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Excommunicated Australian priest: I did not give Communion to a dog

Brian Roewe | Sep. 30, 2013

Excommunicated Australian priest Greg Reynolds [1] says he never gave holy Communion to a dog, an assertion backed by the Melbourne archbishop.

"I did not give a consecrated host to any dog or any animal and never would," Reynolds told *NCR* in a Sept. 24 email.

Reynolds said during the Sept. 18 meeting at which he learned he had been removed from the clerical state and excommunicated, he was asked "very directly and specifically" if he gave Communion to a dog. He said he told Fr. John Salvano, the canon lawyer for the Melbourne archdiocese, that he did not.

In an emailed response to *NCR*, Archbishop Denis Hart appeared to verify that he sided with Reynolds' account of what transpired.

"From media reports, the archdiocese is aware of the presence of Reynolds where the sacred species were given by another person to an animal. That anyone would feed the Eucharist to an animal is an abomination," Hart said.

According to Hart -- in a letter to his priests and also a statement to *NCR* -- the decisions to remove Reynolds from the clerical state and excommunicate him came "because of his public teaching on the ordination of women contrary to the teaching of the church and his public celebration of the Eucharist when he did not hold faculties to act publicly as a priest."

When Reynolds resigned from active ministry in August 2011, he founded a community called Inclusive Catholics. In an August 2012 story about Reynolds and the community, an Australian newspaper reported that a dog had received Communion at one of their liturgies, although it did not identify Reynolds as the distributor.

According to *The Age* [2], a first-time visitor to the group's Mass, held in a southeast Melbourne suburb, arrived late along with his German shepherd. When the paten with the Eucharist circulated through the room, the man took a host, broke off a piece and gave it to his dog.

Reynolds told *NCR* he did not learn of the incident until after Mass, when someone informed him about it.

"Only a few people observed it, including the journalist," he said.

A person who attended the liturgy confirmed to *NCR* that the first-time visitor, not Reynolds, gave the host to the dog, calling the action "spontaneous and completely unexpected."

Last year, after *The Age* story reported the dog incident, Reynolds said a fellow priest contacted him on behalf of the archdiocese asking what had happened. Hart responded to the report days later with a letter to the editor [3]

, released by the archdiocese but not published by *The Age*.

In that letter, Hart labeled giving an animal holy Communion "an abomination" but did not address the specifics of the event.

Reynolds told *NCR* he has not had any communication with church officials in the past year until "the bombshell last week," when he learned of his excommunication.

"All they had to do was ask; there are witnesses [to the dog incident]," he said. "Something seems to have got lost in transit and translation. I would dearly love to know what was Pope Francis told."

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