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# KNEELING AFTER COMMUNION

A SERVICE OF CATHOLICS UNITED FOR THE FAITH

## ISSUE

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Are Catholics in the United States forbidden to kneel after receiving Communion? What should faithful Catholics do where the mandated practice is to stand?

## RESPONSE

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The faithful are not forbidden to kneel after receiving Communion. The Congregation of Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments (CDWDS), with their approval of the postures to be used at Mass in the United States, did not intend “to regulate posture rigidly in such a way that those who wish to kneel or sit would no longer be free.”

## DISCUSSION

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The direction to remain standing following Communion has been implemented in some dioceses. It comes from the new *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM), which states:

The faithful should stand . . . from the invitation, *Orate, fratres* (*Pray, brethren*), before the prayer over the offerings until the end of Mass, *except at the places indicated below*. . .

[A]s circumstances allow, they *may* sit or kneel while the period of sacred silence after Communion is observed (GIRM, no. 43, emphases added)

The ambiguity of the GIRM’s language here has led some to conclude that the faithful are supposed to stand after receiving Communion until after all have received. To rectify the resulting confusion, Cardinal George posed the following question to the CDWDS. Cardinal George was the head of the Bishop’s Committee on the Liturgy (BCL), the committee of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) charged with implementing the GIRM in the United States. Here is Cardinal George’s question (*dubium*) and the CDW’s response (*responsum*; Prot. n. 855/03/L) as found in the July 2003 BCL newsletter:

**Dubium:** In many places, the faithful are accustomed to kneeling or sitting in personal prayer

upon returning to their places after having individually received Holy Communion during Mass. Is it the intention of the *Missale Romanum, editio typica tertia*, to forbid this practice?

**Responsum:** *Negative, et ad mentem.* The *mens* is that the prescription of the *Institutio Generalis Missalis Romani*, no. 43, is intended, on the one hand, to ensure within broad limits a certain uniformity of posture within the congregation for the various parts of the celebration of Holy Mass, and on the other, to not regulate posture rigidly in such a way that those who wish to kneel or sit would no longer be free.

Cardinal Arinze (prefect for the CDWDS) and the BCL have clarified that “posture should not be regulated so rigidly as to forbid individual communicants from kneeling or sitting when returning from having received Holy Communion.”

In light of the confusion on this matter, Catholics United for the Faith has asked Church leaders what we should tell individual Catholics who want to kneel or sit after receiving Communion in dioceses where the mandated practice is to stand. Clearly, this innovation is confusing and upsetting to many people.

The clear response CUF has received is that the faithful unequivocally have a right to sit or kneel after receiving Communion. CUF was further advised to tell people to charitably and gently bring the *dubium* and *responsum*, found in the July 2003 BCL Newsletter, to their pastor or other proper authorities.

The faithful have the right to kneel after receiving Communion. They also have the right to communicate their concern to their pastor and bishop in keeping with Vatican II and the Code of Canon Law.

Out of respect for the current practice in their diocese, faithful Catholics may choose to stand until the matter is resolved until this practice is modified according to the clarification of the CDWDS and the BCL. If one chooses to exercise their right to kneel,

## Kneeling After Communion

we would caution them to do so in a way that does not draw attention or distract the rest of the faithful. We would also encourage those attempting to resolve this issue in their parish or diocese to do so in a constructive way, rather than cause division between the local Church and the universal Church. However one proceeds, it is important to pray daily for the bishop, and assume good faith and sincere motives on the part of the bishop, pastor, and the diocesan liturgical office (cf. *Catechism*, no. 2478). It is also important to address those who are in disagreement about this practice with utmost

respect.

The faithful should be encouraged to respond to the confusion and frustration experienced in this matter with patience and hope. By responding in a constructive manner the faithful will preserve the unity of the Church and be witnesses of Christian charity.

A copy of the July 2003 BCL Newsletter can be obtained by calling the Committee on the Liturgy at 202-541-3000 or by visiting their website at [www.usccb.org/liturgy/innews](http://www.usccb.org/liturgy/innews).

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## FURTHER READING

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