

Gluten Intolerance and the Reception of Holy Communion

(November 2003 / Revised April 2012 / Revised April 2016)

Those who suffer from gluten intolerance, especially the form of it known as “Celiac Sprue” disease, may each react differently to varying amounts of gluten contained in wheat bread and other products. Medical opinion on the best treatment for such people varies greatly. While many doctors advise patients with this condition to adopt a totally gluten-free diet, others merely restrict gluten intake.

As a result, the common advice given to many Celiac Sprue and gluten-intolerant patients is to receive only the Precious Blood at Holy Communion. However, additional concerns can emerge when the Precious Blood has been “contaminated” with gluten at the co-mingling rite. As a result, the administration of the Precious Blood – whether under the form of wine or mustum – to persons with these conditions must carefully take into account the need to avoid any mixing of the sacred species at the altar or at the Communion station.

Prior to 2003, the only “low-gluten” hosts available to parishes in the United States were from European suppliers. Currently, however, there are four suppliers in the United States that have been approved by the Secretariat of Divine Worship. The total gluten content of their products is approximately 0.01% which conforms to the requirements of the Code of Canon Law, canon 924.2. This low-gluten content is still enough to validly confect bread for the Eucharist. The contact information for these suppliers follows:

Congregation of Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration
Altar Breads Department
31970 State Highway P
Clyde, Missouri 64432
Phone: (800) 223-2772
Web: www.BenedictineSisters.org
E-mail: altarbreads@benedictinesisters.org

Parish Crossroads
P.O. Box 84
Zionsville, IN 46077-0084
Phone: (800) 510-8842
Fax: (800) 735-7133
Web: www.ParishCrossroads.com
Email: orders@parishcrossroads.com

Cavanagh Company
610 Putnam Pike
Greenville, RI 02828
Phone: (800) 635-0568
Web: www.CavanaghCo.com

GlutenFreeHosts.com Inc.
100 Buckley Road
Liverpool, NY 13088
Phone: (800) 668-7324, ext. 1
Web: www.GlutenFreeHosts.com

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (then Prefect for the Congregation on the Doctrine of the Faith) issued a letter on July 24, 2003 (Prot.N. 98/78-17498) giving permission for the use of “low-gluten” wheat hosts for Holy Communion. This letter also delegated authority to pastors to permit members of the lay faithful who are gluten-intolerant to use the above mentioned low-gluten hosts.

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Practical Application

1. **Completely** gluten-free hosts **are invalid matter** for the celebration of the Eucharist.
2. Low-gluten hosts (i.e. **partially** gluten-free) **are valid matter**. See ordering information from the properly vetted suppliers on the other side.
3. If the individual can tolerate low-gluten hosts, pastors should:
 - a. Order hosts from the validly vetted suppliers on the other side.
 - b. Consecrate the host on a separate paten (it must not comeingle with the regular parish hosts)
 - c. Work out a system with the gluten-intolerant individual and your ministers of Holy Communion on identifying him/herself when coming forward to receive Holy Communion.
4. If the individual cannot tolerate gluten in any amount, pastors should:
 - a. Catechize the individual on the **doctrine of concomitance**; that the whole Christ is received under either species of bread or wine.
 - b. They may receive Holy Communion under the species of **consecrated wine alone**.
 - c. As with the low-gluten host, pastoral care needs to be taken so there is no comingling of any particle of the consecrated hosts with the wine. This could be problematic even if the individual receives from chalices that do not receive the comingled portion of the host. A small amount of gluten could be transferred from the lips of previous communicants to the wine in the chalice. It would be prudent to have a separate chalice for this gluten intolerant individual.
 - d. As with the low-gluten host above, a system needs to be worked out so that the individual could identify him/herself to the minister as being the recipient of the separate chalice.