

GUIDANCE FOR CATHOLICS, SEEKERS AND VISITORS AT MASS

At Good Shepherd Catholic Community many non-Catholic seekers and visitors attend Mass at our parish for Sunday worship, Baptisms, First Communions, Confirmations, Marriages, Funerals, and others who join us infrequently, especially at Christmas and Easter. We are delighted to welcome them to learn more about us respectfully, but that presents us with a pastoral challenge. Even when a Catholic accompanies a seeker or a visitor to Mass, they may not explain the difference in participation to the non-Catholic. We may no longer presume that all Catholics either know or are themselves respectful of Church teaching. An announcement is conveniently placed directly before we form a communion line to serve as a reminder to the Catholic and as a respectful invitation to the non-Catholic. This also preserves the integrity of the Most Blessed Sacrament for Catholics who are in full communion with the Catholic Church. It avoids unnecessary embarrassment of what is proper in the Catholic Church, and, at the same time, invites Catholics unable to receive or those from other faith traditions to participate by coming forward to receive a blessing instead of Holy Communion. Eucharistic Ministers are approached by Catholics, seekers and visitors at Mass in the communion line who are not sure of what they are to do. On the other hand, when we as Catholics visit another Christian denomination, often ministers invite everyone to come forward when they serve wafers, wine or grape juice. But, since this is not the Body and Blood of Christ, Catholics ought not to come forward for this service in order to avoid giving scandal contrary to Catholic Eucharist. Catholics often do not understand the difference. The announcement is not placed at the beginning of Mass to accommodate those who arrive late for Mass, as late as at the time of the Gospel, and we cannot judge why they might be late. The announcement strategically placed before communion is given at the same time as another announcement to parents, inviting them to bring their children forward for their First Holy Communion. But, in a number of instances these parents are from mixed religions in which one is Catholic and the other not. We want to respect both of these parents and to help them to participate to the extent that is proper and respectful of our Catholic Tradition: one to receive Holy Communion and the other to receive a blessing. As confessors, we priests frequently enough encounter persons who may be returning to the Catholic Church after many years of not practicing their faith. It is a privilege to provide them with the pastoral guidance they need to be reconciled to God, the Church, themselves and others through the Sacrament of Reconciliation first to be in the state of grace before approaching the Sacrament of the Eucharist. The priest is also privileged to offer guidance to children who are preparing themselves through the Sacrament of Reconciliation before they receive their First Holy Communion. Until then and for all of these pastoral reasons, we make an announcement at this strategic time at Mass that is both instructive and encouraging for all to receive either the Holy Eucharist worthily or to receive a blessing. As Catholics we all need to be proud of our Catholic Tradition and not be ashamed to profess it publically. We are neither generic Christians nor robotic Christians. All Catholics are called to be intentional, missionary disciples of the Lord Jesus who know how to stand up for what we believe and who also know how to share our faith in the Holy Eucharist with a positive sense of conviction.