



Diocese of Grand Rapids

Office for Worship

CHURCH ART + ARCHITECTURE COMMISSION

# TASTE AND SEE

## Guidelines on Eucharistic Reservation

### Introduction

Our Roman Catholic belief in the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist refers to both his *active* presence encountered in several modes during the celebration of the Mass, and his enduring presence under the appearance of bread and wine consecrated at Mass. This statement is meant to unify practices in our diocesan parishes and foster a deeper awareness of the mystery of his presence both in the Eucharistic liturgy and when reserved in the tabernacle.

### Principles

The Church's liturgical documents communicate a rich theology of the Eucharist and the custom of Eucharistic Reservation. The following principles of this theology are inherent in this policy:

- A. The Eucharist is the source and summit of the entire Christian life.<sup>1</sup>
- B. In the celebration of the Eucharist, Christ is present: in the very assembly of the faithful gathered in God's name; in the Word proclaimed; in the person of the ordained minister; and especially in the Eucharistic bread and wine.<sup>2</sup>
- C. The adoration shown to the Eucharistic bread and wine outside Mass has its origin and foundation in the celebration of the Eucharist.
- D. The faithful are to show this holy sacrament the veneration and adoration due to the Lord Jesus Christ himself.
- E. The primary and original reason for reservation of the Eucharist is the administration of communion to the sick and viaticum to the dying. The secondary ends are the giving of

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<sup>1</sup> BLS 49: "The celebration of the eucharist is the center of the entire Christian life, both for the universal Church and for local faith communities." See also GIRM 16; *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* [CSL], Vatican II, 41.

<sup>2</sup> BLS 22: "In the liturgical assembly, Christ's presence is realized in all *the baptized* who gather in his name, in the *word of God* proclaimed in the assembly, in *sacramental celebrations*, and especially in the *Sacrament of his Body and Blood*." See also GIRM 27.

communion outside of Mass and the adoration of our Lord Jesus Christ present in the reserved sacrament.<sup>3</sup>

- F. On the grounds of the sign value, it is more in keeping with the nature of the celebration that the Eucharist not be reserved on the altar of celebration.<sup>4</sup>

## Guidelines

1. The Eucharist may be reserved only in one place in each church.<sup>5</sup> If there is a Blessed Sacrament chapel, it is reserved only there.
2. The tabernacle is to be immovable, made of solid and non-transparent material, and locked to prevent desecration.<sup>6</sup>
3. The tabernacle is to be situated in some part of the church which is distinguished, conspicuous, noble, beautifully decorated and suitable for prayer. The place of reservation should be a space that is dedicated to Christ present in the Eucharist and that is designed so that the attention of one praying there is drawn to the tabernacle that houses the presence of the Lord. A special oil lamp or a lamp with a wax candle is to burn continuously near the tabernacle as an indication of Christ's presence.<sup>7</sup>
4. When possible, the Eucharist should be reserved in a special Blessed Sacrament chapel to best meet the liturgical and theological principles outlined. Such a chapel should:
  - be suitable for adoration and the private prayer of the faithful
  - be integrally connected with the church – but still distinct from the church – and designed so the tabernacle is visible from the main worship space.

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<sup>3</sup> BLS 70: "The reservation of the eucharist was originally intended for the communion of the sick, for those unable to attend the Sunday celebration, and as *Viaticum* for the dying." See also HCWE 5.

<sup>4</sup> HCWE 6: "By reason of symbolism, it is more in keeping with the nature of the celebration that the eucharistic presence of Christ, which is the fruit of the consecration and should be seen as such, should not be on the altar from the very beginning of Mass through the reservation of the sacred species in the tabernacle." See also GIRM 315; BLS 74.

<sup>5</sup> *Code of Canon Law* [CCL], No. 938, §1: "The most holy eucharist is to be reserved habitually in only one tabernacle of a church or oratory." See also BLS 72-78, GIRM 314.

<sup>6</sup> CCL, No. 938 §3: "The tabernacle in which the most holy eucharist is reserved habitually is to be immovable, made of solid and opaque material, and locked in such a way that the danger of profanation is avoided as much as possible." See also BLS 72, GIRM 314.

<sup>7</sup> CCL, No. 938 §2: "The tabernacle in which the most holy eucharist is reserved is to be situated in some part of the church or oratory which is distinguished, conspicuous, beautifully decorated, and suitable for prayer." See also BLS 72-74; GIRM 314, 316, 351; HCWE 11.

- foster reverence and provide the quiet and focus needed for personal prayer, including kneelers and chairs for those who come to pray.<sup>8</sup>
- Provide barrier free accessibility.

Ideally, a chapel of reservation would include a separate exterior entrance to provide secure access for those who wish to practice adoration outside normal parish hours. If possible, the Blessed Sacrament could be separate from a chapel used for daily Mass and other occasions of prayer and worship for smaller groups.<sup>9</sup>

6. Parishes with extended periods of Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament are to provide a chapel that fulfills the norms for the Reservation of the Blessed Sacrament, but is sufficiently separated from the body of the church so that exposition does not interfere with daily Mass or the activities of the parish.<sup>10</sup>
7. In all churches built since 1970, the tabernacle may not be reserved on the altar of celebration in the body of the church. The tabernacle, if in the sanctuary, should be thoughtfully placed apart from the altar of celebration so that it does not draw the attention of the faithful away from the Eucharistic celebration and its components. Such a placement should be at a distance from the altar of celebration, and positioned on a fixed pillar or stand, or attached to or embedded in one of the walls.<sup>11</sup>
8. In churches built before 1970, the tabernacle may be in a Blessed Sacrament chapel, on the former main altar, on a side altar, in a wall niche or on a pillar. It may not be on the altar of celebration, unless in rare instances Mass is lawfully celebrated on the former main altar.

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<sup>8</sup> BLS 73: "The place of reservation should be a space that is dedicated to Christ present in the eucharist and that is designed so that the attention of one praying there is drawn to the tabernacle that houses the presence of the Lord. Iconography can be chosen from the rich treasury of symbolism that is associated with the eucharist." See also HCWE 6; GIRM 315; BLS 74-79; *Eucharisticum mysterium: On Worship of the Eucharist*, 55.

<sup>9</sup> See *Rite of Dedication of a Church and an Altar* [RDCA] IV, 7.

<sup>10</sup> BLS 78: "Some parishes have inaugurated the practice of continuous adoration of the eucharist. If, for some good reason, perpetual exposition must take place in a parish church, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments has directed that this take place in a separate chapel that is 'distinct from the body of the church so as not to interfere with the normal activities of the parish or its daily liturgical celebration.'" See also BLS 79; GIRM 314-315.

<sup>11</sup> BLS 79-80: "Careful planning is needed so that the placement chosen does not draw the attention of the faithful away from the eucharistic celebration and its components. In addition, the placement must allow for a focus on the tabernacle for those periods of quiet prayer outside the celebration of the eucharist. Ordinarily, it is helpful to have a sufficient distance to separate the tabernacle and the altar. When a tabernacle is located directly behind the altar, consideration should be given to using distance, lighting, or some other architectural device that separates the tabernacle and reservation area during Mass but that allows the tabernacle to be fully visible to the entire worship area when the eucharistic liturgy is not being celebrated." See also BLS 72, 74; GIRM 303, 315; RDCA IV.

When a church is undergoing renovation, these norms must be carefully examined.<sup>13</sup> In renovating a church designed in another time period, a parish has an opportunity to consider new or more appropriate locations for the tabernacle other than on the former main altar in the center of the sanctuary. A location away from the altar of celebration will be beneficial and will help to prevent confusion among the faithful.<sup>14</sup>

9. Unless a grave reason to the contrary exists, churches where the Eucharist is reserved should be open to the faithful for at least some hours every day, so that they can pray before the Blessed Sacrament.<sup>15</sup>
10. The consecrated Eucharist should be reserved only in sufficient number for giving Holy Communion outside Mass. To the extent possible, the Body of Christ should be distributed at Mass from the Eucharist consecrated at that Mass.<sup>16</sup> The reserved sacrament should be renewed frequently, and the older sacrament consumed properly.
11. The Precious Blood may be reserved only for the bringing of Holy Communion under both kinds as viaticum, or under the form of wine alone for those who cannot consume the host.<sup>17</sup> In these cases, the chalice should be covered after communion and placed in the tabernacle. After Mass, the Precious Blood should be poured into a worthy vessel with a secure lid.

***Learn to savor how good the Lord is;  
happy are they who take refuge in him.***

PSALM 34:9

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<sup>13</sup> BLS 247: “[A parish] will need to review all existing diocesan norms and then carefully examine the principles that underlie each of the options, weigh the liturgical advantages of each possibility, and reflect upon the customs and piety of the parishioners before making a recommendation on the placement of a tabernacle.”

<sup>14</sup> BLS 252: “When a place is chosen for the tabernacle and the former tabernacle can be removed from an existing altar without damaging the altar or the setting, this will be beneficial and will help to prevent confusion among the faithful.” See also BLS 80, 249-250.

<sup>15</sup> See CCL, No. 937; BLS 235.

<sup>16</sup> See CSL 55; GIRM 85; *Directory for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*, 55G.

<sup>17</sup> See *Pastoral Care of the Sick*, 181; CCL, No. 925.