

OFFICE OF DIVINE WORSHIP

An Introduction to Holy Communion, Celiac Disease and Alcohol Intolerance, and the Church's Pastoral Response in the Archdiocese of Boston

One of the areas of most common concern among the parishes and institutions of the Archdiocese is the Church's pastoral response to those who suffer from Celiac Disease and/or alcohol intolerance. The Office of Worship has worked with pastors to address the common questions that often arise when determining the best course of action to make the Eucharist available to those who are not able to receive the Eucharist in its more standard forms. What follows is a list of commonly asked questions, as well as helpful resources for the purchase of low-gluten hosts and mustum. Please note that the list of low-gluten host and mustum suppliers has been expanded in recent years and is reflected below.

WHAT IS CELIAC DISEASE?

Celiac disease is an immune reaction to eating gluten, a protein found in wheat, barley and rye. For those with the disease, eating gluten triggers an immune response in the small intestine. Over time, this immune reaction damages the small intestine's lining and hinders absorption of some nutrients. The intestinal damage often causes stomach pain, diarrhea, and weight loss, and can lead to serious complications. A Mayo Clinic-led analysis published in 2012 estimates that roughly 1.8 million Americans have the disease, but around 1.4 million of them are unaware that they have it.

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 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. It is important to let them know what their options are right from the very beginning.

CAN CATHOLICS USE "GLUTEN-FREE" HOSTS?

In order for bread to be valid matter for the celebration of the Eucharist, it must be made of wheat. The amount of gluten necessary for validity in such bread is not determined by minimum percentage or weight. "Gluten-free" hosts are considered invalid matter for Mass if they are made out of anything other than wheat and water. For example, hosts made out of potato starch or rice flour are considered invalid matter for the celebration of the Eucharist.

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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 celebration of the Eucharist.

CAN "LOW-GLUTEN" HOSTS BE USED AT MASS?

Yes. Due to advances in technology and science, a number of different religious congregations and church supply companies have successfully produced a variety of low-gluten hosts, which have been approved by the Vatican and favorably reviewed by one publication, *Gluten-Free Living*, as "perfectly safe"¹ for sufferers of Celiac disease. We are grateful to those who have worked very hard to provide this safe and perfectly acceptable option for those with gluten intolerance.

WHERE CAN I BUY THESE LOW GLUTEN HOSTS?

In the dioceses of the United States, there are three approved distributors of low-gluten hosts:

Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration

Altar Breads Department
31970 State Highway P
Clyde, MO 64432-8100
Phone: (800)223-2772
E-Mail: altarbreads@benedictinesisters.org
Web: www.BenedictineSisters.org
Gluten Content: 0.01%

Parish Crossroads

P.O. Box 2413
Zionsville, IN 46077-0084
Phone: (800)510-8842
E-Mail: admin@parishcrossroads.com
Web: www.ParishCrossroads.com
Gluten Content: 0.016%

GlutenFreeHosts.com Inc.

26332 Raleigh Drive
Bonita Springs, FL 34135
Phone: (239)947-1940
Cell: (315) 727-2267
E-Mail: Marshcicccone@gmail.com
Web: www.GlutenFreeHosts.com
Gluten Content: 0.002%

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.

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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. Mustum is defined as grape juice in which fermentation has begun, but has been suspended with the result that its alcohol content (usually less than 1.0%) does not reach the levels found in most table wines. Pasteurized grape juice in which all alcohol has been evaporated through high temperature preparations is invalid matter for Mass.

WHERE CAN I BUY MUSTUM?

In the dioceses of the United States, there are two approved distributors of mustum:

Mont La Salle Altar Wines

605 Trancas Street, Suite B
Napa, CA 94558
Phone: (800)447-8466
E-Mail: johnmtlasalle@aat.net
lyzvintners@accounting.com
Web: www.MontLaSalleAltarWines.com

Monk's Wine & Candles

P.O. Box 681248
Schaumburg, IL 60168
Phone: (800)540-MONK (6665)
E-Mail: info@monkswineandcandles.com
Web: www.MonksWineAndCandles.com

CAN A PRIEST OR BISHOP CHANGE THIS TEACHING AND CONSECRATE GRAPE JUICE OR A HOST MADE OF RICE?

No. It is impossible to consecrate anything other than wine (or mustum) and a host made of wheat and water. No priest or bishop can change this longstanding teaching of the Catholic Church. In 2003, then 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."² Grape juice would also be considered invalid matter for the celebration of the Eucharist.

HOW DOES ONE GO ABOUT GETTING PERMISSION TO USE LOW-GLUTEN HOSTS OR MUSTUM?

If a parishioner desires to receive permission please have the parish priest contact the Office for Divine Worship at 617-746-5753, or send in the completed form requesting permission. When permission is granted to the individual they will receive a letter granting permission, a certificate that they may bring with them to other parishes to show that the permission has been granted for such use, as well as instructions on what to do when receiving communion outside of their home parish.

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 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.