

Catholic Church, Congregatio pro Cultu Divino.  
Instruction on Masses  
c.3 ADE 9767

# **INSTRUCTION ON MASSES FOR SPECIAL GATHERINGS**

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**Congregation for Divine Worship**

**May 15, 1969**



# **INSTRUCTION ON THE MANNER OF ADMINISTERING HOLY COMMUNION**

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**UNITED STATES CATHOLIC CONFERENCE**

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# **INSTRUCTION ON MASSES FOR SPECIAL GATHERINGS**

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One of the principal objectives of the Church's pastoral activity is educating the faithful to insert themselves into the ecclesial community so that everyone, above all in liturgical celebrations, will feel united with his brother in communion with the universal and local Church. The liturgical assembly, presided over by the one who is invested with the power to reunite, direct, and instruct and sanctify God's People, is a sign and instrument of the unity of all men, and above all of the Church with Christ (cf. Constitution on the Liturgy, n. 83).

This is realized chiefly in the communitarian celebration of the Eucharist, especially on Sunday, with the bishop or in the parochial assembly where the pastor takes the place of the bishop (cf. Constitution on the Church, n. 1; Constitution on the Liturgy, nn. 41-42; Instruction on Eucharistic Worship, May 25, 1967, nn. 26-27).

Pastoral care is directed also to special gatherings, not with the scope of engendering a tendency towards a separate or privileged class but with the hope of meeting special needs and of deepening and intensifying the Christian life according to the needs and the preparation of the persons in these gatherings. It achieves this by taking advantage of the opportunities which emanate from a common spiritual or apostolic commitment and from the desire for mutual edification.

Experience shows the efficacy of pastoral activity in these gatherings. If they are directed well and thought out, rather than damaging the unity of the parish, they benefit its missionary action by bringing some people closer and by deepening the formation of others.

Their vitality stems from the fact that the common study of Christian truth and the equally common effort to conform one's own existence and behavior to this are joined in this coming-together in prayer. These prayer reunions are carried out in a manner and form consonant with the gathering, especially in the reading and meditating on the Word of God and often in the Eucharistic celebration, which becomes the culmen and crowning point of the reunion.

The desire to have the Eucharistic celebration at these gatherings is particularly felt today. Therefore, it seemed appropriate to give some norms which may regulate such a celebration, so that it may be carried out with order, propriety and serenity, with a spiritual advantage for the participants and with respect for its essential character of sacred and religious worship.

1. It pertains to the bishop to examine accurately the circumstances in order to judge whether in each case pastoral reasons dictate a Eucharistic celebration, or if instead it would be better to suggest another religious celebration.

2. The special gatherings for which permission can be given to celebrate the Eucharist are:

a) Gatherings for retreat, religious or pastoral studies, for one or more days, or for meetings of the lay apostolate or similar associations.

b) Meetings for pastoral motives in certain sections of the parish.

c) Gatherings of the faithful who live far from the parish church and who periodically come together to enrich their religious formation.

d) Gatherings of young people or of persons of the same condition or formation, who periodically come together for religious formation or instruction adapted to their mentality.

e) Family gatherings around the sick or aged who cannot leave their house and who otherwise would never participate in

the Eucharistic celebration. Included with these are friends and those who look after the sick.

f) Those gathered together for a wake or for some other exceptional religious occasion.

3. Normally, the Eucharist for special gatherings is celebrated in a sacred place.

4. The norm in Canon 822, paragraph 4, of the Code of Canon Law and number 7 of the first part of the *Motu Proprio Pastorale Munus*, Nov. 30, 1963, still hold. The permission to celebrate the Eucharist for special gatherings, outside of a sacred place, can be given only by the local Ordinary. In cases of celebrations in private houses or institutes, he will give this permission only if the group gathers where there is no chapel or oratory and only if this is a fitting place for such a celebration. Celebrations in bedrooms are always excluded.

However, in searching for spacious and decorous places, some families should not be preferred towards others. This would only resuscitate, under another form, the privilege class system which was disapproved of in the liturgical constitution (n. 32).

5. The basic principles, delineated in the Instruction on Eucharistic Worship (n. 3), should be kept in mind, especially the following:

a) The sacrifice and the sacred Meal belong to the same mystery, to such an extent that they are linked to one another by a very close theological and sacramental bond.

b) No Mass may be considered as an exclusive action of a particular group, but as a celebration of the Church, in which the priest, exercising his office, presides as a minister of the Church over the entire liturgical action.

c) Everything should be disposed in such a way that, in the selection of a place, in the attitude of the persons and in the use of things, true worship is rendered to the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

6. In order to achieve a celebration corresponding to circumstances and environment, the single parts should be well organized, keeping in mind the following general norms and principles:

a) In the fullest way possible, participation of the faithful should be encouraged, according to the particular circumstances.

b) The celebration can be preceded by a period of meditation on Holy Scripture or of instruction on spiritual things, adapted to the characteristics of the gathering.

c) Besides an initial admonition, the celebrant can briefly introduce the liturgy of the Word before the readings and the Eucharistic liturgy before the preface, and also intervene again before the dismissal. Any other interruption is excluded during the Eucharistic liturgy.

d) With the exception of the following norms (cf. f and h below) and the role of the commentator during the celebration, the faithful will refrain from any interventions in the way of reflections, exhortations and the like.

e) In the liturgy of the Word readings adapted to the particular celebration can be chosen from approved lectionaries.

f) The readings which precede the Gospel should be read by one of the participants (man or woman); the Gospel, however, must be proclaimed by the priest or deacon.

g) In the homily the priest should recall the particular character of the celebration, and its link with the local and universal Church.

h) The prayer of the faithful can be adapted to the circumstances. The general intentions for the Church, the world, brothers in need and the assembly should not be entirely omitted. A particular intention, properly prepared, can be proposed by the participants.

7. A more complete and perfect participation in the celebration is had with Eucharistic communion. For communion under both species the disposition in the Instruction on Eucharistic Worship must be adhered to (cf. n. 32). This type of communion is excluded when Mass is celebrated in houses. Giving communion to oneself and receiving it in the hand are likewise excluded.

8. In order to favor the participation of those present the use of song, in some circumstances, could be useful. Also in this regard, the norms regarding song and music in sacred celebrations should be observed, avoiding that which is contrary to the holiness of the rite and to the piety of the participants.

9. The above indicated adaptations, introduced exclusively for these cases, are not to be introduced in celebrations done in Church for the entire community of the faithful.

10. For celebrations of the Eucharist for special gatherings outside of a sacred place, especially in private houses, these conditions are required:

a) The faculty (cf. n. 4 above) may not be given for Sundays and holy days of obligation.

b) The necessity of obtaining the permission of the local Ordinary should always be kept in mind. If the celebrant is not the pastor, the pastor should be notified. These, then, will give a report to the bishop concerning the celebrations.

c) The norms for Eucharistic fast should be observed; in no way can the Eucharist be preceded by an agape. If one should follow, it will not be at the same table on which the Eucharist is celebrated.

d) Bread for the Eucharist remains unleavened bread, the only kind permitted in the Latin Church and not without grave reasons. It will be confectioned in the customary form.

e) The celebration should not occur late in the night.

f) Even in gatherings with family ties no one is to be excluded who desires to participate.

11. To safeguard the success of these celebrations and to obtain a greater spiritual efficaciousness, they should be well prepared and always celebrated with dignity and sacredness. Attention must be given to the form, and the more fitting elements should be chosen with respect for liturgical forms. Therefore:

a) The texts of the Mass should be taken from the Missal or from approved supplements. Every change (except for what has been said in n. 6h) is arbitrary and therefore rejected.

b) The furnishings of the altar (cross, altar cloth, candles, Missal, purificator, corporal, hand towel and communion plate), the sacred vessels (chalice, paten, pyx), the vestments (amice, alb, cincture, stole and chasuble) should be, in number, form and quality, as desired by present legislation.

c) The ritual gestures and the ceremonies of the celebrant, as well as the attitude of the participants, should be those prescribed for the normal Eucharistic celebration.

Pastors in charge of the faithful are encouraged to consider and deepen the spiritual and formative value of these celebrations. They are valid only if they direct the participants to a greater awareness of

the Christian mystery, to an insertion in the ecclesial community and its worship and to the faithful exercise of charity and the apostolate.

In our day and age there are those who think they are up-to-date only when they can show off novelty, often bizarre, or devise arbitrary forms of liturgical celebrations. Priests, Religious and diocesan, considerate of the true welfare of the faithful, realize that only in a generous and unyielding fidelity to the will of the Church, expressed in its directive, norms and structures, lies the secret of a lasting and sanctifying pastoral success.

Those who wander from this line, even if it is alluring, finish in creating bewilderment in the faithful. At the same time they are killing and rendering sterile their sacerdotal ministry.

This Instruction, prepared at the request of higher authority by the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, will regulate every type of Mass celebrated in special gatherings *until the Apostolic See disposes otherwise*.

Vatican City, May 15, 1969, Feast of the Ascension of Our Lord

BENNO CARDINAL GUT  
*Prefect*

A. BUGNINI  
*Secretary*



# **INSTRUCTION ON THE MANNER OF ADMINISTERING HOLY COMMUNION**

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When it celebrates the memorial of the Lord, by that rite the Church witnesses to its faith and adoration of Christ, who is present in the sacrifice and who is given as food to those who share in the Eucharistic table.

For this reason it is of great concern that the Eucharist be celebrated and shared in most worthily and fruitfully, by observing unchanged the tradition that has reached us step by step, the tradition whose riches have been poured into the practice and life of the Church. The documents of history demonstrate that the ways of celebrating and receiving the holy Eucharist have been diverse. Even in our time many and important ritual changes have been introduced into the celebration of the Eucharist in order to bring it into accord with the spiritual and psychological needs of men today. Because of circumstances, communion under both kinds, bread and wine, which was once common in the Latin rite but had fallen into disuse little by little, has again been made a part of the discipline governing the faithful's mode of receiving the holy sacrament. At the time of the Council

of Trent a different situation had arisen and was in effect everywhere; the Council approved and defended it as suited to the conditions of that period. <sup>1</sup>

With the renewal in the modes of communicating, however, the sign of the Eucharistic meal and the complete fulfillment of Christ's mandate have been effected more clearly and vividly. At the same time a full sharing in the celebration of the Eucharist, expressed through sacramental communion, has recently stirred up in some places the desire to return to the practice by which the Eucharistic bread is placed in the hand of the faithful who communicates himself by putting it in his mouth.

In some communities and localities this rite has even been performed without obtaining the prior approval of the Apostolic See and occasionally without appropriate preparation for the people.

It is true that, according to ancient usage, it was once permitted for the faithful to take the sacred food in their hands and themselves to place it in their mouths and even, in the earliest period, to carry the holy sacrament with them from the place of celebration, especially in order to receive it as viaticum if they should have to suffer for the profession of the faith.

Nevertheless the precepts of the Church and the writings of the Fathers give abundant witness to the great reverence and prudence shown to the holy Eucharist. For "no one . . . eats this flesh unless first he adores," <sup>2</sup> and each recipient is warned: ". . . receive it and take care that none of it be lost to you" <sup>3</sup>: "for it is the body of Christ." <sup>4</sup>

In the meantime the care and ministry of the body and blood of the Lord was entrusted in a quite special way to sacred ministers or to persons assigned to this function: "After the president has completed the prayers and all the people have made the acclamation, those among us whom we call deacons distribute a part of the bread and wine and water, in which the thanksgiving has been made, to each one present and bring them to those who are absent." <sup>5</sup>

The office of bringing the Eucharist to those who were absent was soon entrusted to sacred ministers alone, for the reason that greater care might be shown for the reverence due to the body of Christ as well as for the needs of the people. In the following period, after the true meaning of the Eucharistic mystery, its effect, and the

presence of Christ in it had been profoundly investigated, from a pressing sense of reverence toward this holy sacrament and of the humility which its reception demands, the custom was introduced by which the minister himself would place the piece of consecrated bread on the tongue of the communicants.

In view of the state of the Church as a whole today, this manner of distributing Holy Communion must be observed, not only because it rests upon a tradition of many centuries but especially because it is a sign of the reverence of the faithful toward the Eucharist. The practice in no way detracts from the personal dignity of those who approach this great sacrament, and it is a part of the preparation needed for the most fruitful reception of the Lord's body. <sup>6</sup>

This reverence is a sign of communion not in "common bread and drink" <sup>7</sup> but in the body and blood of the Lord. By it "the people of God shares in the blessings of the paschal sacrifice, renews the new covenant once made by God with man in the blood of Christ, and in faith and hope prefigures and anticipates the eschatological banquet in the kingdom of the Father." <sup>8</sup>

In addition, this manner of communicating, which is now to be considered as prescribed by custom, gives more effective assurance that Holy Communion will be distributed with the appropriate reverence, decorum, and dignity; that any danger of profaning the Eucharistic species, in which "the whole and entire Christ, God and man, is substantially contained and permanently present in a unique way," <sup>9</sup> will be avoided; and finally that the diligent care which the Church has always commended for the very fragments of the consecrated bread will be maintained: "If you have allowed anything to be lost, consider this a lessening of your own members." <sup>10</sup>

On this account, since some few episcopal conferences and individual bishops had asked that the usage of placing the consecrated bread in the hand of the faithful be admitted in their territories, the Supreme Pontiff decreed that each bishop of the entire Latin Church should be asked his opinion concerning the appropriateness of introducing this rite. A change in a matter of such importance, which rests on a very ancient and venerable tradition, besides touching upon discipline can also include dangers. These may be feared from a new manner of administering Holy Communion; they are a lessening of reverence toward the noble sacrament of the altar, its profanation, or the adulteration of correct doctrine.

Three questions were therefore proposed to the bishops. Up to March 12 the following responses had been received:

1. Does it seem that the proposal should be accepted by which, besides the traditional mode, the rite of receiving Holy Communion in the hand would be permitted?

Yes: 567

No: 1,233

Yes, with reservations: 315

Invalid votes: 20

2. Should experiments with this new rite first take place in small communities, with the assent of the local Ordinary?

Yes: 751

No: 1,215

Invalid votes: 70

3. Do you think that the faithful, after a well planned catechetical preparation, would accept this new rite willingly?

Yes: 835

No: 1,185

Invalid votes: 128

From the responses received it is thus clear that by far the greater number of bishops feel that the present discipline should not be changed at all, indeed that if it were changed, this would be offensive to the sensibilities and spiritual appreciation of these bishops and of most of the faithful.

After he had considered the observations and the counsel of those whom "the Holy Spirit has placed as bishops to rule"<sup>11</sup> the Churches, in view of the seriousness of the matter and the importance of the arguments proposed, the Supreme Pontiff judged that the long received manner of ministering Holy Communion to the faithful should not be changed.

The Apostolic See therefore strongly urges bishops, priests, and people to observe zealously this law, valid and again confirmed, according to the judgment of the majority of the Catholic episcopate,

in the form which the present rite of the sacred liturgy employs, and out of concern for the common good of the Church.

If the contrary usage, namely, of placing Holy Communion in the hand, has already developed in any place, in order to help the episcopal conference fulfill their pastoral office in today's often difficult situation, the Apostolic See entrusts to the conferences the duty and function of judging particular circumstances, if any. They may make this judgment provided that any danger is avoided of insufficient reverence or false opinions of the holy Eucharist arising in the minds of the faithful and that any other improprieties be carefully removed.

In these cares, moreover, in order to govern this usage properly, the episcopal conferences should undertake the appropriate deliberations after prudent study; the decision is to be made by a two-thirds majority by secret ballot.

These deliberations should then be proposed to the Holy See for the necessary confirmation, together with an accurate explanation of the reasons which moved the conferences to take this action. The Holy See will weigh the individual cases with care, remembering the bonds which exist between the several local Churches among themselves and with the entire Church, in order to promote the common good and edification and the increase of faith and piety which flow from mutual good example.

This Instruction, prepared at the special mandate of the Supreme Pontiff Paul VI, was duly approved by him, in virtue of apostolic authority, on May 28, 1969. Pope Paul also decreed that it be brought to the attention of the bishops through the presidents of the episcopal conferences.

Anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

Rome, May 29, 1969.

BENNO CARD. GUT  
*Prefect*

A. BUGNINI  
*Secretary*

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Council of Trent, session XXI, doctrine concerning communion under both kinds and communion of children: Denz. 1726-1717 (930); session XXII, decree on the petition for the concession of the cup: Denz. 1760.

<sup>2</sup> Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 98, 9: PL 37, 1264.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses Mystagogicae*, V, 21: PG 33, 1126.

<sup>4</sup> Hippolytus, *Traditio Apostolica*, n. 37; ed. B. Botte, 1963, p. 84.

<sup>5</sup> Justin, *Apologia I*, 65: PG 6, 427.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 98, 9: PL 37, 1264-1265.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Justin, *Apologia I*, 66: PG 6, 427; cf. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 1. 4, c. 18, n. 5: PG 7, 1028-1029.

<sup>8</sup> S. Congregation of Rites, instruction *Eucharisticum Mysterium*, n. 3a: AAS 59 (1967) 541.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *ibid.* n. 9, p. 547.

<sup>10</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses Mystagogicae*, V. 21: PG 33, 1126.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Acts 20: 28.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. II Vatican Council, decree *Christus Dominus*, n. 38, 4: AAS 58 (1966) 693.



