

Gluten-Free Communion at St. Paul's: best practices, and a protocol

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The situation: While many people choose a gluten-free diet, others are forced into it by necessity. Celiac, an autoimmune disease, is the most common reason a person must remain gluten-free. A few parishioners in our congregation suffer from celiac, and we never know when another may arrive as a newcomer. For some people, even touching a gluten-based product can result in extreme digestive distress for days. It can also lead to major behavioral problems in children. This is why we offer gluten-free wafers as an alternative to the wheat-based wafers or bread. This page is meant to clarify **our standard, best practices** for the care and distribution of gluten-free communion at St. Paul's.

Important facts:

- 1) The number one concern is contamination. All gluten-free options must be kept separate from the regular options at all times.
- 2) The gluten-free wafers we use are rice-based.
- 3) Hand sanitizer does NOT stop gluten contamination. In fact, most hand sanitizers and many hand soaps actually contain gluten. In the sacristy we have now switched to Dawn hand soap, currently the only major brand that is guaranteed to be gluten-free.

Altar guild: From the moment the gluten-free wafers are removed from the package, only uncontaminated hands must touch them. Please make available on the credence table a separate paten or other receptacle for the gluten-free wafers, *and* a second small chalice which will be used by the clergy to contain consecrated wine that will be free from contact with wafers, as in the practice of intinction.

Ushers: Be ready to give a little green token to those who request it.

Acolytes: The crucifer will stand at the ready, carrying the paten of gluten-free wafers and the gluten-free chalice of wine for when they are needed. It is hospitable for crucifers to pay attention and learn the faces and names of the "regulars" who request gluten-free communion. It is also important for the acolyte not to touch the wafers.

Eucharistic ministers and clergy: When someone presents the green token in their hand at the altar rail (or wherever they are receiving), be ready to request of the acolyte the gluten-free paten and chalice. These wafers appear distinctly different from the normal wafers. Distribute the gluten-free wafer and the gluten-free chalice to those persons presenting the green token.

Clergy: Do not touch the gluten-free wafers at any time prior to distribution. Only touch a wafer if the communicant allows you to do so. Distributing regular wafers with the right hand and gluten-free with the left is a good precaution. Parishioners may choose to take the wafers from the paten themselves in order to avoid potential contamination.

Conclusion: We do our best to avoid contamination, but we must be upfront with parishioners that if their need for gluten-free communion is especially dire, they may take the initiative to take the wafer from the paten rather than waiting for the priest to place it in their hands. Furthermore, we can urge parishioners to let us know if they have suffered any harmful physical effects from taking communion at St. Paul's. Finally, in the bulletin we assure parishioners that forgoing the bread and receiving only the wine constitutes full reception of communion.

References:

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