



NORTH AMERICAN 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 hosts¹ 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 hosts³. One such manufacturer is the Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, which has been producing low-gluten host since the 1980s and provides detailed information on the proper use and storage of its products 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 average gluten concentration of the Benedictine Sisters alter bread to be 56.5 parts per million (ppm)⁴. Accordingly, considering the total weight of each Communion wafer, the actual amount of gluten in one low-gluten host would add up to about 0.002 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 milligrams to be safe in clinical practice and challenge protocols⁵. 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.

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- 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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