

Communal cup

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communion versus one communal cup for all," the advisory continued. "If this is not already your current practice, we recommend you do so."

Yet some Catholic parishes in Tompkins County have not been willing to forgo the communal-cup ritual.

Father John O'Hare, OFM Cap., pastor of St. James the Apostle Church in Trumansburg, said he "just thought it would be a better policy" to continue the communal chalice. The priest added that he might reconsider that policy if "we get some more warnings" from the health department.

Neither have any changes been made at St. Catherine of Siena Church in Ithaca or All Saints Church in Lansing.

"We haven't changed our practice and I don't think we're about to," said Father Ronald E. Gaesser, pastor of both Tompkins County churches.

He cited a recent study conducted by the National Center for Disease Control, determining that alcohol in wine kills the germs of transmittable diseases.

Meanwhile, in a June 11 article in the *Syracuse Herald American*, Father Bernard L. Carges, pastor of Ithaca's Immaculate Conception Church, said: "I just don't feel that it's that much of a threat." (Father Carges could not be reached for comment by this newspaper last week.)

Workmaster supports the decisions of these three priests, saying, "In the history of the church, I don't think anyone can prove that an outbreak of an infectious disease has been caused by the sharing of a common cup."

Yet she emphasized that eucharistic ministers can ill afford to throw caution to the wind. Standard sanitary practices should include: eucharistic ministers' hands being thoroughly washed; chalices being wiped with a towel and rotated after each member of the congregation drinks from the cup; and the cleansing of chalices after each Mass.

Although several Protestant faiths offer individualized cups in which to receive wine, Workmaster pointed out that this option has never been seriously explored in the Catholic Church.

"That's part of our theology — we drink from the common cup and we share from the common cup," she said.

Conflicts such as the one in Tompkins County are not uncommon, said Workmaster, due to varying priorities between public offices and churches.

"I can sympathize strongly with what (the Tompkins County Health Department is) saying, but I would still not want to give up the practice. It's their job to alert us and it's our job to make a decision of how far to go along with it," Workmaster said. "From their scientific point of view, that's the way it is. Over here, the church has another agenda."

Two Tompkins County priests, however, have decided to at least temporarily adhere to their county health department's advisory.

"It never hurts to be on the safe side," said Father John H. Hayes, administrator of Holy Cross Church in Freeville. He said he plans on reinstituting the communal chalice in September.

"To ignore the advisory would not be a good idea," stated Father Robert M. Egan, pastor of Groton's St. Anthony's Church. Like Father Hayes, the Groton priest plans to once again offer the communal cup this fall provided further outbreaks of meningitis do not occur in the Ithaca area.

Father Egan explained that if he were to ignore the health department's warning and a death caused by meningitis occurred in his parish — even if it couldn't be traced to a wine cup — "I'd have a terrible time explaining to the family. We have that tendency with hindsight."

Back in Ithaca, although his parish continues to offer the communal chalice, Immaculate Conception parishioner Joe Cassaniti is adamant about disbanding the practice altogether. He's been against it "from day one," stating there's an everyday threat of a disease by sharing a

cup.

"Anyone who thinks drinking from a common container is not dangerous to your health probably does not wash his/her hands after going to the bathroom," Cassaniti declared.

On the other hand, Father O'Hare said the majority of his Trumansburg parishioners has continued opting to receive the chalice even after the May advisory was issued, adding that he has detected only "a little noticeable decline."

When contacted by the *Catholic Courier* for questions about the advisory's effectiveness, Alice Cole, Tompkins County Public Health Director, refused to comment.

Dr. Nancy Bennett, deputy director of health for Monroe County, said her department has "never made any specific policy and doesn't plan to in the future" regarding the communal chalice. However, she did say, "We don't believe for the most part that this practice poses a risk of communicable disease to the public. There needs to be a significant amount of spit passed."

If an outbreak of meningococcal disease were to occur in Monroe County, she said, "We would work with area churches to figure out a way it would be possible to minimize the transmittal of diseases."

"It's hard for me to imagine doing anything we thought would pose an undue burden to the churches," Bennett said.

Both Bennett and Eileen O'Connor, director of environmental health for Cayuga County, said they would also consult state health authorities for guidance if such outbreaks were to occur in their areas.

The recent Tompkins County debate would actually have been a non-issue just 30 years ago. Beginning in the Middle Ages and extending through the middle of the 20th century, the communal cup at Mass had been limited to celebrants standing around the altar.

Yet the 1969 General Instruction of the Roman Missal — revised by decree of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council

— called for a rebirth of the communal-cup practice which had been popular in the early Catholic Church.

A portion of Chapter 5 in the General Instruction states: "Holy Communion has a more complete form as a sign when it is received under both kinds (bread and wine). For in this manner of reception a fuller light shines on the sign of the eucharistic banquet."

According to Workmaster, a tiny fraction of diocesan parishes have still not invoked the communal chalice in the years since the 1969 guidelines were issued.

Among this small group are Holy Cross Church in Ovid and St. Francis Solanus Church in Interlaken. Both churches are located in Seneca County, just north of Tompkins County.

Father Nelson J. Ruppert, OFM Cap., pastor of both churches, said Holy Cross parishioners receive wine by intinction — the dipping of the Eucharist in the wine chalice. Meanwhile, St. Francis Solanus parishioners do not take wine at all despite past efforts by Father Ruppert to introduce the practice there.

"They're so traditional, they just don't do it," said Father Ruppert.

He estimated that about 50 percent of the Interlaken churchgoers also continue to receive Eucharist on the tongue, rather than in the hand.

The irony with maintaining this tradition, said Workmaster, is that hand-to-mouth exchange of the Eucharist is much more likely to spread disease than a communal cup.

"There is no way people can go from one person to the other giving Communion without getting saliva on their fingers," Workmaster said.

Ultimately, however, liturgical practices regarding the body and blood of Christ are left in the hands of individual parishes.

"Each pastor needs to look at their situation and how they can best serve their people, even if we don't always agree with what they decide," Workmaster acknowledged.

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