NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Phoenix diocese to restrict Communion wine

Zoe Ryan | Oct. 10, 2011

Phoenix Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted, foreground, and priests distribute Communion in front of St. Mary's Basilica during an outdoor Mass in downtown Phoenix in 2009. (CNS/Catholic Sun/J.D. Long-Garcia)

[**Editor's Note:** The following story appears in the Oct. 14 print issue of NCR, which went to press three days ago. This morning, NCR learned that the Madison, Wis., diocese is also discussing the implementation, starting this Advent, of Communion wine restrictions.]

In keeping with new standards for the distribution of Communion, the Phoenix diocese will be restricting the frequency of when Communion wine will be available, causing some questions from Catholics.

The Phoenix diocese issued a statement Sept. 21 on the new restrictions, saying that in the diocese and other places, reception of wine ?became frequent or even commonplace,? and ?the new norms call for the practice of less frequent distribution of Holy Communion under both kinds than the faithful may have been accustomed.?

The statement says it is implementing the change in keeping with the new standards and promoting unity in the celebration of the Eucharist.

Since 1975, the U.S. was one of a few places, according to the statement, that was ?given experimental privileges for the distribution of Holy Communion under both kinds? and the privileges expired in 2005.

The diocese lists the church?s five reasons for the restrictions:

- ?To protect the Sacred Species from profanation?;
- Having both forms is not necessary for salvation;
- Limiting Communion wine will emphasize feast days ?and other special moments?;
- Limiting wine will keep the diocese in solidarity with the rest of the world that doesn?t use wine as much;
- When both forms are used frequently, ? ?extraordinary? ministers of Holy Communion are disproportionately multiplied.?

Opinions in Phoenix on the new restrictions vary, but surprise seems to be common. Jack Rubino, a parishioner

at the Parish of St. Benedict in Phoenix and a member of the church reform group Call to Action, said he understands the theology of Jesus being present in both the consecrated host and wine but was surprised about this change.

Even after reading the information about the change, he said he is unclear on why Phoenix is the only U.S. diocese making this change now and why it?s occurring. Something he was not clear on was how Phoenix will be ?in solidarity? with the rest of the world by restricting wine if the rest of U.S. dioceses don?t do the same. He also said the restriction was a ?major abridgment? from the Last Supper story and that no one has answered that inconsistency.

Mary Jayne Benton, a member of Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Guadalupe and Call to Action representative for the Phoenix area, called it ?rather shocking.? By this action, she said, the laypeople are being denied the ?fullness of the Eucharist.?

The restriction is legitimate theologically and in keeping with the present norms in terms of a bishop?s authority as well as with the classical Tridentine philosophy, said Franciscan Fr. Gilbert Ostdiek, a professor of liturgy at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. However, he said his first reaction was that from a liturgical point of view of ritual practice, the liturgical performance of the actual ritual action is incomplete.

There?s a theological basis to the restriction, he said, but it doesn?t follow the biblical rationale. The Tridentine rationale is Christ is present in both forms; the biblical rationale is everyone should participate fully in the ritual acts -- eating and drinking, he said.

That biblical rationale ties in with the more pastoral direction given by the Second Vatican Council in paragraph 14 of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, he said, that the full conscious act of participation of the laity is the pastoral aim to be considered before all else.

When the priest says, ?Take this all of you and drink from it,? and then only the priest drinks from it, Ostdiek said, what is said and what is done does not match up and the action is incomplete.

?It doesn?t really honor fully the Lord?s commandment,? he said.

The diocese?s statement approaches that point with ?Whenever someone receives Holy Communion under either the form of bread or the form of wine, he or she receives Christ, whole and entire. There is one Jesus Christ -- and He is received really, truly, and substantially under either or the two.?

Jesuit Fr. John Baldovin, professor of historical and liturgical theology at Boston College, said he thinks the main question is over the difference between extraordinary ministers and ordinary ministers of Communion (the priests and deacons).

From reading the information provided on the diocese?s Web site, he said the question raised is how ?central and distinctive do we need to make the ordained ministers.?

?I?m not saying [the ordained ministers] are not central and distinctive,? he said. ?They are central and necessary.?

The question this brings up is just how central and distinctive, he said.

A question-and-answer document [1] that accompanied the Phoenix diocese?s statement lists what conditions must be met to offer both forms, and notes that in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, ?the practical need to avoid obscuring the role of the priest and deacon as the ordinary ministers of Holy Communion by an

excessive use of extraordinary (or lay) ministers might in some circumstances constitute a reason for limiting the distribution of Holy Communion under both species.?

The example given is of a priest deeming both forms appropriate for the feast of Corpus Christi, but if the ?particular situation would necessitate a dozen extraordinary ministers? while the priest and deacon would be the only ordinary ministers, both forms would not be offered.

The new norms, according to the statement, ?should be completed in the next few months.?

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[1] http://www.diocesephoenix.org/onenewsstory.php?themonth=201109&story=448092189