

## THE EUCHARIST AT THE FUNERAL

### ***Funeral with a Eucharist***

While some will not want to celebrate the Eucharist during the actual funeral, others will find it helpful.

A Eucharist does however raise the question of whether or not members of other churches will be able to receive communion.

It is doubtful if a Roman Catholic bishop would permit open communion, and though some priests would take the responsibility on themselves, others would insist on episcopal permission.

Having a celebration of the Eucharist could mean that bereaved people would be asking permission to receive communion in a Roman Catholic church at a time when they are very vulnerable, and when a refusal would be devastating.

The present position as stated in the *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* (1993) is that, where norms are established for judging situations of grave and pressing need (by the *Directory* itself, by the diocesan bishop, or by the Episcopal Conference), then

*# 131. The conditions under which a Catholic minister may administer the sacrament of the Eucharist to a baptised person are that the person be unable to have recourse for the sacrament desired to a minister of his or her own Church or ecclesial Community, ask for the sacrament of his or her own initiative, manifest Catholic faith in this sacrament and be properly disposed.*

The teaching document *One Bread One Body*, produced by the three Catholic Bishops' Conferences of England and Wales, Ireland, and Scotland in 1998, presents general norms on sacramental sharing between [Roman] Catholics and other Christians. Paragraph 109 discusses what constitutes a "unique occasion" in the life of a family or individual for which admission to Holy Communion in the Roman Catholic Church may be allowed. Paragraphs 110-111 deal with the possible admission to Communion of both bride and groom during a marriage ceremony where one partner is not a member of the Roman Catholic Church. Paragraph 112 lists other "unique occasions for joy or sorrow" when people might ask for admission to Communion, including "the immediate family of the deceased at a Funeral Mass", adding: "Each situation will be judged individually according to the norms." (This paragraph is quoted in the leaflet prepared for the National Board of Catholic Women by its Ecumenical Standing Committee, *May my husband (a Christian of another Church) ever receive Holy Communion with me? How?*)

If a Roman Catholic priest is willing to offer a blessing to members of other churches attending a funeral Mass, it is important that a clear invitation to come to receive a blessing should be given during the service. A blessing can also be offered if a Eucharistic service is held in a church of another Christian community and Roman Catholics are present.

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### ***Funeral without a Eucharist***

It should be noted that the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales, and in Scotland, provides two forms of the funeral Liturgy: *Funeral Mass* and *Funeral Liturgy outside Mass*. Both can be found in *An Order of Christian Funerals* (Geoffrey Chapman, 1991), prepared by the Liturgy Office of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales and the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (a Joint Commission of Catholic Bishops' Conferences), and authorised by the Episcopal Conferences of England and Wales and of Scotland. Provision is also made for two forms of funeral liturgy for children.

The *Funeral Liturgy outside Mass* may be used (1) when the funeral Mass is not permitted (on solemnities of obligation, Holy Thursday and the Easter Triduum, and Sundays of Advent, Lent and the Easter season); (2) when it is not possible to celebrate the funeral Mass before the committal (for example, if a priest is not available); (3) for pastoral reasons. It can if wished include a distribution of Holy Communion. In all these liturgies there is a choice of prayers within each part of the service.