



THE ROMAN CATHOLIC
church of phoenix

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Office of the Bishop

August 22, 2007

Dear Brothers in Christ,

For the last several years I have been working with the Presbyteral Council and the Office of Worship in revising our policy on Holy Communion Services issued by Bishop O'Brien in 2000. *Redemptionis Sacramentum* issued in 2004 placed greater restrictions on the use of Holy Communion Services and urged bishops to curtail their use, even on Sundays in places without a priest. As many of you know the revised edition of Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest (SCAP) was issued by the National Conference in March of 2007.

The revised edition of SCAP has a new structure for the communion service so to make it more distinct from the structure of Mass. It includes a prayer for vocations to the priesthood, states that the presider's chair must remain empty (even when the service is presided over by a deacon) and separates the role of presider into several parts if led by lay persons. Included with this letter is a document from the Office of Worship highlighting the changes from the 1994 edition.

As a diocese, we waited to put into effect our revised Policy on Holy Communion Outside of Mass until we received the new edition of the Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest. Now that the new SCAP ritual is available, I would like to set **September 15th, the Feast of our Mother of Sorrows, as the date for implementation of the new revised policy on Communion Services.**

The draft policy reviewed by the Presbyteral Council two years ago has been modified to respond to the concerns of many of you. Our new policy now allows for the canonical pastor of a parish without a resident priest, to petition the Bishop to use SCAP on Sunday on a regular basis. Secondly, in an emergency, SCAP may be used to replace a Sunday Eucharist. The Dean of your Deanery must be notified that such a celebration has taken place.

Since all Communion Services are intended to link the faithful attending them to the Sunday Celebration of the Eucharist of a parish community, the use of communion services during the week at places other than hospitals, nursing homes, prisons or other such institutions is prohibited.

The new policy is included with this letter. An article on the new policy and reasons for it will be published in The Catholic Sun at the time of implementation.

If you feel like you need help in explaining the changes in the policy to your parish on the apparent restriction of weekday communion services, Sr. Ginger Downey or Fr. Kieran Kleczewski will be happy to make a presentation at your parish to answer questions regarding the new policy or to bring a deeper understanding to the difference between Celebrating the Eucharist and receiving Communion in a non-Eucharistic service.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas J. Olmsted". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

+Thomas J. Olmsted
Bishop of Phoenix

Policy on Holy Communion Outside of Mass
Diocese of Phoenix
September 15, 2007

Four documents govern the distribution of Holy Communion outside of Mass. These are: *Holy Communion Outside of Mass* (1973); *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* (1993); *Redemptionis Sacramentum* (2004); and *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* (2007). As in the case of most liturgical law, principles contained in latter documents supersede or refine earlier principles because of the lived experience of the Church.

1) The 1974 rite is to be used only in non-parish settings (such as prisons, nursing homes, hospitals, etc) when Mass cannot be celebrated or the faithful cannot legitimately attend Mass in a Parish. The distribution of Holy Communion outside of mass in this rite seeks to link people who are unable to attend Mass on Sunday to the parish Sunday celebration of the Eucharist. The celebrant of this rite is the priest, deacon or instituted acolyte. Lay ministers can be given faculties by the bishop to perform this ceremony.

2) The rites described in *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* are very limited in their use. Option A includes morning or evening prayer with the distribution of Holy Communion; Option B is a service of the Word with distribution of Holy Communion. These rites are to be used only on Sundays, when no Mass will be celebrated in a parish or mission. They may not be used if the faithful may reasonably attend Mass at another parish or location. These rites may be used only when and where the diocesan bishop has given permission and under the guidance of a canonical pastor. Great care and proper instruction must be given the community before the use of either option so that the faithful do not confuse this celebration with Mass. Only a deacon or a lay person appointed by the bishop may perform the rite. Preaching is only allowed with proper delegation from the bishop. The community should understand that “their assembly on Sunday is not an assembly without a priest”. . . “but an assembly in expectation of a priest”.

3) *Redemptionis Sacramentum* places greater restrictions on the use of either the rite of 1974 or that of 1993. This document has three concerns: 1) that the above rites have been used indiscriminately without proper permissions and for reasons outside the original intent; 2) that the use of the above rites have created confusion among the laity as to what they were participating in; and 3) that the importance of full active participation by the faithful in the Eucharistic celebration (Sunday Obligation) has become equated with receiving Holy Communion.

Several emphases have changed in this latest document: 1) rather than give permission for Communion Services on Sunday, the diocesan bishop is encouraged to find religious or retired priests to say Mass at parishes (missions) without a full time priest or the laity is encouraged to join nearby churches for Sunday Mass or holy days(#162, 163);

2) permission for deacons or laity to offer other services on Sunday must be seen as extraordinary for each locale; these Sunday services must inspire a “hunger” for the Eucharistic celebration and do not necessarily include the distribution of Holy Communion (#164); 3) if confusion is created among the faithful over the rite they are attending, then Holy Communion should not be distributed (#165); 4) if Holy Communion is distributed and the rite is led by the

laity, then the rite should be carried out by several members lest it seem that one is “presiding”;
5) though priests should celebrate daily Mass for their congregations as often as possible, the bishop must not easily give permission for communion services on weekdays if there is a Sunday celebration in the parish (#166).

4) In light of #3 above the USCCB has issued a revised version of *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* (2007). This latest document makes clear that Sunday celebrations with or without communion can only take place with the permission of the bishop and may never happen at a place where Sunday Mass has been celebrated that weekend. Such celebrations are for parishes that only see a priest once or twice a month. They help those parishes maintain Sunday as the Day of the Lord, but do not fulfill the obligation of Catholics to attend Mass on Sunday.

In light of the above, the following will serve as policy for the celebration of communion services in the Diocese of Phoenix.

- 1) For the faithful who cannot legitimately attend Mass (nursing homes, hospitals, prisons, etc.), communion services may be offered by the person(s) appointed by the pastor or office who has jurisdiction over these institutions. When these take place during the week and not on Sunday, the rite found in the Pastoral Care of the Sick is used. If possible, pastors should make every effort to arrange for the celebration of Mass at such institutions within his care on a regular basis (monthly).
- 2) If a priest is absent from his parish during the week and cannot find a substitute, a service of the Word or the liturgy of the hours, should be prayed instead of a communion service. The rite of 1974 may not be used. If someone is not available to conduct a liturgy of the Word or the liturgy of the hours, a rosary may be prayed.
- 3) As a rule of thumb, *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* should never be celebrated in metropolitan Phoenix. In the extraordinary event that a priest had to miss a Sunday Mass at his parish, and knowing this in advance could not find a substitute, he should publish Mass times of surrounding parishes.
- 4) In parishes without a resident priest, the canonical pastor of a parish (mission) may petition the bishop for permission that *Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest* may take place. He should name the deacon or lay persons for whom he is requesting permission. Sunday services may or may not include the distribution of Holy Communion depending on the permission of the bishop.
- 5) Where permission has been granted for the use of the rite *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*, every effort should be made by the canonical pastor or administrator to schedule Mass for the faithful at some regular interval (monthly or quarterly)
- 6) In an emergency (e.g., a priest gets sick before Mass, an assigned priest does not show up for mass on a Sunday), *Sunday Celebration* may be performed by a deacon or other person delegated by the pastor, if not other Sunday Mass is scheduled in the parish. The Dean must be notified that such a celebration has taken place.