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Interim guidelines for prayer... ADT 2154

# INTERIM GUIDELINES FOR PRAYER IN COMMON AND COMMUNICATIO IN SACRIS

BISHOPS' COMMISSION FOR  
ECUMENICAL AFFAIRS

NATIONAL CATHOLIC WELFARE CONFERENCE



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INTERIM GUIDELINES  
FOR PRAYER IN COMMON  
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IN SACRIS

The Decree on Ecumenism of the Second Vatican Council speaks of change of heart, holiness of life, and prayer for unity as the "soul" of the ecumenical movement (Ch. II, 8). The Bishops' Commission for Ecumenical Affairs, while taking steps to engage in dialogue and common action with the representatives of other churches, realizes that the question of prayer in common and *communicatio in sacris* is the most pressing of its tasks.

In presenting recommendations for common worship and prayer the Bishops' Commission recognizes that it is the local bishop who has the authority to make dispositions in this matter. The Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity will, in time, present a directory for the practice of ecumenism which will be applicable throughout the universal Church. In the absence of such a directory and in the absence of legislation enacted by the Episcopal Conference of the United States, the Bishops' Commission for Ecumenical Affairs offers the following recommendations for the interim to the bishops of the United States.

## **I. *Diocesan Ecumenical Commissions***

In guiding the course of ecumenism within their own dioceses, especially in presenting guidelines for prayer and *communicatio in sacris*, it is highly recommended that local bishops establish diocesan ecumenical commissions. Among the members of these commissions it would be desirable to include priests, religious and members of the laity who, by reason of their expert knowledge, can contribute to the work of the commissions, and who are also representative of the local churches. As the involvement of Catholics in dialogue, in joint action, and in prayer with other Christians increases such commissions could be of inestimable value to the local bishops.

In drawing up directives for *communicatio in sacris* and prayer in common it is also desirable to consult with other diocesan agencies, such as the Diocesan Liturgical Commission, and with leaders of the other churches of the community. The president and executive secretary of the local Council of Churches, for example, might be consulted before issuing regulations for the diocese.

## **II. *Prayer in Common between Catholics and Christians of Other Churches***

*Principles governing prayer in common, drawn from the Decree on Ecumenism, Chapter II, 8:*

“This change of heart and holiness of life, along with public and private prayer for the unity of Christians, should be regarded as the soul of the whole ecumenical movement, and merits the name, ‘spiritual ecumenism.’

“It is a recognized custom for Catholics to meet for frequent recourse to that prayer for the unity of the Church with which the Saviour Himself on the eve of His death so fervently appealed to His Father: ‘That they may all be one.’ (*Jn.* 17, 20)

“In certain circumstances, such as in prayer services ‘for unity’ and during ecumenical gatherings, it is allowable, indeed desirable that Catholics should join in prayer with their separated brethren. Such prayers in common are certainly a very effective means of petitioning for the grace of unity, and they are a genuine expression of the ties which still bind Catholics to their separated

brethren. 'For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.' " (*Mt.* 18, 20)

In accordance with Section 8 of the Decree on Ecumenism the participation of Catholics with other Christians in services which are not part of the official liturgies of any communion, if these services are devoted to the cause of Christian unity, is highly desirable. Such services could fittingly be called "Ecumenical Services." Participation of Catholics in such services, whether they are held for the sake of promoting Christian unity in accordance with the Decree or, in the spirit of the Decree, for some other purpose, e.g., for peace, in time of public need, mourning, thanksgiving, etc., remains under the guidance of the local bishop.

The place chosen for the conduct of these ecumenical services should provide a worthy setting which is acceptable to all the participants and which, according to the prudent decision of the local bishop, is considered suitable.

With the approval of the local bishop, priests are to be encouraged to take an active part in the conduct of services, e.g. by reading Scripture lessons, preaching homilies, offering prayers and giving blessings.

The vesture to be worn at such services is also to be determined by the local bishop. In some circumstances ordinary civil attire may be the only appropriate form of dress for the participating priest. In other circumstances, since it is in accordance with Catholic usage even in the conduct of nonliturgical services, the use of the cassock and surplice may be considered. Another form of dress which is neither liturgical nor merely civil, namely, the use of the ferraiuola, may also be desirable on certain occasions. The value of some kind of "sacred" vesture is not to be underestimated in creating the right atmosphere for prayer in common. In reaching decisions concerning ecclesiastical vesture on these occasions it is highly recommended that there be consultation with the clergy of the other church bodies which are to participate in such services.

On occasion members of the Catholic laity may also be invited to take an active part in Ecumenical Services. They may, for example, be called upon to read the Scripture lessons. Under the guidance of the local bishop, who may well wish to consult his ecumenical commission regarding the qualifications of the laity invited to take these leading roles, such participation on the part of

laymen has much to recommend it. The acceptance of such a policy could become one more manifestation of the Church's doctrine on the laity as found in the Constitution on the Church.

In preparing for and conducting these Ecumenical Services the principle of "reciprocity" should be kept in mind: to accept an invitation may often seem to entail an obligation to extend a similar invitation and to proffer an invitation may imply a readiness to receive one; one should not, therefore, accept an invitation if, according to Catholic norms, one cannot proffer a similar invitation.

All such joint services of prayer should be carefully prepared in accordance with the principle of "collaboration." The leaders of the participating groups should, after careful consideration, agree on the format of the services and on the choice of themes, Scripture readings and hymns. Prayers and hymns and homilies which may be unacceptable either to Catholics or to other Christians are to be avoided.

These Ecumenical Services, it is hoped, will complement the programs of prayer for unity which continue in our churches.

### **III. *Communicatio in Sacris***

#### *Principles governing communicatio in sacris:*

"Yet worship in common (*communicatio in sacris*) is not to be considered as a means to be used indiscriminately for the restoration of unity among Christians. There are two main principles upon which the practice of such common worship depends: first, that of the unity of the Church which ought to be expressed; and second, that of the sharing in means of grace. The expression of unity for the most part forbids common worship. Grace to be obtained sometimes commends it. The concrete course to be adopted, when due regard has been given to all the circumstances of time, place and persons, is left to the prudent decision of the local episcopal authority, unless the Bishops' Conference according to its own statutes, or the Holy See, has determined otherwise."—The Decree of Ecumenism, Chapter II, 8.

#### 1) *Participation of Christians of Other Churches in the Liturgy of the Catholic Church*

Christians of other communions should be made welcome in attending Catholic liturgical celebrations. It is recommended, how-

ever, that great care be taken in issuing general invitations. The sensibilities of other ecclesial communities on proselytizing should also be respected in extending such invitations. It would be well to consult with leaders of other churches in formulating them. It is also worthy of note that general invitations may evoke invitations of a similar nature from other church bodies.

*Baptism and Confirmation:* From the nature of the office of sponsor, Christians of other communions may not be invited to act as sponsors at Baptism and Confirmation. The sponsor does not act only as a friend of the family nor only as one who promises to provide for the Christian education of the person to be baptized or confirmed, but also as a representative of the community of the Catholic faithful. As a representative of the community the sponsor stands as guarantor of the faith of the candidate he presents. A Christian not of our communion cannot be asked to assume this role.

*Holy Eucharist:* The Eucharist is the sign and at the same time is the cause of the unity of the Church. The restoration of Eucharistic Communion is the goal of our ecumenical effort. At the present time, however, except in particular cases of members of the Eastern Orthodox Church intercommunion with Christians of other denominations should not be permitted (cf. *Decree on the Catholic Churches of the Eastern Rite*, 26-29; *Decree on Ecumenism*, Ch. III, 15). Our separation is most keenly felt at the Table of the Lord, and the sense of sorrow awakened by a deepening realization of the meaning of this tragic separation should in itself provide a powerful stimulus to ecumenical concern among our people.

When, however, Christians of other communions are present at the Sacrifice of the Mass in our churches they may be invited to join, if they so desire, in the dialogue, in the recitation of prayers and in the singing of hymns. Christians of other churches may not, however, be invited to assume roles of leadership within the assembly, e.g., that of lector.

One of the great achievements of the Second Vatican Council is the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, and one of the most important emphases found in this document is that concerning the homily of the Mass (cf. Article 52). The homily is an integral part

of the Liturgy and normally will be given by the celebrating bishop or priest. In breaking the bread of doctrine the homilist speaks on behalf of the local bishop and, in a sense, on behalf of the entire Episcopal College. A clergyman of another communion cannot be asked to accept such a role.

Following the example of the liturgy of Good Friday it is recommended that public prayers for Christians of other communions be admitted within the liturgical celebrations. It is recommended, for example, that, when the presiding priest judges it appropriate, the names and intentions of Christians of other communions be included within the *Prayer of the Faithful*.

*Holy Orders:* In the conferral of Holy Orders Christians of other communions must not be invited to take active roles. For reasons of friendship or courtesy, however, they may be invited to be present.

*Matrimony:* Christians of other churches may be admitted as witnesses and attendants at the celebration of Matrimony within the Catholic Church.

For the celebration of marriage between Catholics and Christians of other communions it is highly recommended that sacred rites be used according to the *Collectio Rituum* of 1964 and that the officiating priest be vested in cassock, surplice and stole.

Clergymen of other communions should not be invited to take an active role in the ceremony.

*Funerals:* It is recommended that, when requested by the family of the deceased, priests be permitted to conduct funeral services and to lead prayers at wakes for those not of our Church. It is for the local bishop to determine what rites are to be used on these occasions. In such circumstances burial in Catholic cemeteries may be permitted to those not of our communion, especially to spouses and relatives of Catholics. On the occasion of burials in Catholic cemeteries of those who were not Catholics it is also recommended that clergymen of other churches be permitted to conduct graveside services.

*Sacramentals:* The sacramentals of the Church may be given to those not of our communion who desire to receive them.



## 2) *Participation of Catholics in the Official Worship of Other Churches*

The Decree of Ecumenism does envisage *communicatio in sacris*, i.e., the participation of Catholics, under the supervision of the local bishop, in the liturgy of other communions (cf. Chapter II, 8). Catholics may attend official services of other churches which have special civic or social significance especially weddings and funerals. It should be remembered, however, that the Decree on Ecumenism makes repeated recommendations for caution and states that “worship in common (*communicatio in sacris*) is not to be considered as a means to be used indiscriminately for the restoration of unity among Christians.”

*Baptism and Confirmation:* Catholics may not act as sponsors at the conferral of Baptism or Confirmation in churches not of our communion; for reasons of friendship or courtesy, however, they may be present at these ceremonies.

*Holy Eucharist:* Catholics, accepting Eucharistic separation from their brothers of other churches in a penitential spirit and bearing in mind the principles mentioned above concerning the restoration of Eucharistic Communion, may not participate in the Eucharistic celebrations of other churches. For reasons of friendship or courtesy, however, they may be present at these services.

Catholic priests, remembering the Church’s view regarding the homily at Holy Mass, may not accept invitations to preach during the Eucharistic celebrations of other churches.

*Holy Orders:* Catholics may not take an active role in the ordination ceremonies of other churches. Invitations to be present for these ceremonies, with the approval of the local bishop, may be accepted for reasons of friendship or courtesy.

*Matrimony:* Catholics, under the guidance of the local bishop, may be permitted to serve as witnesses at marriages which are celebrated in churches of other communions.

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Catholics should be mindful that attendance at services in other churches is not a substitution for, nor fulfillment of, their obligation to participate in the celebration of Holy Mass on Sundays and days of precept.

#### IV. *Communicatio in Sacris* and Relations with the Eastern Orthodox Church

With regard to *communicatio in sacris* with the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Decree on Ecumenism, Ch. III, 15, reads: "These Churches, although separated from us, yet possess true sacraments, above all—by apostolic succession—the priesthood and the Eucharist, whereby they are still joined to us in closest intimacy. Therefore some worship in common (*communicatio in sacris*), given suitable circumstances and the approval of church authority, is not merely possible but is encouraged."

The Decree on the Catholic Churches of the Eastern Rite (cf. articles 26-29) established a new "conciliatory policy with regard to *communicatio in sacris* with the brethren of the separated Eastern Churches." Article 29 places the supervision of this policy in the care and control of local bishops. It encourages combined consultation on the part of these bishops and, if need be, consultation with the bishops of the Orthodox Churches.

The fulfillment of these articles is a matter of the utmost delicacy and the members of the Bishops' Commission for Ecumenical Affairs agree that there should be consultation concerning this matter with the ecclesiastical authorities of the Orthodox Churches. A subcommission has been established by the Bishops' Commission under the chairmanship of the Most Reverend Bernard J. Flanagan, Bishop of Worcester, and it will be among the tasks of this subcommission to explore, together with representatives appointed by the bishops of the Orthodox Church, this difficult question of *communicatio in sacris*.

V. Throughout this statement of recommendations, it should be noted, frequent reference has been made to the role of the local bishop in guiding the practice of ecumenism within his diocese. This emphasis is, the members of the Bishops' Commission for Ecumenical Affairs are convinced, in accord not only with the Decree on Ecumenism but also with the spirit of the Constitution on the Church (Chapter III, 25-27) and the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. (Chapter I, 22, 41-42)

The unity of the Church is a "sacred mystery" and "the highest exemplar and source of this mystery is the unity, in the Trinity

of Persons, of one God, the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit.” (*Decree on Ecumenism*, Ch. I, 2). In offering these recommendations the members of the Bishops’ Commission for Ecumenical Affairs are guided by this vision of unity as a “mystery” and consequently share a conviction that Catholic participation in ecumenism must move beyond dialogue, programs of education, and cooperation in social matters to “spiritual ecumenism.”

The renewal of the Church, and especially of the sacred liturgy, which is the concern of the Second Vatican Council, will, it is hoped, prepare our people for participation in the ecumenical movement and for prayer in common with other Christians. It is confidently expected that the annual observance of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, together with other programs of prayer, following the spirit of the renewed liturgy, will be extended and intensified in our churches. Our confidence in the efficacy of such prayer is based on the words of Our Lord, “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (*Mt.* 18, 20)

At the first Eucharist, in the moments which preceded His passion and death, the Lord addressed Himself to His Father in His priestly prayer for unity. This prayer of Christ has become the prayer of the Church not only when these words are read and listened to, but above all, when the Church celebrates the Eucharist. While the Pilgrim Church awaits the return of the risen Christ and the final consummation of all things in Him, the Eucharist remains the great sign and cause of the mysterious unity of the Church, and it is hoped that the Holy Sacrifice will be offered frequently for the cause of Christian unity.

In all of these endeavors which we describe as ecumenical—in dialogue, in giving common witness to the world, and in common prayer—we find the assurance we seek and require in the words of Christ’s prayer: “that they all may be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.” (*Jn.* 17, 21)









