

Guidelines for Concelebration of the Eucharist

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Introduction

1. Concelebration is the practice by which “several priests, in virtue of Christ’s own Priesthood and in the person of the High Priest, act together with one voice and one will; so also do they confect and offer a single sacrifice by a single sacramental act and likewise partake of the same.”¹
2. The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council recommended concelebration as an expression of “the unity of the priesthood”² and chose to extend permission for the practice to a number of particular instances, granting the Bishop of each diocese the authority to decide when concelebration was opportune at other times. The Council further directed that “a new rite for concelebration...be drawn up and inserted into the *Pontifical* and into the *Roman Missal*.”³
3. On March 7, 1965, the Council’s directives were fulfilled in the publication of the Decree *Ecclesiae semper* and the accompanying *Rite of Concelebration*. From the earliest days of the Church, concelebration, while taking a variety of forms, has been celebrated for “much more than merely practical considerations.”⁴ For such concelebration at Mass is expressive of the one sacrifice of the cross, the priesthood, and the action of the entire People of God, “ordered and acting hierarchically.”⁵ Concelebration should be understood as an appropriate way for priests to participate in the celebration of the Eucharist, expressive of their unique relationship with Christ the High Priest and of the unity of the priesthood.

General Principles

Regulation of Concelebration

4. The purpose of these guidelines is to provide a summary of the Church’s practice in regard to Eucharistic concelebration. They do not constitute new liturgical law, but enjoy the authority of the law cited. These guidelines may be adapted by diocesan Bishops within the parameters of liturgical law. This document is limited to questions directly pertaining to Eucharistic concelebration.
5. The regulation of concelebration belongs to the diocesan Bishop, who may establish diocesan guidelines regarding concelebration.⁶ “An individual priest is, however, permitted to celebrate the Eucharist individually, though not at the same time as a concelebration is taking place in the same church or oratory. On Holy Thursday, however, and for Mass of the Easter Vigil, it is not permitted to celebrate individually.”⁷

Participation in Concelebration

6. “[Priests] ‘as ministers of holy things, above all in the Sacrifice of the Mass, act especially in the person of Christ’ (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 13, see also *Lumen Gentium*, no. 28). Hence it is fitting that, because of the sign value (*ratione signi*), priests should participate in the Eucharist, fulfilling their office according to their proper order, that is by celebrating Mass rather than merely receiving communion as lay persons.”⁸

7. Therefore, concelebration is always encouraged, “unless the welfare of the Christian faithful requires or urges otherwise.”⁹ “Visiting priests should be gladly welcomed to Eucharistic concelebration, as long as their priestly standing is ascertained,”¹⁰ and “a superior may not prohibit a priest from concelebrating,”¹¹ except in the instances described in no. 10, below.

8. Concelebration is “prescribed by the rite itself for the Ordination of a Bishop and of priests, at the blessing of an abbot, and at the Chrism Mass”¹² because it “appropriately expresses the unity of the priesthood, of the Sacrifice, and also of the whole People of God.”¹³ Concelebration is also recommended at the evening Mass on Holy Thursday, the Mass for councils, meetings of Bishops, synods, the conventual Mass, the principal Mass in churches and oratories, and the Mass for any kind of meeting of priests, either secular or religious.¹⁴

9. “In a Eucharistic celebration at which the Bishop presides, priests should concelebrate with him, so that the mystery of the unity of the Church is manifested through the Eucharist and that priests appear before the community as the presbyterate of the Bishop.”¹⁵

10. “No one is ever to enter into a concelebration or to be admitted as a concelebrant once the Mass has already begun.”¹⁶

Number of Concelebrants

11. Each Ordinary or the Major Superior of clerical non-exempt religious and of societies of clerics living in common¹⁷ may limit the number of concelebrants if, in consideration of the size of the church and the altar and whether the faithful’s view of the rite is impaired, he decides “that the dignity of the rite requires this.”¹⁸

12. In those instances where it is advisable to limit the number of concelebrants, the priests chosen to concelebrate should be truly representative of the larger group. Such a limitation on the number of concelebrants should be understood as a pastoral response to the problems of space which may occur because of the great number of priests who may be present rather than as an attempt at exclusion.

13. In those cases when the number of concelebrants is limited for legitimate reasons, those in charge of planning should provide opportunities for the non-concelebrating priests to celebrate the Eucharist at another time.

Physical Arrangements

14. Concelebrants should be seated together in a distinct area (*presbyterium*). They should not be intermingled with the assembly nor should anyone be seated between the concelebrants and the altar. If the space in the *presbyterium* is not large enough to accommodate all the concelebrants appropriately, some are seated in another area which physically and visually unites them with the other concelebrants.

15. The position of the concelebrants should not obscure the fact that only one Bishop or one priest presides over the whole celebration. Furthermore, the position of the concelebrants should not usurp the positions or limit the functioning of other liturgical ministers. Unless it is unavoidable, concelebrants should not impede the full view of the assembly, since members of the congregation are called upon to kneel at various times during Mass.¹⁹

Vesture

16. "In the Church, which is the Body of Christ, not all members have the same office. This variety of offices in the celebration of the Eucharist is shown outwardly by the diversity of sacred vestments, which should therefore be a sign of the office proper to each minister. At the same time, however, the sacred vestments should also contribute to the beauty of the sacred action itself."²⁰

17. Concelebrating priests wear an alb with a stole and chasuble. However, if "a good reason arise[s] (e.g., a large number of concelebrants or a lack of vestments), concelebrants other than the principal celebrant may omit the chasuble and simply wear the stole over the alb."²¹

18. The principal celebrant is to wear the alb with a stole and chasuble.²²

19. Priests may not concelebrate in secular attire, in ordinary clerical garb, or by wearing the stole over the cassock. Nor may priests of religious institutes concelebrate merely by placing a stole over the monastic cowl or habit.²³

20. If chasubles are worn by all the concelebrants, they should be simpler in their decoration than that of the principal celebrant. Vestments that differ in size, shape, and ornamentation can obscure unity, emphasize individualism, and detract from the presidential role of the principal celebrant. The vestments of the concelebrants should be of the color proper to the Mass being celebrated. "However, the proper color being kept by the principal celebrant, the concelebrants may in case of necessity use white...."²⁴

Rite of Concelebration

Reverence to the Altar

21. Concelebrants should participate in the entrance or recessional chant or maintain a reverential silence. The principal celebrant and deacon(s), together with concelebrants and other ministers in the procession, bow to the altar on arrival as a sign of reverence. "If, however, the tabernacle with the Most Blessed Sacrament is present in the sanctuary, the priest, the deacon, and the other ministers [including concelebrants] genuflect when they approach the altar and when they depart from it, but not during the celebration of Mass itself."²⁵ The principal celebrant, the deacon(s), and any concelebrants then venerate the altar with a kiss.²⁶

The Gospel

22. When there is no deacon present, a concelebrant proclaims the Gospel.²⁷ If the principal celebrant is a Bishop, the concelebrant asks for and receives a blessing from the Bishop, and proclaims the gospel reading in the usual way.²⁸ If the principal celebrant is not a Bishop, the concelebrant bows before the altar and prays inaudibly, *Almighty God, cleanse my heart*, and proclaims the gospel reading in the usual way.²⁹ After the proclamation of the Gospel, if the *Book of the Gospels* is brought to the Bishop, the concelebrants remain standing.

The Homily

23. The homily is usually given by the principal celebrant or, at his invitation, by one of the concelebrants,³⁰ or even, in some cases, by a deacon.³¹

Preparation of the Altar and the Gifts

24. "The Preparation of the Gifts (cf. nos. 139-146) is carried out by the principal celebrant, while the other concelebrants remain at their places."³² When there are to be great numbers of communicants and all the ciboria cannot conveniently be placed on the altar, some of the concelebrants may hold the ciboria in their hands during the Eucharistic Prayer.

At the Altar

25. The concelebrants approach the altar for the Eucharistic Prayer after the principal celebrant has concluded the prayer over the offerings. If there is a great number of concelebrants, only some of them should be invited to stand with the principal celebrant at the altar. The deacons remain "behind the concelebrants, but in such a way that one of them may assist at the cup and the book as needed."³³ The Eucharistic Prayer should be chosen prior to the celebration. The principal celebrant begins the Eucharistic Prayer only after the concelebrants have taken their places.

Singing of the Eucharistic Prayer

26. It is very appropriate that the principal celebrant sing those parts of the Eucharistic Prayer for which musical notation in the *Missal* is provided and that concelebrants sing together the parts assigned to them.³⁴ However, the Eucharistic Prayer should not be sung unless the principal celebrant and the concelebrants know the music and are able to sing it well.

Proclamation of the Eucharistic Prayer

27. When it is not sung, the Eucharistic Prayer should be proclaimed by the principal celebrant in a loud and clear voice. Concelebrating priests recite the epiclesis, words of consecration, anamnesis, and post-consecratory epiclesis in a very low voice, so that the congregation is able to hear the text without difficulty.³⁵ The concelebrants listen in silence during the post-sanctus and the intercessions.

Deacons and Other Ministers

28. When neither a deacon nor other ministers assist in a concelebrated Mass, their functions are to be carried out by one or more of the concelebrants.³⁶ However, every effort should be made to provide a deacon and other ministers.

Epiclesis

29. In accord with ancient tradition, concelebrating priests stretch out both their hands toward the elements during the epiclesis.³⁷ The full impact of this gesture can be achieved if the concelebrants adopt the same gesture as the principal celebrant.

Consecration

30. During the consecration, each concelebrant extends the right hand toward the bread and the chalice.³⁸

31. All bow profoundly when the principal celebrant genuflects after the consecration of the bread and after the consecration of the wine.

Anamnesis and Epiclesis

32. The concelebrants hold their hands outstretched in an *orans* gesture during the anamnesis and the post-consecratory epiclesis, but not during the other parts of the Eucharistic Prayer.

Additional Gestures in the Roman Canon

33. When praying the First Eucharistic Prayer (Roman Canon), concelebrants make two additional gestures. From *Almighty God, we pray to the sacred body and blood of your Son* inclusive, they bow with hands joined; then they stand upright and cross themselves at the words *let us be filled*.³⁹ At the words *Though we are sinners*, each concelebrant strikes his breast.⁴⁰

The Intercessions

34. If they are to be prayed by designated concelebrants, the intercessions within the Eucharistic Prayer should be assigned prior to the beginning of the celebration. Cards or booklets containing the Eucharistic Prayer should be provided to those concelebrants who will read one or more of the intercessions. In this way, the passing of the *Sacramentary* on the altar from one concelebrant to another will be avoided.

35. Each individual concelebrant chosen to pray the intercessions does so with his hands extended. Careful attention should be given to the manner in which the intercessions are divided.⁴¹ The principal celebrant may also say the intercessions by himself.

Doxology of the Eucharistic Prayer

36. During the final doxology of the Eucharistic Prayer only the principal celebrant elevates the paten with the consecrated bread, while the deacon raises the chalice. The concelebrants do not elevate other chalices, ciboria, or other sacred vessels. If no deacon is present, one of the concelebrants may elevate the chalice.

37. All the concelebrants may join in the singing or recitation of the doxology if this is desirable or it may be sung or recited by the principal celebrant alone.⁴² *The collective voice of the concelebrants should not, however, overwhelm the voice of the principal celebrant.* The procedure to be followed should be decided by the principal celebrant before the celebration begins.

The Lord's Prayer

38. "The principal celebrant, with hands extended, says the introduction to the Lord's Prayer. Then, together with the concelebrants, who also extend their hands, he says the Lord's Prayer with the people."⁴³ Only the principal celebrant maintains the *orans* posture for the *Deliver us, Lord, from every evil...*

Prayers During the Communion Rite

39. The celebrant's parts of the Communion Rite are said by the principal celebrant alone. They may not be distributed for recitation by the concelebrants. Nor may they be recited by the concelebrants together with the principal celebrant.⁴⁴

Sign of Peace

40. The sign of peace should not be overextended, thus delaying the rite of the breaking of the consecrated bread.⁴⁵

Breaking of the Bread

41. The Lamb of God begins only after the sign of peace is completed. During this litany the deacon (or, in his absence, one or more of the concelebrants) assists the principal celebrant in the breaking of the consecrated bread.⁴⁶

42. It is not necessary that each concelebrant receive one-half of a large host. But at least some of the Eucharistic bread should be broken for the concelebrants and the people.

43. It is strongly recommended that the faithful receive the Lord's Body from the bread consecrated at the same Mass.⁴⁷ Concelebrants must never be given Holy Communion consecrated at another Mass and reserved in the tabernacle, and they are to receive under both species.⁴⁸

44. The concelebrants can receive hosts in two ways. When the principal celebrant's private prayer before Communion is finished, the principal celebrant genuflects and steps back a little. One after another, the concelebrants come to the middle of the altar, genuflect, and reverently take the Body of Christ from the altar. Then, holding the Eucharistic bread in one hand, with the other hand under it, they return to their places. Alternately, the concelebrants may remain in their places and take the Body of Christ from the paten presented to them by the principal celebrant, or by one or more of the concelebrants or deacons, or also from the paten as it is passed from one to another.⁴⁹ The formula *The Body of Christ* is not said.

45. When sufficient concelebrants are present, they assist the principal celebrant in the distribution of Holy Communion. When the number of ordinary ministers of Holy Communion is insufficient, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion may assist in the distribution of the Eucharist. Such extraordinary ministers do not receive Holy Communion in the manner of concelebrants. Rather, they receive the Body and Blood of the Lord after the principal celebrant and the deacon.

Invitation to Holy Communion

46. Only the principal celebrant shows the consecrated host to the people when he proclaims, *This is the Lamb of God.*⁵⁰ Concelebrants do not elevate their hosts; rather, they reverently hold the consecrated bread in the right hand with the left hand under it.

Receiving the Body of the Lord

47. After the invitation to Communion, the principal celebrant alone says in a lower voice, *May the Body of Christ bring me to everlasting life.* He then consumes the Body of Christ. If the concelebrants are holding the consecrated bread in their hands, they consume it at this time.⁵¹

Receiving the Precious Blood

48. The Precious Blood is received⁵² in one of the following ways: The concelebrants approach the altar one after another or, if two chalices are used, two by two. They genuflect, partake of the Blood of Christ, wipe the rim of the chalice, and return to their seats, or the concelebrants may receive the Precious Blood while remaining in their places. They drink from the chalice presented to them by the deacon or one of the concelebrants, or else passed from one to the other. The chalice is wiped either by the one who drinks from it or by the one who presents it. The chalice is offered to each concelebrant without saying the formula *The Blood of Christ.*⁵³

Alternate Form of Receiving Holy Communion

49. A second form of distributing Holy Communion to concelebrants is described by the *General Instruction*. "After the principal celebrant's Communion, the chalice is placed on another corporal at the side of the altar. The concelebrants approach the middle of the altar one after another, genuflect, and receive the Body of the Lord; then they go to the side of the altar and consume the Blood of the Lord, following the rite chosen for Communion from the chalice, as has just been said."⁵⁴

Communion by Intinction

50. "If the concelebrants' Communion is by intinction, the principal celebrant receives the Body and Blood of the Lord in the usual way, but making sure that enough of the Precious Blood remains in the chalice for the Communion of the concelebrants. Then the deacon, or one of the concelebrants, arranges the chalice as appropriate in the center of the altar or at the side on another corporal together with the paten containing particles of the host. The concelebrants approach the altar one after another, genuflect, and take a particle, dip it partly into the chalice, and, holding a purificator under their chin, consume the intincted particle. They then return to their places as at the beginning of Mass."⁵⁵

Distribution of Holy Communion to the Faithful

51. If there are many concelebrating priests, the Communion of the liturgical assembly should not be delayed. There is no need for all the concelebrants to finish receiving Holy Communion before distribution to the assembly can commence.

Purification of Sacred Vessels

52. After Communion, the Precious Blood is to be consumed immediately.⁵⁶ The sacred vessels are purified or are covered on a side table to be purified after Mass.⁵⁷

Reverence to the Altar

53. Before leaving it, the concelebrants make a profound bow to the altar when the principal celebrant with the deacon venerates the altar with a kiss.⁵⁸ If the tabernacle is present in the sanctuary, they genuflect to it.

Notes

¹ Sacred Congregation of Rites, *Ecclesiae Semper* (ES), 7 March 1965.

² See Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC), December 4, 1963, no. 57 §1, 2a: “at conventual Mass, and at the principal Mass in churches when the needs of the faithful do not require that all priests available should celebrate individually and at Masses celebrated at any kind of priests’ meetings, whether the priests be secular clergy or religious,” and SC, 57 §1, 1: (a) on the Thursday of the Lord’s Supper, not only at the Mass of the Chrism, but also at the evening Mass; (b) at Masses during councils, Bishops’ conferences, and synods; (c) at the Mass for the blessing of an abbot.

³ SC, no. 58.

⁴ ES.

⁵ ES.

⁶ See *General Instruction of the Roman Missal, third typical edition* (GIRM), April 20, 2000, no. 202.

⁷ GIRM, no. 199; see SC, 57 §2.

⁸ Sacred Congregation of Rites, *Eucharisticum Mysterium* (EM), May 25, 1967, no. 43.

⁹ *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 902: “Priests may concelebrate the Eucharist unless the welfare of the Christian faithful requires or urges otherwise but with due regard for the freedom of each priest to celebrate the Eucharist individually, though not during the time when there is a concelebration in the same church or oratory.”

¹⁰ GIRM, no. 200.

¹¹ In a *responsum ad dubium*, dated July 3, 1999 (prot. 1411/99), the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments has reinforced the freedom of all priests to concelebrate. No superior may prohibit a priest from concelebrating. The response also notes that “it is laudable that [priests enjoying the faculty of celebrating Mass in the rite in force before the liturgical renewal of Vatican Council II] concelebrate freely especially for the Mass of the Thursday of Holy Week, with the diocesan Bishop presiding....The sign of communion inherent in concelebration is so particular that it ought not to be omitted in the Chrism Mass except for grave reasons.”

¹² GIRM, no. 199.

¹³ GIRM, no. 199.

¹⁴ See GIRM, no. 199.

¹⁵ *Caeremoniale Episcoporum* (CE), September 14, 1984, no. 21. Translation by the USCCB Secretariat for the Liturgy.

¹⁶ GIRM, no. 206.

¹⁷ “It is for the Bishop, in accordance with the norm of law, to regulate the discipline for concelebration in all churches and oratories of his diocese”: GIRM, no. 202.

¹⁸ Sacred Congregation of Rites, *Rite of Concelebration* (RC), March 7, 1965, nos. 3 and 4.

¹⁹ See GIRM, no. 43.

²⁰ GIRM, no. 335.

²¹ GIRM, no. 209.

²² See GIRM, no. 209.

- ²³ See Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, *Liturgicae Instaurationes*, September 5, 1970, no. 8c.
- ²⁴ See CE, no. 12.
- ²⁵ See GIRM, no. 274.
- ²⁶ See GIRM, no. 211.
- ²⁷ See GIRM, no. 212; see *Books of the Gospels for Use in the Dioceses of the United States of America* (BOG), no. 14.
- ²⁸ See BOG, no. 15.
- ²⁹ *Lectionary for Mass for Use in the Dioceses of the United States of America* (LFM), November 29, 1998, no. 17.
- ³⁰ See GIRM, no. 213.
- ³¹ See GIRM, no. 66.
- ³² GIRM, no. 214.
- ³³ GIRM, no. 215; see CE, no. 153.
- ³⁴ See GIRM, nos. 147, 218.
- ³⁵ See GIRM, no. 218.
- ³⁶ See GIRM, no. 208.
- ³⁷ See GIRM, nos. 222a, 227a, 230a, 233a.
- ³⁸ See GIRM, nos. 222c, 227c, 230c, 233c.
- ³⁹ See GIRM, no. 222e.
- ⁴⁰ See GIRM, no. 224.
- ⁴¹ See GIRM, nos. 216-236.
- ⁴² See GIRM, no. 236.
- ⁴³ GIRM, no. 237 (translation by Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy); see CE, no. 159.
- ⁴⁴ See GIRM, nos. 238, 241.
- ⁴⁵ See GIRM, no. 154.
- ⁴⁶ See GIRM, no. 240.
- ⁴⁷ See SC, no. 55; GIRM, no. 85; EM, no. 31.
- ⁴⁸ For an exception, see the circular letter of the Congregation for Doctrine of the Faith dated July 24, 2003 (Prot. 89/78-17498), no. B3.
- ⁴⁹ See GIRM, no. 242.
- ⁵⁰ See GIRM, no. 243.
- ⁵¹ See GIRM, nos. 244.
- ⁵² The following is excerpted from a circular letter to the Presidents of Episcopal Conferences from Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (prot. 89/78): "Concerning permission to use *mustum*: (A) The preferred solution continues to be Communion *per intinctionem*, or in concelebration under the species of bread alone. . . .) In general, those who have received permission to use *mustum* are prohibited from presiding at concelebrated Masses. There may be some exceptions however: in the case of a Bishop or Superior General; or, with prior approval of the Ordinary, at the celebration of the anniversary of priestly ordination or other similar occasions. In these cases, the one who presides is to communicate under both the species of bread and that of *mustum*, while for the other concelebrants a chalice shall be provided in which normal wine is to be consecrated."
- ⁵³ See GIRM, no. 246.
- ⁵⁴ GIRM, no. 248.

⁵⁵ GIRM, no. 249.

⁵⁶ See GIRM, no. 182.

⁵⁷ See GIRM, no. 183.

⁵⁸ See GIRM, no. 251.

The document *Guidelines for Concelebration of the Eucharist* was developed by the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). It was approved by the full body of bishops at its November 2003 General Meeting and has been authorized for publication by the undersigned.

Msgr. William P. Fay
General Secretary, USCCB

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