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Examining the rules for divorced and remarried Catholics the right thing to do

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I am delighted to hear that the pope, and probably the upcoming Synod of Bishops on the family, are reconsidering the question of Communion for divorced and remarried Catholics.

When this topic comes up, I am haunted by images of my Aunt Marian. She was my father's sister, a wonderful woman with a loving heart and a sharp wit. She married my Uncle Alan, who was not a Catholic but had been divorced. And of course, the powers that be in the church told Marian she could not receive Communion.

Family lore says Alan's first marriage never should have taken place. But I have no way to judge that. All I know is this: My Aunt Marian, whom I really loved and admired, was deeply hurt by the denial of Communion. She and Alan had a wonderful marriage, and they had three children together.

All her life, Marian wanted her full rights as a Catholic, but even when she was far from home and the local priest did not know her, she refrained from Communion. The rules were the rules; that's how she lived.

It was not until her deathbed that she found peace. When she was dying of cancer in Blacksburg, Va., she called me to ask if I knew a priest who would help, who would give her the last rites. My good friend and then-Jesuit Bill Callahan and I flew to Blacksburg. He reassured her that she had lived a good life and gave her Communion. In spite of her cancer, the look on her face was one of utter joy. She felt reconciled, included, welcomed.

Maybe Pope Francis had an Aunt Marian or Uncle Alan. Or maybe not. But changing this rule is surely

the right thing to do.

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