

THAT ALL MAY COME GLUTEN-FREE GUIDELINES FOR COMMUNION IN THE RCA

The Liturgy for the Lord's Supper invites us to the table with these familiar words: ***"Come, for all things are now ready."***¹

The day before his death, Jesus commanded his disciples to get things ready for the Passover Meal.² At that meal, Jesus instituted what we now celebrate in the Lord's Supper.³ Preparations for this sacrament are an essential element for the feast. These preparations should consider the people in our churches who endure a variety of food allergies, including gluten intolerance.

The real presence and real partaking of Christ is experienced in our simple actions: sharing food and drink, remembering Christ's sacrifice, experiencing oneness in and with Christ, and renewing our hope in the promised kingdom of God.⁴ "It is in the act of eating and drinking that Christ feeds us with his presence through the power of the Holy Spirit."⁵ The meaning of the sacrament and communion with Christ and others is more important than the physical elements.⁶ Because of this, wine may be grape juice, and bread does not necessarily have to be made out of wheat.

The Lord's Table is where God meets the church in the person of Jesus Christ and sacramentally binds us together as the body of Christ. The following guidelines are provided to aid the elders in communion preparations and to increase awareness and sensitivity to the need for full inclusion. Bread preparations that include options for people with gluten intolerance (or other allergies) ensure that all may join in the joyful feast of our Lord.

Full Inclusion

The best practice for full inclusion of all those with gluten intolerance is to provide only gluten-free elements at the Lord's Table. Some people have a variety of gluten-related health issues, including celiac disease, wheat allergy, and non-celiac gluten sensitivity (NCGS). These medically recognized intolerances and sensitivities have created a barrier to full communion in the body of Christ. Utilizing only gluten-free bread or wafers at the table ensures that all are welcome.

Individual Service

The individual service option addresses cross-contamination concerns by maintaining strict safety guidelines regarding the separation of gluten and gluten-free breads. Providing separate gluten-free stations or plates allows for the participation of all people at the table. While this may be a practical option for most congregations, it will call attention to people with gluten intolerance. Furthermore, this separates the congregation from sharing the common loaf.

Alongside

In some ministry contexts, it may be possible to serve communion with a gluten-free option alongside wheat-based bread. Providing a gluten-free option alongside can be done in a variety of ways depending on the traditions of the congregation. In serving alongside and allowing people to partake together, cross-contamination becomes a concern for people with severe intolerance. This option excludes people from freely coming to the table.

Guidelines

General Considerations

- Where to find gluten-free breads and wafers:
 - Search the internet for gluten free bread or wafers (e.g., “gluten free bread near me”).
 - Communicate with people who regularly purchase gluten free products.
- Gluten-free bread or wafers used for communion should be labeled as: “no gluten,” “gluten-free,” “free of gluten,” or “without gluten.”⁷
- Local bakeries should ensure that the gluten-free bread was prepared separately from regular wheat breads and pastries.
- Gluten-free does not guarantee allergen free.
- Create an environment where people feel free to share their allergy concerns with the leadership of the congregation and with one another.⁸

Full Inclusion Practical Guidelines

- Gluten-free communion requires thorough cleansing of the preparation area, the communionware, linens, and the utensils used for preparing communion.
- Those preparing communion must wash their hands thoroughly.⁹
- To avoid cross-contamination, wheat products must not be present.

Individual Service Practical Guidelines

- Serving by intinction
 - Have a separate gluten-free station using the practical guidelines for full inclusion (above). This station should include both the gluten-free option and the cup.
 - Be clear when inviting worshipers to the table which station is gluten free.
- Serving when trays and plates are passed
 - Keep a separate plate only used for gluten-free bread that is prepared using the practical guidelines for full inclusion (above).
 - Designate a server for the gluten-free option. This person should only handle the gluten-free plate.
 - Be clear when inviting worshipers to the table which server has the gluten-free option and how worshipers should indicate they require gluten-free elements.

Alongside Practical Guidelines

- Gluten-free bread or wafers may be offered alongside their wheat equivalent.
- To limit cross-contamination, separately prepare gluten-free and wheat products.
- Gluten-free and wheat breads should be separated when transporting to the table and during the service. This may be two separate plates, a dish on a tray, or a napkin on a plate.
- If people are invited forward for intinction, the bread server may hold both options, allowing the individual to choose.
- Be clear when inviting worshipers to the table that elements are not free from cross-contamination.

A resource from the RCA Commission on Christian Worship

Endnotes

1. RCA Liturgy for the Order for the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper (1968)
2. Matthew 27:17-19; Luke 22:7-13; Mark 14:12-16
3. Matthew 27:26; Luke 22:19; Mark 14:22
4. Belhar Confession, Clause 2; Belgic Confession, Article 35
5. Gregg Mast, *In Remembrance and Hope* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998): 24.
6. Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 79
7. <https://www.fda.gov/food/food-labeling-nutrition/gluten-free-labeling-foods>
8. RCA *Book of Church Order* Chapter 1, Part I, Article 5, Section 3b (2021 edition, p. 22)
9. https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/safe-food-handling/keep-food-safe-food-safety-basics/ct_index