OFFICE FOR WORSHIP
DIOCESE of ORANGE
13280 CHAPMAN AVENUE, GARDEN GROVE, CA 92840

Memorandum

TO: All Priests, Parishes and Faithful

FROM: Deacon Modesto Cordero, Director Office for Worship

DATE: November 13, 2026

RE: **Clarification on Guidelines for Holy Communion**

Following the publication of the Diocesan Guidelines for the Reception of Holy Communion, questions have arisen regarding those who are unable to receive Holy Communion and the guidance that they remain in their pew and make an act of spiritual communion. Particular concerns have been raised regarding children accompanying their parents, Catholics who are unable to receive Holy Communion because of their marital situation, and non-Catholic guests attending Mass.

The purpose of the Communion procession is the reception of Holy Communion by those properly disposed to receive the Eucharist. As the General Instruction of the Roman Missal states, "The priest then takes the paten or ciborium and goes to the communicants, who, as a rule, approach in procession" (GIRM 160). The liturgical books envision the procession as ordered toward the reception of the Eucharist and make no provision for non-communicants approaching for a blessing.

The Church has long encouraged the practice of spiritual communion for those who are unable to receive the Eucharist sacramentally. By expressing faith in Christ's Real Presence and a sincere desire to be united more closely to Him, the faithful may receive spiritual fruits and graces even when they cannot receive Holy Communion. For this reason, those unable to receive should be encouraged to unite themselves prayerfully to the sacrifice of the Mass and make an act of spiritual communion.

Pastoral sensitivity must guide the application of this principle. Parents should not be expected to leave young children unattended in the pew while approaching for Holy Communion. Children who have not yet received First Holy Communion may accompany their parents in the procession as they prepare to receive the Eucharist themselves.

Likewise, the Church continues to accompany Catholics who, for various reasons, are unable to receive Holy Communion, including those whose marital situations presently prevent sacramental reception (e.g., divorced and civilly remarried Catholics). These members of the faithful remain obligated to participate in Mass each Sunday and Holy Day and continue to receive grace through hearing the Word of God, participating in the Church's prayer, and making an act of spiritual communion. Accordingly, they should ordinarily remain in their pew during the Communion procession, where they may prayerfully make an act of spiritual communion and express their desire for deeper union with Christ and His Church. This participation should also foster a sincere desire to remove any impediments preventing full sacramental participation in the Eucharist.

A further consideration concerns blessings during the Communion procession. Because the procession is ordered toward the reception of the Eucharist and the entire assembly receives a blessing at the conclusion of Mass, the Diocese of Orange discourages the practice of giving individual blessings during the procession. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are not to extend their hands, trace the sign of the cross, lay hands upon individuals, or otherwise attempt to impart a blessing. While priests and deacons possess the authority to impart blessings, they should ordinarily refrain from doing so during the Communion procession.

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The Diocese of Orange does not encourage inviting those who are unable to receive Holy Communion to approach solely for the purpose of receiving a blessing. Nevertheless, some individuals, including children accompanying their parents and visitors unfamiliar with Catholic practice, may still present themselves in the procession. In such cases, the minister may simply say, "Receive Christ spiritually in your heart" to those unable to receive Holy Communion, or "May you know God's love for you" to children not yet admitted to First Holy Communion, accompanied by a slight bow of the head. No blessing, sign of the cross, or other gesture should be given.

Those who are unable to receive Holy Communion remain valued members of the worshipping assembly. By encouraging spiritual communion while preserving the proper purpose of the Communion procession, the Diocese of Orange seeks to promote both pastoral care and a clearer understanding of the Church's liturgy.

For information, questions and/or concern please contact the Office for Worship at worship@rcbo.org.

Blessings!