

Holy Communion, Celiac Disease, Gluten and Alcohol Intolerance



Frequently asked Questions

What is Celiac Disease?

Celiac Disease is a genetic, auto-immune system, malfunction. The disease causes the body to harm the lining of the small intestine as well as other organs. Damage results by exposing the immune system to certain proteins, known as “gluten,” which are found in such substances as wheat, barley, and rye. What makes matters of even more concern is that the degree of sensitivity or tolerance to gluten varies greatly among sufferers of this disease. Unfortunately, at this time there is no cure. The only treatment is to adopt what is called the “gluten-free” diet, which attempts to restrict all dangerous proteins from being consumed.

Why can’t individuals with Celiac Disease be able to use “gluten-free” hosts as Mass?

It is the doctrine of the Catholic Church that “communion bread” must be made of only wheat and water with “sufficient gluten to attain the confection of bread.” From the very beginning of the Church only true bread and true wine could be used as species to be consecrated at Mass. This teaching comes directly from the words of Jesus in Sacred Scripture, when he instituted the First Eucharist at the Last Supper, and has been preserved in the Tradition of the Church ever since. For this reason any consecration of a material that is not true bread, as is the case of a host which contains absolutely no gluten, is strictly prohibited and if takes place, is both an invalid consecration and denies the “Real Presence” of Jesus in Holy Communion.

What is meant by “Real Presence” of Jesus and where is this teaching found?

According to the *Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America*, n. 8.: “Christ is ‘truly, really, and substantially contained’ in Holy Communion. His presence is not momentary nor simply signified, but wholly and permanently real under each of the consecrated species of bread and wine.” As Catholics we believe that the bread and wine once consecrated at Mass truly become the “body and blood, soul and divinity of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” Therefore, the Eucharist, rightly called “the source and summit of the Christian life,” represents a most sacred doctrine and cannot be denied. (cf. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, ¶’s 1324-1327).

How does the Church recommend Holy Communion to Catholics with Celiac Disease?

Realizing the growing awareness and seriousness of Celiac Disease, the Church now offers a number of options; again considering the varying degree and tolerance or sensitivity needs of individuals. The ideal situation recommended by the Church is to choose to receive Holy Communion only by drinking from the Chalice of the consecrated wine also known as the “Precious Blood.” It is important that everyone clearly understand the doctrine of the Church known as “concomitance,” before selecting this option. And also to make sure (on everyone’s part) that every care has been given to ensure that the Chalice is free from any possible gluten contamination whatsoever.

What is the Church’s doctrine known as “concomitance?”

The Church teaches that under **either species** of bread or wine, the whole Christ is received (cf. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no. 282; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1390). Thus, the faithful may be confident in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist they receive, even under only one or the other species. In most cases individuals with Celiac disease are asked to receive full Holy Communion only from either the Chalice of the consecrated wine OR from a “very low gluten host.”

How much gluten is in a “very low gluten host?”

In an effort to remain faithful to the “communion bread” being true bread, which must contain some gluten, and the serious needs of individuals with Celiac Disease, the Church has approved a very low gluten host which has been tested to contain .01% gluten per host. While research has stated that this extremely low gluten represents no real harm for most individuals with Celiac Disease, the problem may be that there are some, who may find even this very low content to be unacceptable.

How do I know if this is acceptable, especially for my child at First Holy Communion?

At present, we here at St. Rose of Lima order our low gluten hosts for distribution at First Holy Communion 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: altarbreads@benedictinesisters.org
Sr. Rita, OSB, Manager

On their web-site a detailed description of the gluten content, how the hosts are made, stored and shipped, is posted. Once received we immediately refrigerate the hosts until use. It is imperative that you download this information and share it with your child’s physician. If it is deemed acceptable we could further suggest only a portion of the host, for example 1/4th, be used, thus reducing the .01% gluten even further.

What happens if even the very low gluten host is considered unacceptable?

In this extreme situation, we could make available a special Chalice that has been designated for use only by those with Celiac Disease. Every care would be taken to see that this Chalice is set apart on the altar and is handled only by a Eucharistic Minister for this purpose.

What happens if drinking from the chalice of consecrated wine is considered undesirable?

Again, please check with you child’s physician to determine if the amount of alcohol in a “sip,” representing a small amount, is tolerable. If it is not, we can request the use of “mustum” at the First Holy Communion. But this is a very last resort, and will require special permission from the Office of the Bishop.

What is “mustum” and why is it not more ordinarily made available, especially for use by individuals with alcoholism concerns?

As in the case of the communion bread having to contain at least some gluten in order to be considered “true bread” and being able to be used at Mass, so also must wine contain some amount of alcohol in order to be “true wine.” Mustum is a form of wine in which the fermentation process has been limited in order to reduce the amount of alcohol to about 1%. Originally, mustum was made available only for alcoholic priests, but was never intended for regular use with the congregation since those recovering alcoholics would limit themselves to Holy Communion with the consecrated host. Mustum can be made available for use during First Holy Communion but again would require special diocesan permission for use at Masses, thereafter.

What must I do to request reception of First Holy Communion in light of Celiac Disease?

Please review the “very low gluten” content with your Physician, consider all options, and then call the Office of Faith Formation to schedule a time to meet and discuss the best manner in which you would like to proceed.

What must I do to request reception of Holy Communion, in light of Celiac Disease, at Masses thereafter?

While this may vary from parish to parish, here at St. Rose of Lima we would suggest the following. As stated above, full Holy Communion can be received only from the Chalice of consecrated wine. But, if you so desire, and if a very low gluten host is permissible, this is what we have been doing for several years now: First, acquire an inexpensive Pyx (a small container used exclusively for hosts) on-line or available across the street at the Advent Shop. You can then order your own “low gluten hosts” from the web-site above. Then, bring the Pyx to the sacristy, or place on the table of the Offertory Gifts, before each Mass. All celebrating Priests, Deacons, and Eucharistic Ministers will make every effort to ensure that any contact with gluten from regular hosts is to be avoided.

What should I do if I would like more information?

Please refer all further inquires, need for clarification, or additional information to The Diocese of Rockville Centre, Office of Worship, PO Box 9023, Rockville Centre, NY 11571-9023, e-mail to worship@drvc.org, Phone: 516-678-5800 Ext. 503, or fax to 516-764-3316.

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