

A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO HOLY COMMUNION AND CELIAC SPRUE DISEASE

1. What is Celiac Sprue disease?

In recent years, many have worked to foster an increasing awareness of the significant effects of Celiac Sprue disease on people's lives. The digestive system of those with this condition is considerably compromised by the consumption of gluten, one of the major ingredients in wheat flour. It is estimated that as many as fifteen percent of all persons of northern European origin are affected by this disease to some degree.

2. 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 the 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.

3. Can low gluten hosts be used at Mass?

The Secretariat for the Liturgy of the U.S. Bishops' Conference has devoted considerable resources to this question for the last seven years. Within the past year, the Secretariat has successfully assisted the Congregation of Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration in Clyde Missouri in the production of a very low-gluten host which has been favorably reviewed by the publication *Gluten-Free Living* as "perfectly safe" ¹ for sufferers of Celiac Sprue disease.

4. Where can I buy these low gluten hosts?

Low gluten altar hosts are available 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:).

5. **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.

6. **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*, a type of wine with a minimal alcohol content. If an individual is unable to tolerate *mustum*, there is little else the Church can do except to recommend that the person make a "spiritual communion." Why? Because 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 Eucharist.

7. **Can a priest or bishop change this teaching and consecrate a host made of rice?**

No. It is impossible to consecrate a host made of something other than wheat and water. No priest or bishop can change this longstanding teaching of the Catholic Church. A little over a year ago, 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 *Excerpts from Gluten Free Living (Vol. 9, no. 1).*

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 review 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.