

October 2024

## PASTORAL GUIDANCE FOR THE RESUMPTION OF COMMUNION FROM THE CHALICE

### Background

Before the advent of COVID-19 in early 2020, Communion from the Chalice was regularly available at many, if not all, Masses in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle, celebrated on Sundays and weekdays. At major diocesan celebrations, such as the Chrism Mass or ordinations, it was ordinarily assumed that Communion from the Chalice would be available to those who wished despite the logistical challenges in implementing this.

When Churches were allowed to open again for the celebration of liturgy, the impact of COVID continued to be felt in a seismic shift in the liturgical practice of the diocese, including the withdrawal of Communion from the Chalice.

With the passing of years, the COVID-induced changes to the liturgy have all been removed except for the continued blanket restriction on the resumption of offering Communion from the Chalice.

COVID, the Flu, and RSV are not going anywhere. As with life in general, we learn to live with them, taking responsibility and care for not only ourselves but also for all people.

It is time to consider removing the blanket restriction on the resumption of Communion from the Chalice and leaving the decision to individual parish communities and ultimately to individual members of the faithful, who, as before COVID, make a personal choice as to whether they receive Communion from the Chalice.

Across the diocese, some people are asking for the Chalice to again be offered at Mass. Some concerns have been raised regarding how best to manage its reintroduction and ensure the proper respect and treatment of the Precious Blood during and after Communion.

This document seeks to respond to the breadth and depth of this issue.

### Theological considerations

In the first place, Eucharist is understood as a verb, an action where the faithful join themselves to Christ's paschal action and are transformed to become the Church, the Body of Christ on mission in the world today. Eucharist is not, in the first place, a moment or an object.

In the celebration of the Eucharist, bread is taken, blessed, broken, and given in Communion. In the Eucharist, the Chalice containing the wine is taken, blessed, poured out, and given in communion. The very heart and point of the celebration of the Eucharist is achieved in this four-part action. Bread broken and a Chalice poured out and not shared significantly diminishes the power of the sign to be found in Communion. It is in the whole Eucharistic action that the Church is made. The liturgical considerations following seek to embed this understanding.

## Liturgical Considerations

The pre-COVID liturgical practice within the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle was based on the rubrics in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM)*, which state:

It is most desirable that the faithful, just as the Priest himself is bound to do, receive the Lord's Body from hosts consecrated at the same Mass and that, in the cases where this is foreseen, they partake of the chalice (*cf. no. 283*), so that even by means of the signs Communion may stand out more clearly as a participation in the sacrifice actually being celebrated. (n. 85)

Holy Communion has a fuller form as a sign when it takes place under both kinds. For in this form the sign of the Eucharistic banquet is more clearly evident and clearer expression is given to the divine will by which the new and eternal Covenant is ratified in the Blood of the Lord, as also the connection between the Eucharistic banquet and the eschatological banquet in the Kingdom of the Father. (n. 281)

Paragraph 283, referenced above, determines the context in which the Diocesan Bishop may permit the reception of Communion under both kinds more broadly.

Receiving Communion from the Chalice when this is available is always at the discretion of the communicant (see *GIRM*, n. 284). It can never be forced upon anyone beyond those who are bound to do so by virtue of their office. Indeed, there are many communicants who, for a variety of reasons, have never and will never receive Communion from the Chalice. It is, therefore, not appropriate to suggest that the reintroduction of the Chalice compromises the pastoral principle of care for all members of the community.

When Communion is to be received under both kinds, the *GIRM* indicates that appropriate preparations should be made, with appropriate care to "be taken lest beyond what is needed of the Blood of Christ remains to be consumed at the end of the celebration" (n. 285). The implementation of this provision will vary from community to community and from occasion to occasion, requiring prudent judgement and common sense in ensuring a suitable amount of wine is available for consecration without too much of the Precious Blood being left after Communion is concluded.

The *GIRM* establishes that "whatever may remain of the Blood of Christ is consumed at the altar by the Priest or the Deacon or the duly instituted acolyte who ministered the chalice" (n. 284). It is noted that the US Bishops, in their *Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion* (2001), extend the ability to assist in consuming what remains of the Precious Blood after the distribution of Communion to Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion. This establishes a precedent that could be followed here as needed.

The Instruction *Redemptionis Sacramentum (RS)*, issued in 2004 by the then Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacrament, repeats some of the provisions indicated above. Specifically, the Instruction acknowledges:

So that the fullness of the sign might be made more clearly evident to the faithful in the course of the Eucharistic banquet, lay members of Christ's faithful, too, are admitted to Communion under both kinds, in the cases set forth in the liturgical books, preceded and continually accompanied by proper

catechesis regarding the dogmatic principles on this matter laid down by the Ecumenical Council of Trent. (n. 100).

In determining the circumstances in which Communion from the Chalice is made available, the Instruction notes:

The chalice should not be ministered to lay members of Christ's faithful where there is such a large number of communicants that it is difficult to gauge the amount of wine for the Eucharist and there is a danger that "more than a reasonable quantity of the Blood of Christ remain to be consumed at the end of the celebration". The same is true wherever access to the chalice would be difficult to arrange, or where such a large amount of wine would be required that its certain provenance and quality could only be known with difficulty, or wherever there is not an adequate number of sacred ministers or extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion with proper formation, or where a notable part of the people continues to prefer not to approach the chalice for various reasons, so that the sign of unity would in some sense be negated. (n. 102)

*RS* paragraph 107 echoes the requirement noted above from the *GIRM* concerning the requirements for consuming any of the Precious Blood that remains following the distribution of Communion.

It should be noted that the version of the *GIRM* currently in force for Australia was issued after *RS*, and so any discrepancies between the two ought to be resolved in favour of the more recent document.

### Canonical Considerations

One of the primary concerns about reintroducing Communion from the Chalice is how to ensure that any remaining Precious Blood is treated appropriately, particularly considering the requirements found in the Code of Canon Law and *Redemptionis Sacramentum*.

The relevant provision of the Code of Canon Law is found in canon 1382 §1:

One who throws away the consecrated species or, for a sacrilegious purpose, takes them away or keeps them, incurs a *latae sententiae* excommunication reserved to the Apostolic See; a cleric, moreover, may be punished with some other penalty, not excluding dismissal from the clerical state.

Following the 2021 revision of Book VI of the Code of Canon Law, the provision above exactly duplicates the previous canon 1367, which may still be found in many older printed copies of the Code.

In 1999, the Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts, with the approval of Pope John Paul II, provided an authentic interpretation of the former canon 1367. In the accompanying commentary, that authentic interpretation is explained thus:

The verb *abicit* ['throws away'] should not be understood only in the strict sense of throwing away, nor in the generic sense of profaning, but with the broader meaning of *to scorn, disdain, demean*. Therefore, a grave offence of sacrilege against the Body and Blood of Christ is committed by anyone who takes away and/or keeps the Sacred Species for a sacrilegious (obscene, superstitious, irreligious) purpose, and by anyone who, even without removing them from the tabernacle, monstrance or altar, makes them the object of any external, voluntary and serious act of contempt. Anyone guilty of this offence incurs, in the Latin Church, the penalty of excommunication *latae sententiae* (i.e.,

automatically), the absolution of which is reserved to the Holy See; in the Eastern Catholic Churches he incurs a major excommunication *ferendae sententiae* (i.e., to be imposed). (n. 5)

*RS* picks up this authentic interpretation and the requirements of the GIRM by clearly indicating that “Anyone, therefore, who acts contrary to these norms, for example casting the sacred species into the sacrarium or in an unworthy place or on the ground, incurs the penalties laid down.” (n. 107)

While recognising that the requirements and prohibitions noted above are indeed serious, it must also be recognised that they are so because of the profound respect due to the Body and Blood of Christ rather than as a recognition that there is a serious spate of misbehaviour directed towards the Sacred Species. Applying common sense and pastoral wisdom, combined with the good catechesis called for above, will ensure the proper respect and treatment of the Body and Blood of Christ.

With that in mind, the following advice, guidance and suggestions are offered.

### **Pastoral Guidance & Suggestions**

It is recommended that:

The leadership of each parish community engages in conversation and formation with the faithful who participate in the celebration of Eucharist to discern when and how to reintroduce the sharing of the Chalice at Mass.

Parish leadership consider the following process of engagement with the faithful:

1. Share the following statement with the faithful:

*Bishop Michael has removed the restriction on offering the Chalice at Mass. He has indicated it is up to individual parish communities to discern together when it is appropriate to reintroduce the Chalice.*

2. Presiders engage in targeted preaching and provide catechesis via Parish Bulletins on ...

3. Invite the community to engage in informal conversation about this.

4. After an appropriate period of time, invite those interested to gather for shared conversation, which may unfold as follows:

- *Allow questions to be asked, concerns to be expressed, and opportunities to be grasped. Take the opportunity to clarify these and the contents of the preaching and catechesis.*
- *When appropriate, ask more focused questions such as:*
  - *If the Chalice were reintroduced and you are well, would you receive communion from the Chalice?*
  - *What needs to be in place before we reintroduce the Chalice?*
  - *Is it time to reintroduce the Chalice at Mass for those who wish to participate in this form of communion? Why?*

Parish leaders use the information in this document to support engagement with the community.

This moment be seized as an opportunity to engage interested members of the community in formation on the Eucharist. Suggestions include:

1. Form a group(s) to engage in a shared reading and reflection on Pope Francis' Apostolic Letter [Desiderio Desideravi](#) on the Liturgical Formation of the People of God. Note particularly Pope Francis' focus on the theological sense of the liturgy, the Paschal Mystery and the importance of symbol, the latter in reference to 'the fullness of the sign' noted above in *GIRM* 281.  
  
[The Liturgy of the Eucharist: Celebrants or Consumers? It Matters.](#)
2. Contact [The Office of Worship and Prayer](#) to organise formation that would best suit your community, particularly for liturgical ministers who would be involved in the reintroduction of the Chalice.

The following liturgical issues need to be checked and resolved:

- Appropriate sanitising protocols are in place
- Metal Chalices are available and being used.
- There are sufficient formed Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion available to offer the Chalice at Mass
- There are enough ministers willing to assist in consuming any Precious Blood remaining after Communion.

When the parish community is ready, sharing the Chalice be reintroduced for those who wish to partake.

That the reintroduction of the Chalice be under constant review to ensure that all appropriate measures are in place.

If in doubt, use common sense.

Best wishes,

Louise Gannon rsj, on behalf of the Diocesan Liturgy Council

23 October 2024