

## Document 9

### PASTORAL GUIDELINES CONCERNING ADMISSION OF POLISH NATIONAL CATHOLICS TO SACRAMENTS IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

*(Promulgated in a March 13, 1996, letter to the Bishops of the United States from Most Rev. Oscar H. Lipscomb)*

For some years there has been a cordial dialogue taking place between bishops of the Polish National Catholic Church and the Roman Catholic Church. This dialogue seeks the healing of a division which occurred within the American Catholic community in this century, and the recovery of its unity. In that context the question arose whether there would be occasions on which Polish National Catholics might be admitted to sacraments celebrated in the Roman Catholic Church.

It is the understanding of the Roman Catholic Church that the celebration of sacraments is an action of the celebrating community made within the community itself in which the celebration signifies oneness of faith, worship and life. Accordingly, participation in the sacraments is normally restricted to those who are members of the community. However, certain exceptions can occur.

Thus, for example, the Roman Catholic Code of Canon Law (Canon 844.3) reads: "*Catholic ministers may licitly administer the sacraments of penance, Eucharist and anointing of the sick to members of oriental churches who do not have full communion with the Catholic Church, if they ask on their own for the sacraments and are properly disposed. This holds also for members of other churches, which*

*in the judgement of the Apostolic See are in the same condition as the oriental churches as far as these sacraments are concerned.*"

In the course of the Polish National Catholic-Roman Catholic dialogue, "it seemed clear to the Roman Catholic participants on the basis of the evidence that the bishops of the Polish National Catholic Church are validly ordained bishops in apostolic succession." In light of this the National Conference of Catholic Bishops inquired whether in the judgment of the Apostolic See the canon cited would apply to the Polish National Catholic Church. In due course, Cardinal Edward I. Cassidy, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, sent a reply in behalf of the Holy See, saying "there are sufficient reasons to respond affirmatively to the request."

### Application of Canon 844.3 to Polish National Catholics

Certain specifications should be observed. First of all, this clarification responds only to the question posed concerning the Polish National Catholic Church in the United States and Canada. It does not address the status of any other church. Thus, for example, the Polish Catholic Church in Poland, which sprang from the Polish National Catholic Church and is now autonomous, is not included in this response of the Holy See, nor are the other churches of the Union of Utrecht. The specific pastoral context in which the question was raised concerned the fact that members of the Polish National Catholic Church sometimes found themselves in situations in which they did not have access to the sacramental ministrations of their own priests. This pastoral consideration was the framework and the primary motive around which the response of the Holy See was made.

The decision applies to members in good standing of the Polish National Catholic Church who are not otherwise individually impeded by canonical sanctions of the Roman Catholic Church. This restriction would apply to those individuals who once were Roman Catholics and incurred a sanction which has not subsequently been lifted by the Roman Catholic Church. Such, for instance, would be the case of a Roman Catholic priest who set aside his priestly obligations without a dispensation. Others might be impeded from receiving the Eucharist because of their marital situation.

Roman Catholic sacramental ministers should all be advised by their pastors of this decision of the Holy See so they are prepared to apply it consistently and generously when the sacraments of Holy Communion, penance, and anointing of the sick are requested of them by Polish National Catholics. Consistency of practice is very important in this matter, not only in centers where Polish National Catholics are numerous, but also in areas removed from such centers where Polish National Catholics, not having ready access to their own bishops and priests, may approach Roman Catholic priests with requests for the sacraments.

Sacramental ministers of the Roman Catholic Church may admit Polish National Catholics to the sacraments of penance, the Eucharist, and anointing of the sick, when they ask and are properly disposed to approach the sacraments with faith, repentance, and a firm purpose of amendment (conditions which all Christians must fulfill in approaching the sacraments). No additional restrictions apply. The additional restrictions which do apply to Protestants (such as serious need of the sacraments and the inability to receive them from their own ministers, cf. Canon 844.4) do not apply in these cases. It can safely be presumed that Polish National Catholics hold a faith in these three sacraments

in harmony with the faith held by Roman Catholics, and ought not be questioned on this.

While the law of the Roman Catholic Church (Canon 844.3) makes generous provisions, it should still be kept in mind that these cases are seen as exceptional, not as the norm. Normally Polish National Catholics, it is expected, will seek the sacraments from their own bishops and priests, and only on certain occasions approach Roman Catholic sacramental ministers.

Since full communion between our churches has not yet been achieved, in no instance is a Roman Catholic priest permitted to concelebrate the Eucharist with Polish National Catholic priests (Canon 908).

### Application of Canon 844.2 to Roman Catholics

Nothing is changed with respect to Roman Catholics seeking admission to the sacraments from priests of the Polish National Catholic Church, and the response from the Holy See did not touch that issue. According to Canon 844.2, Roman Catholics may approach the sacramental ministers of other churches only when four conditions are met:

1. when this is required by necessity or suggested by way of true spiritual advantage — a condition that might be met in a number of cases,
2. the danger of error or indifference is avoided — a condition that might readily be met in most cases,
3. it is virtually impossible (either physically or morally impossible) for Roman Catholics to receive these sacraments from their own minister — a condition that might be the least likely to be fulfilled since Roman Catholic

ministers of the sacraments are generally present in neighborhoods where their Polish National Catholic counterparts are found, and

4. they seek them only of a church whose sacraments are valid — a condition which in the case of the Polish National Catholic Church is fulfilled.

Thus, the requirements differ somewhat. Out of respect for individual consciences and sensitivity to individual spiritual needs, cases should be responded to on an individual basis. General public invitations to communicate are not appropriate.

### Different Customs

In this matter all should know about and respect the different customs of our churches. Polish National Catholics generally receive Communion on the tongue by intinction. They receive either kneeling or standing. Roman Catholics usually receive the Sacred Host standing. They receive either in the hand or on the tongue, as the communicant wishes. Communion is not distributed under both kinds at all Roman Catholic Masses. When it is, after receiving the Host, the communicant proceeds to a second Eucharistic minister who offers the chalice containing the Precious Blood. Roman Catholics have the option not to receive under both kinds. In the administration of Holy Communion in the Roman Catholic Church, bishops, priests, and deacons are also assisted by lay ministers of the Eucharist, both men and women. This is not the case in the Polish National Catholic Church. The eucharistic fast before receiving Holy Communion is two hours in the Polish National Catholic Church, one hour in the Roman Catholic Church.

Regrettably our churches are still divided. But we do hope that the clarification we have received from Rome will advance our churches toward that full communion of faith and life that is both Christ's promise and His will for us. At the same time we trust it will be a source of pastoral and sacramental support for our people as they live out their faith.