



# NEWS

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**POLISH NATIONAL CATHOLIC-ROMAN CATHOLIC DIALOGUE ISSUES STATEMENT**

WASHINGTON--Members of the Polish National Catholic Church (PNCC) in the United States and Roman Catholic Dialogue group have issued a joint statement hailing the judgment by the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity that members of the PNCC may receive the sacraments of Penance, Holy Communion, and the Anointing of the Sick from Roman Catholic priests.

Edward Cardinal Cassidy, President of the Pontifical Council, informed Archbishop William H. Keeler of Baltimore, President of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB), that members of the PNCC may receive these sacraments from Roman Catholic priests if they ask for them on their own, are properly disposed, and are not otherwise excluded from the sacraments.

The Cardinal's letter is an answer to a request from the National Clergy Conference of the PNCC expressing hope for increased sacramental responsibilities between the Churches as they move toward unity.

That expression of hope was forwarded to Pope John Paul II a little over two years ago by Bishop John Swantek of the PNCC. Archbishop Daniel Pilarczyk, then President of the NCCB, also made a formal request that the PNCC be considered in the same condition as the Oriental Churches, such as Eastern Orthodox, as far as these sacraments are concerned. Roman Catholic Canon Law specifies that this is a matter for the judgment of the Holy See in Canon 844 which states:

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#1. Catholic ministers may licitly administer the sacraments to Catholic members of the Christian faithful only and, likewise, the latter may licitly receive the sacraments only from Catholic ministers with due regard for ##2,3, and 4 of this canon, and can.861, #2.

#2. Whenever necessity requires or genuine spiritual advantage suggests, and provided that the danger of error or indifferentism is avoided, it is lawful for the faithful for whom it is physically or morally impossible to approach a Catholic minister, to receive the sacraments of penance, Eucharist, and anointing of the sick from non-Catholic ministers in whose churches these sacraments are valid.

#3. Catholic ministers may licitly administer the sacraments of penance, Eucharist and anointing of the sick to members of the oriental churches which do not have full communion with the Catholic Church, if they ask on their own for the sacraments and are properly disposed. This holds also for members of other churches, which in the judgment of the Apostolic See are in the same condition as the oriental churches as far as these sacraments are concerned.

#4. If the danger of death is present or other grave necessity, in the judgment of the diocesan bishop or the conference of bishops, Catholic ministers may licitly administer these sacraments to other Christians who do not have full communion with the Catholic Church, who cannot approach a minister of their own community and on their own ask for it, provided they manifest Catholic faith in these sacraments and are properly disposed.

#5. For the cases in ##2, 3, and 4, neither the diocesan bishop nor the conference of bishops is to enact general norms except after consultation with at least the local competent authority of the interested non-Catholic church or community.

The joint statement by the members of the PNCC and Roman Catholic dialogue was issued after their meeting in Dearborn Heights, MI, April 22. Below is the text of the statement:

"This is indeed an important development in the on-going dialogue taking place between the PNCC and the RC Churches. It means that PN Catholics may receive these three sacraments in the Roman Catholic Church under the same conditions as Roman Catholics if they ask for them on their own.

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Now that a favorable response has been received from the Vatican, practical pastoral instructions and guidelines on how this is to be best implemented will be forthcoming in the near future.

All the Bishops of the dialogue welcome this judgment by the Holy See and ask the priests and faithful of both churches to accept it as one positive step forward toward the realization of Our Lord's prayer that as his followers we may be one as He and the Father are one. More is to be accomplished and the 'journey together in Christ' is not yet at an end. The Bishops ask the support of the prayers of all the faithful that with the Lord's help, and with the grace of the Holy Spirit, and with the intercession of Mary, we may be brought to its needed and much longed for goal, full unity."

In recent meetings in Buffalo (June, 1992) and Boston (October, 1992), the Bishops' dialogue has investigated the role of the Bishop of Rome as successor of St. Peter and promoter of unity. The meeting in Dearborn Heights on April 22 explored the understanding of ecclesiastical communion as the form of unity specific to the Church and various models of unity gauged to express unity in an appropriate and adequate way.

The PNCC members of the group issued their own statement. It is as follows:

"We welcome with joy the announcement from the Vatican concerning the status of the Polish National Catholic Church in regards to Canon 844, Section 3. This positive announcement, the result of dialogue, inspires hope in our 'journeying together in Christ.'

The clarification regarding the opportunity to receive the sacraments of Penance, Eucharist, and Anointing of the Sick under certain conditions strengthens those fraternal ties which already exist. We trust that, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we may collaborate on developing guidelines which will increase our opportunities for pastoral care and a common witness.

The dialogue will continue between the two churches as we work to realize that unity for which Our Lord Jesus Christ prayed."

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