



SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF
CELIAC DISEASE

Use of Low-Gluten Host for Catholic Mass

A June 15 directive by the Vatican regarding the use of gluten-free communion hosts (1) has received considerable attention in the media. For example, a July 10 article in the New York Times was titled "Vatican Refuses to Go Gluten Free at Communion". The news coverage has generated some concern in the celiac disease community.

It should be noted, however, that the new directive only affirms a previous Catholic Church policy. The original directive from 2003 stated that although completely gluten-free products are not acceptable, "low-gluten hosts (partially gluten-free) are valid matter, provided they contain a sufficient amount of gluten to obtain the confection of bread without the addition of foreign materials and without the use of procedures that would alter the nature of bread" (2).

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has certified some manufacturers of low-gluten hosts (3). One such manufacturer is the Benedictine Sisters of Perceptual Adoration, which has been producing low-gluten host since the 1980s and provides detailed information on the proper use and storage of its on its web site.

A pertinent question is whether such low-gluten hosts are adequately low in gluten content to be safe for consumption by celiac disease patients. A report dated 02/05/2014 by the Gluten Free Watchdog, an organization focused on making testing data on gluten-free food available, indicates the mean gluten level of the Benedictine Sisters alter bread to be 56.5 parts per million (ppm) (4). Accordingly, considering that the weight of each Communion wafer is only about 33 milligrams, the amount of gluten in one low-gluten host would add up to no more than 0.002

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milligrams. This amount has been shown to be safe in various clinical studies. A 2004 study involving 76 subjects with celiac disease, for example, found daily gluten intake of less than 30 mg to be safe in clinical practice and challenge protocols (5). Therefore, the data available suggest that low-gluten altar breads used for Communion that have similar levels of gluten to the above tested product would be safe for consumption by celiac disease patients.

- 1) http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20170615_lettera-su-pane-vino-eucaristia_en.html
- 2) http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20030724_pane-senza-glutine_en.html
- 3) <http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/the-mass/order-of-mass/liturgy-of-the-eucharist/celiac-disease-and-alcohol-intolerance.cfm>
- 4) <https://www.glutenfreewatchdog.org/product/benedictine-sisters-low-gluten-altar-breads/207>
- 5) <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15191509>

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