

**GUIDELINES FROM THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF
ENGLAND AND WALES FOR CATHOLICS RESPONDING TO
DECLARATIONS OF ECUMENICAL WELCOME AND COMMITMENT
FROM OTHER CHURCHES**

“ At the Second Vatican Council the Catholic Church committed herself irrevocably to following the path of the ecumenical venture..... ” (Ut Unum Sint 3.)

1. There will be, within some Catholic parishes in rural areas, villages where there is only one church and one worshipping congregation. This congregation will probably be Anglican but could well be Baptist, Methodist or United Reformed. Some of the congregations in these single-church villages may wish to extend a Declaration of Ecumenical Welcome and Commitment to Christians of other denominations inviting them to be part of the life and witness of that worshipping congregation. These guidelines are offered to assist Catholics in responding to these Declarations so as to help them to bring into being the unity for which Christ prayed.

2. There is, as is well known, a serious obligation for Catholics to attend Mass on Sundays, unless they have reasonable cause not to do so, because the celebration of the Eucharist on the Lord's Day is at the centre of our Catholic life. However, these Declarations of Welcome and Commitment may help Catholics to witness to the ecumenical mission of the Church. *They also give opportunities to those Catholics, who through illness, frailty or lack of transport, cannot participate regularly in their own parish Mass to share in the Christian life and worship of their village.*

3. Catholics who are committed to the life of their parish are encouraged to respond positively to these Declarations by exercising their Christian ministry within the village in which they live;
 - by participating in Christian outreach and service undertaken by the congregation
 - engaging in prayer, discussion and study groups and
 - serving on such committees as are appropriate.

4. At the Eucharistic celebrations of other Christians (i) Catholics, if invited, may receive a blessing at Communion time (ii), and may;
 - Read the lesson
 - Take part in intercessory prayer
 - Participate in music, dance and drama.

5. At Non-Eucharistic services of other Christians (iii) Catholics may

- Participate in planning and leading the service
 - Read the lesson and Gospel
 - Give the address
 - Lead or take part in intercessory prayer
 - Participate in music, dance and drama
6. The Catholic priest may, if invited, celebrate Mass in the village church. The usual condition (iv) concerning the participation by members of other churches in Catholic worship apply in these circumstances.
The priest and/or members of his parish may, if invited, *lead in the village church* non-sacramental worship particular to the Catholic tradition e.g. Stations of the Cross.
7. The local Catholic priest should seek advice from his Diocesan Ecumenical Commission before responding to these Declarations of Ecumenical Welcome and Commitment.

NOTES

- (i) “It is not permissible for Catholics to receive Holy Communion, or the sacraments of Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick from ministers of the Anglican Communion, the Church of Scotland or of other faith communities rooted in the Reformation”
One Bread, One Body 117
- (ii) “Reciprocal acceptance of a ‘blessing’ by Catholics and other Christians at each other’s Eucharistic celebrations is something which we encourage as a sign of the degree of unity we share”
One Bread, One Body 84
- (iii) “At liturgical celebrations taking place in other Churches and ecclesial communities, Catholics are encouraged to take part in the psalms, responses, hymns and common actions of the Church in which they are guests. If invited by their hosts they may read a lesson or preach.
Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism 118
- (iv) *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* 131,133,134,135.

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