communion with these new low-gluten hosts should contact their parish offices, and are also strongly advised to check with their personal physicians in advance. <http://www.usccb.org/about/divine-worship/newsletter/upload/March-2012.pdf>

### **4. What is the contact information for the two sources of these hosts?**

- a. Congregation of Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration; Altar Breads Department; 31970 State Highway P; Clyde, MO 64432; Phone: 1-800-223-2772; E-mail: [altrabreads@benedictinesisters.org](mailto:altrabreads@benedictinesisters.org) [www.BenedictineSisters.org](http://www.BenedictineSisters.org)
- b. Parish Crossroads Phone (toll-free): (800) 510-8842; Fax: (800) 735-7133; P.O. Box 84; Zionsville, IN 46077-0084; E-Mail: [orders@parishcrossroads.com](mailto:orders@parishcrossroads.com) Web: [www.ParishCrossroads.com](http://www.ParishCrossroads.com)

## A Short Introduction to Holy Communion and Celiac Sprue Disease

<http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/resources-for-the-eucharist/distribution-of-communion/celiac-sprue-disease.cfm>

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### 1. What is Celiac Sprue disease?

In recent years, many have worked to foster an increasing awareness of the significant effects of Celiac Sprue disease on people's lives. The digestive system of those with this condition is considerably compromised by the consumption of gluten, one of the major ingredients in wheat flour. It is estimated that as many as fifteen percent of all persons of northern European origin are affected by this disease to some degree.

### 2. How does this affect those who go to Holy Communion?

This is a particular challenge to Catholics, who believe that the celebration of the Holy Eucharist and the reception of Holy Communion are the very source and summit of the Christian life. Priests should show great pastoral sensitivity and compassion to anyone afflicted with this disease, but especially to the parents of children with a gluten intolerance at the time of their first Holy Communion.

### 3. Can low gluten hosts be used at Mass?

The Secretariat for the Liturgy of the U.S. Bishops' Conference has devoted considerable resources to this question for the last seven years. Within the past year, the Secretariat has successfully assisted the Congregation of Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration in Clyde Missouri in the production of a very low-gluten host which has been favorably reviewed by the publication *Gluten-Free Living* as "perfectly safe"<sup>1</sup> for sufferers of Celiac Sprue disease.

### 4. Where can I buy these low gluten hosts?

Low gluten altar hosts are available from: the Congregation of Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, Altar Breads Department, 31970 State Highway P, Clyde, Missouri 64432 (Phone:1-800-223-2772, e-mail: ).

### 5. What if a person cannot consume low gluten hosts?

Such communicants may still receive the Precious Blood. Catholics believe that whoever receives Holy Communion only under the form of bread or only under the form of wine still receives the whole Christ, in his Body and Blood, soul and divinity.

### 6. What about people who cannot receive low gluten hosts and cannot receive even a small amount of consecrated wine?

In such cases, the bishop may grant permission for individuals to receive *mustum*, a type of wine with a minimal alcohol content. If an individual is unable to tolerate *mustum*, there is little else the Church can do except to recommend that the person make a "spiritual communion." Why? Because the Church believes that it is impossible to consecrate anything except wheat bread and grape wine. From the time that the Lord Jesus took bread and wine and told his disciples "Do **this** in memory of me," the Roman Catholic Church has tried faithfully to fulfill Christ's command by taking unleavened bread made from water and wheat flour, and wine made from grapes for use at the Eucharist.

### 7. Can a priest or bishop change this teaching and consecrate a host made of rice?

No. It is impossible to consecrate a host made of something other than wheat and water. No priest or bishop can change this longstanding teaching of the Catholic Church. A little over a year ago, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, once again took up this question on behalf of the Holy Father when he wrote: "Hosts that are *completely* gluten-free are invalid matter for the celebration of the Eucharist."<sup>2</sup>

*Excerpts from Gluten Free Living (Vol. 9, no. 1).*

1. See Ann Whelan's "Make Your Own Decision" in *Gluten-Free Living* (vol. 9, no. 1), p. 4. In this same issue, see also Sr. Jeanne Crowe's extensive review article on the low gluten host, "Catholic Celiacs Can Now Receive Communion", pp.3ff.
2. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, circular letter to the Presidents of Conferences of Bishops, July 24, 2003 (Prot. 89/78-174/98) in BCL Newsletter, November 2003 (Vol. XXXIX), p. 45.