

Interchurch Marriages

18. Interchurch marriages are a particular life situation for many Christians whose communion is rooted in baptism and strengthened by the sacramental nature of their Christian marriage. They require special consideration and pastoral sensitivity. A heavier burden of the pain of church divisions is felt by these committed families.

19. The partner who is a baptized Anglican or Protestant in an interchurch marriage may wish to receive Holy Communion in a Catholic Church on occasions of ecclesial or familial significance, when he or she experiences a serious spiritual need. In such a case the normal canon law requirements are in effect (see paragraph 9). Prior consultation with the pastor will assist such a person to consider all the criteria for proper discernment. In light of such discernment, the spouses themselves will recognize occasions when they have a strong spiritual need to receive Communion, and the conditions are met. There should be special meaning to such occasions; they are not meant to become routine practice.

20. A marriage partner from one of these Christian denominations who meets the conditions laid out in paragraph 9 may request the Eucharist from a Catholic pastor on special occasions such as:

- a) their Marriage and subsequent anniversaries celebrated with a Mass;
- b) Baptism, First Communion, Confirmation, graduation Mass, and wedding or ordination Mass of a child, grandchild, or close family member;
- c) major Feast days: Easter, Pentecost, and Christmas;
- d) times of serious illness and/or approaching death;
- e) funeral of their partner, child, or grandchild;
- f) retreats, Marriage Encounters, Parish Missions, and religious workshops when these are attended with their partner;
- g) other special circumstances in consultation with the pastor.

In applying the Directives, the above list does not imply that every such occasion or circumstance justifies a positive response to a request to receive Communion.

21. The baptismal and marital oneness of an interchurch marriage may draw a particular couple, in a singular way, toward further sacramental sharing as a sign of deep unity in Christ and as a source of grace for their marriage. Such oneness offers a particularly strong basis for exceptional admission to the sacrament of the Eucharist.

Each interchurch couple also needs to be responded to specifically. The local pastor is encouraged to discern, with the couple, an appropriate application of the Directives, in light of Catholic sacramental teaching and of the couple's particular circumstances.

III PRINCIPLES OF APPLICATION

22. The guidelines given in these directives are not to lead to a situation where the divisions among Christians are no longer taken seriously. Nonetheless, responding to the serious spiritual needs of Christians of other denominations is a serious pastoral responsibility.

23. Two general principles should guide the application of these directives:

- a) the Directives and norms are to be applied generously in favour of those eligible, with the pastoral and ecumenical sensitivity that each situation requires.
- b) the Church does not demand more of fellow Christians than it does of Catholic people.

IV CONCLUSION

24. Progress toward the unity Christ wills for his disciples, by the means he wills, urges us forward to deeper discernment and obedience in the ways of the Spirit. Let us encourage one another, learn to carry each other's burdens, and wash each other's feet, across denominational lines, so that we may "all be one" (John 17) for the credibility of our common mission in Christ, and for the glory of God in his reconciling grace.

Resources:

Decree on Ecumenism, Vatican II, Nov. 21, 1964

Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism, Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, 1993

The Code of Canon Law, N. 844

Ecclesia de Eucharistia, Pope John Paul II, 2003

Pastoral Notes on Policy of Sacramental Sharing, Diocese of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada, 2005

Policy on cases of serious need in which the sacraments of Penance, Eucharist, and Anointing of the Sick may be shared with Anglicans, Lutherans, and Protestant Christians, Diocese of Calgary, Alberta, Canada, 2000

Sacramental Sharing Between Catholics and Other Baptized Christians, Diocese of St. George's, Newfoundland, Canada, 2002

Sacramental Sharing

Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon



Pastoral Directives

for

Sacramental Sharing in particular circumstances

Between Catholics and Baptized Christians of other Denominations

www.saskatoonrcdiocese.com
www.ecumenism.net

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I INTRODUCTION

1. “We should all give thanks to the Blessed Trinity for the many members of the faithful throughout the world who, in recent decades, have felt an ardent desire for unity among all Christians. The Second Vatican Council, at the beginning of its Decree on Ecumenism, sees this as a special gift of God. It was an efficacious grace which inspired us, the sons and daughters of the Catholic Church and our brothers and sisters from other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, to set forth on the path of ecumenism.” (Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, # 43)

2. By the grace of God, the Catholic Church and other Churches or Ecclesial Communities are united in a real though imperfect communion or fellowship, in varying degrees. Christians stand in this *communio* through faith and baptism. Unity in baptism impels us toward full communion. It calls all disciples of Christ to faithful discipline in striving toward reconciliation and unity, in the hope that we will reach, one day soon, full communion around the eucharistic table of the one Lord.

3. In the Diocese of Saskatoon notable progress has been made on the path of Christian reconciliation and unity. This joint faithfulness, the work of God’s grace, involves churches of many traditions. We gratefully testify that God’s grace, in us, “has not been in vain” (1 Cor. 15:10).

4. The ecumenical imperative calls all Christians to participate in God’s work of reconciliation and healing. Sharing in experiences of God’s grace opens us to God’s healing action. God’s grace is truly experienced in the sacraments of the Church.

5. Catholics believe that the celebration of the Eucharist is a sacramental sign of the oneness of faith, life and worship of the Church and that participation in Communion presupposes this unity. It is for this reason, then, that reception of Holy Communion is ordinarily reserved for baptized members of the Catholic Church. (see #13)

6. However, it is a source of joy that Catholic pastors may, in certain cases, administer the sacraments of the Eucharist, Reconciliation, and Anointing of the Sick to Christians who are not in full communion with the Catholic Church.

II GUIDELINES FOR SACRAMENTAL SHARING

7. The following are guidelines for receiving the sacraments of the Eucharist, Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick in the Catholic Church.

Serious Spiritual Need

8. In Catholic theology, all the sacraments are acts of worship and signs of Christ’s presence. The sacraments of Eucharist, Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick, while normally reserved for members of the Catholic Church, may be celebrated with a baptized Christian of another denomination who is experiencing genuine serious need and spiritual hunger. This spiritual need involves an awareness of both the personal and communal nature of the sacraments and could lead to a request to receive a sacrament from a Catholic pastor.

9. Given the presence of such a spiritual need, the following conditions apply for a baptized Christian of another denomination to fully participate in the sacrament:

- a) is without access to a pastor of his or her own Church or Ecclesial Community;
- b) requests the sacrament of his/her own initiative (see # 12);
- c) manifests Catholic faith in the sacrament (see # 13, 14, 17);
- d) is properly disposed (see #14);

All four conditions are to be met simultaneously.

Sacrament of the Eucharist

10. The Eucharist is a profound mystery which is both a sign of unity and a source of grace. Reserving Holy Communion to those who are members of the Catholic Church preserves the central place of the Eucharist as the sacramental source and expression of the Church’s visible unity.

11. However, in particular circumstances, permission for a Christian of another denomination to receive Holy Communion in the Catholic Church recognizes the importance of the sacrament as a source of grace for all the baptized.

12. A baptized Christian of another denomination wishing to receive Communion during a Eucharistic celebration is strongly encouraged to request the sacrament by meeting privately with the Catholic pastor for a fuller discussion.

If such a person, however, approaches Communion without a prior meeting, he/she may be understood to be in serious spiritual need and to be requesting the Eucharist out of this need. A subsequent discussion with the pastor would be helpful.

If the person wishes to receive Communion regularly in the Catholic Church, such a person might also wish to explore becoming a Catholic.

13. The Eucharist is the body and blood of Christ given under the form of bread and wine and is the sacramental source and expression of the unity of the one Body of Christ, the Church. The believer, manifesting Catholic faith, affirms this by responding “Amen” when the minister presents the sacred bread and saving cup.

Sacrament of Reconciliation

14. The liturgical reforms initiated by the Second Vatican Council have emphasized the communal and ecclesial character of the sacrament. Christians who request the sacrament of Reconciliation are to have the understanding that, through the sacrament, sinners are reconciled with God and neighbour. The person confesses all serious sin that has broken relationship with God and neighbour, expresses sorrow, and resolves to do his or her best not to sin again.

15. When celebrating the sacrament of Reconciliation, the person identifies her/himself as a baptized Christian of another denomination so that the priest may be more helpful.

Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick

16. In the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, we encounter the risen Christ, the Healer, acting through the ministry of the Church.

17. The seriously ill Christian who requests this sacrament believes that the grace of God is given to help the person experience the illness with courage and peace. The gift of healing may be physical as well as spiritual.

Baptized persons who are infirm or elderly may request this sacrament when the need for its healing grace is present.