

OFFICE OF DIVINE WORSHIP

Pastoral Guidelines Updated for the Use of Low-Gluten Hosts

UPDATED AUGUST 4, 2022

Archdiocese Delegates to Pastors Authority to Permit Parishioner Reception of Low-Gluten Hosts:

Beginning August 4, 2022 Pastors, Administrators, Rectors, and Shrine Directors in the Archdiocese of Boston are delegated the authority to permit parishioners to receive low-gluten hosts. The prior Archdiocesan policy requiring both pastors and the lay faithful to submit a paper form to the Office of Divine Worship and then wait to receive a paper approval, is no longer in effect.

Parishes Required to Provide Low-Gluten Hosts, When Requested:

In the Archdiocese of Boston, pastors, and all those charged with the ministry of any shrine or chapel, are henceforth required, upon request, to provide approved low-gluten hosts (and in rare cases, mustum) for parishioners presenting approval from this Archdiocese, or another diocese. The Archdiocese requires this so as to remove from members of the lay faithful the burden of identifying and furnishing valid matter for the Eucharist, consistent with the current practice of every parish, chapel, and shrine to provide wheat-bread hosts and grape wine for the vast majority of communicants. There can be confusion among similar looking products, some of which are only permissible in non-Catholic settings, as well as products touted as “Vatican-approved,” which do not appear on the USCCB nor the RCAB lists of approved low-gluten hosts and mustum.

In the case of a parish, chapel or shrine where no one currently receives low-gluten hosts (or mustum, as the case may be), and there are none of these hosts (or mustum) in supply at the place in question, the faithful requesting these forms of Eucharistic matter are asked to make their request as early as possible, understanding that delay can occur while shipping takes place.

Pastors/chaplains/shrine directors/rectors may continue to enforce their own local policies regarding how/who places the low-gluten hosts in a special pyx or small ciborium before Masses, as long as these low-gluten hosts are purchased by the parish/place in question, and are stored on-site in the proper manner according to the instructions provided by the makers of the hosts.

An Introduction to Holy Communion, Celiac Disease and Alcohol Intolerance, and the Church's Pastoral Response in the Archdiocese of Boston: bit.ly/3xpytlu

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N.B. Regarding Mustum: While mustum is most commonly used for priests who, in the celebration of the Eucharist, medically cannot tolerate alcohol, it is lesser known that members of the lay faithful with the same condition, who cannot receive low-gluten hosts either, may also receive mustum if they have approval from the Archdiocese. While members of the laity are not required to receive Communion under both species in the liturgy as priests are, lay persons may receive under the species of mustum alone where that is the only form of the Eucharist they can receive.

PASTORAL GUIDELINES FOR THE USE OF LOW-GLUTEN HOSTS

MAY 8, 2019

The Office for Worship receives many inquiries about the necessity of using wheat flour for the host in the celebration of the Eucharist. This particular concern reflects the growing recognition of a very serious disorder called celiac disease. Celiac disease results in a harmful intestinal reaction to the gliadin in the gluten in wheat and other grains. The gluten in wheat flour is a protein complex that functions to bind the bread as it is made. Gluten must not be ingested by persons with the disease because serious damage to the digestive system may result. The damage inhibits the absorption of vitamins and nutrients, and predisposes its victims to osteoporosis, neurological illnesses, and even lymphoma. Some other grains, such as rice, do not pose this danger.

Based on the seriousness of this disease it is understandable why people might question the Church's teaching on the necessity of using only wheat bread for the Eucharist. Is this not simply a man-made rule that can be set aside for the pastoral needs of those who suffer this disorder? Unfortunately, it is not that simple. The Church's use of wheat for the eucharistic bread has roots deep in the Church's tradition both east and west.

The tradition begins with Jesus who at the last supper used wheat bread and wine made from grapes. He gave his command: "do this in memory of me." The Church has kept this command ever since as she has celebrated the Eucharist and, like Christ, has only used wheat bread and grape wine. The Church teaching has consistently been that it has no authority to change what Christ instituted. Although it is not possible here to give a full scriptural and historical examination of this practice, the Church believes that the use of bread made of wheat is of divine origins.

One is then left with the question of how to address this serious problem of people with celiac disease. Gluten is naturally present in wheat flour and a principal binding agent in the formation of true bread. And, a host without some amount of gluten present is not considered valid matter for the eucharist. What can be done for those with celiac? A solution to this

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problem may now exist. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has given approval for the use of low-gluten hosts (Prot. 89/78-174 98). A very low-gluten host has been developed by the Congregation of Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration in Missouri. Some consider this confection to be safe for use by those with celiac disease. The valid use of these hosts has been attested to by the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy in their November 2003 Newsletter. In an article written in *Gluten-Free Living* (Vol. 9 no. 2, 2004) Ann Whelen quotes Carlo Catassi, MD, who is an expert in celiac disease, concerning the amount of gluten contained in these hosts. The article states: "Of the hosts Dr. Catassi said, "This dose would have no clinical or histological effect even if taken on a regular basis." In this limited space it is not possible to present the science to support this statement but it is contained in two articles in *Gluten-Free Living* (Vol. 9 no. 1, 2004), the first by Sister Jeanne Crowe, "Catholic Celiacs Can Now Receive Communion," and the second by Ann Whelen, "Make your own decision." A follow-up article is also by Ann Whelen, "Low-Gluten, no gluten" (Vol. 9 no. 2, 2004). It is of course important to remember that when dealing with any medical issues, particularly ones that may have serious consequences, it is appropriate to encourage the person to seek proper medical advice from an individual's own physician. In presenting this information there is no intention to render a medical opinion for what someone with Celiac disease should do. If you are interested in reading these articles I am working with *Gluten-Free Living* to be able to place them on our website.

It is possible that those with this disorder may still not agree that receiving this host would be a safe practice for them. It always remains possible for them to receive only from the cup. Our theology teaches us that we receive in one element of the Eucharist what we receive wholly and completely in the other. In either species of the Eucharist we receive the whole Christ, in his Body and Blood, soul and divinity. As a further precaution it might be advisable to set aside a cup for the exclusive use of those with celiac disease so that there is a diminished chance of contamination with gluten from others who receive both the host and from the cup. Other practical liturgical issues will need to be attended to when permission is received. It is not possible to address those concerns here; rather when permission is received guidelines will be sent on how best to handle the situation.

The use of low-gluten hosts and the use of mustum are restricted to individuals who have a medical need and have been granted permission to use them. Furthermore, the use of mustum is reserved to those who are incapable of receiving a host and cannot receive alcohol. Therefore, the use of low-gluten hosts and mustum by individuals without permission is not allowed.