

WORLD & NATION

Bishops' document would teach Real Presence

By Jerry Filteau
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON —The U.S. bishops plan to vote this month on a statement explaining church teachings on the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist.

Besides addressing the core teaching, the statement touches on topics such as eucharistic devotion, receiving Communion under both forms and what happens when someone without faith or in a state of sin receives the Eucharist.

The bishops are to discuss and vote on the proposed 19-page statement, written in question-answer format, during their June 14-16 national meeting in Atlanta.

A number of bishops signed a request to develop such a statement in November 1999. The request said in part, "Our pastoral experience, as well as published surveys, indicates that a significant number of Catholics are confused about the Real Presence. We consider this to be a grave situation which needs to be addressed by the body of bishops."

In one such poll, U.S. Catholics were asked to choose between statements that during Mass the bread and wine are "changed into the body and blood of

Christ" or that they are "symbolic reminders of Christ." Fewer than half the respondents chose the "changed" answer.

The bishops' Committee on Doctrine, chaired by Bishop Donald W. Trautman of Erie, Pa., drafted the statement the bishops are to vote on.

"The Catholic Church professes that in the celebration of the Eucharist, bread and wine become the body and blood of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit," it says.

It begins with a recounting of Christ's institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper and recalls the words of Christ recorded in the sixth chapter of John's Gospel: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world. ... For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink."

This is what the church means when it teaches that Christ is really present in the Eucharist, it says.

"The whole Christ," it adds, "is truly present, body, blood, soul and divinity, under the appearances of bread and wine — the glorified Christ who rose from the dead after dying for our sins."

The proposed statement discusses why,

in God's plan of salvation, Christ gives himself to his disciples as food and drink.

It explains the church teaching that the Eucharist is both a meal and a sacrifice.

It discusses why the appearances of bread and wine remain after their substance or underlying reality has become the body and blood of Christ — the teaching classically formulated since the 16th-century Council of Trent as the doctrine of transubstantiation.

The statement affirms church teaching that "in the Eucharist the bread ceases to be bread in substance and becomes the body of Christ, while the wine ceases to be wine in substance and becomes the blood of Christ."

It says the bread and wine that are consecrated "are not strictly speaking symbolic because they truly are the body and blood of Christ" and not just a sign of it.

At the same time, it notes that "there are various ways in which the symbolism of eating bread and drinking wine is taken up in the meaning of the Eucharist."

The statement reaffirms church teaching that Christ's presence in the Eucharist continues after Mass.

It explains why the church reserves the Eucharist, firstly for distribution to the sick

and dying, and secondly as an object of adoration by the faithful.

It outlines basic ways Catholics are expected to show reverence toward the Eucharist.

It says a nonbeliever who receives the Eucharist consumes Christ's body and blood, but "a lack of faith ... does prevent the person from obtaining the spiritual benefit."

Quoting St. Paul's warning to those who receive the Lord "unworthily," the statement reminds Catholics of their obligation to confess mortal sins before receiving Communion, or at least make an act of perfect contrition if grave circumstances warrant.

It says that, "if possible, it is preferable to receive Christ in both forms during the celebration of the Eucharist," but this does not detract from the teaching that Christ is fully present under either form.

The statement discusses the different senses in which the church speaks about the "body of Christ." It also discusses what it means to speak about Christ's presence in the other sacraments and in other ways besides in the Eucharist, and what the church means when it describes Christ's presence in the Eucharist as a "mystery."

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Thoughts to Consider



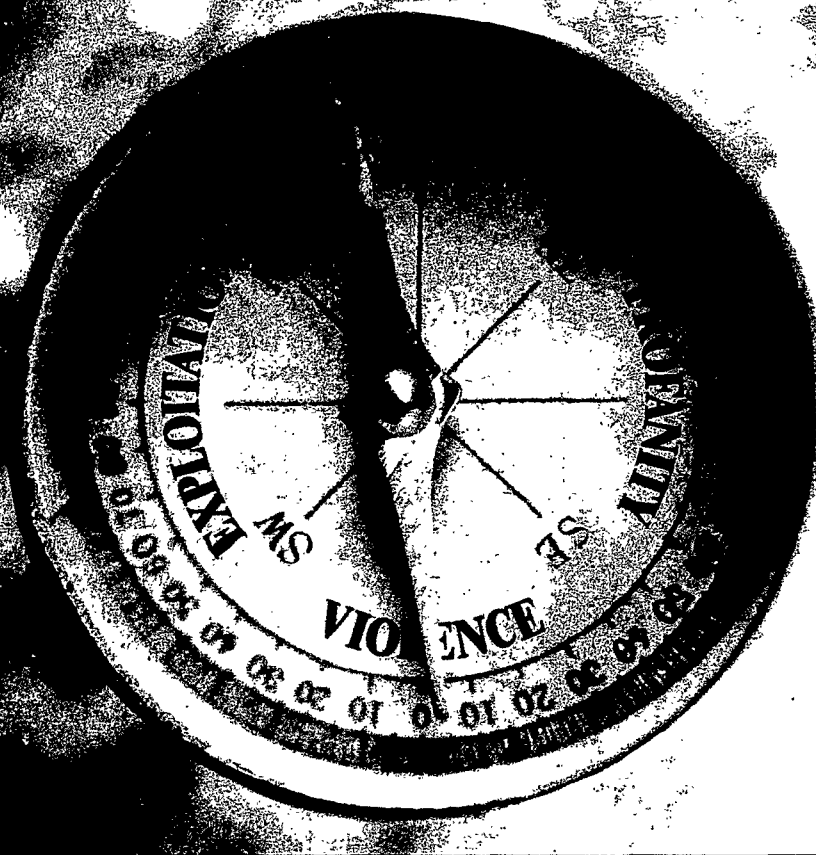
EDWIN SULEWSKI
Funeral Director

When a person dies at home, what should you do?

You can call your funeral director for specific directions but here is a general procedure. First, contact your physician or emergency team. If the death is unexpected you should notify the police who will in turn notify the coroner. This will also assure that medical help can be given should there be confusion as to whether the person is dead. If the death was expected notify your physician for verification of death. If you wish, contact your clergy and relatives or friends who are close to you. When all medical and legal matters are cared for contact the funeral director who will take your loved one to the funeral home and provide you with support and assistance for the next several days.

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