

ADMISSION TO HOLY COMMUNION: THE LEGISLATION OF THE  
1983 CODE OF CANON LAW

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Canon 844 effectively summarises and replaces the Secretariat's Instruction on this matter (1972) and the subsequent clarificatory Note (1973). These earlier documents (reprinted, for example, in Flannery's Vatican II, pp 554-563) retain their value as an aid to interpretation and also in view of the Instruction's synthesis of the doctrinal position from which this discipline springs. The text of the canon follows in Latin and in English.

Can. 844 - § 1. Ministri catholici sacramenta licite administrant solis christifidelibus catholicis, qui pariter eadem a solis ministris catholicis licite recipiunt, salvo huius canonis §§ 2, 3 et 4, atque can. 861, § 2 praescriptis.

§ 2. Quoties necessitas id postulet aut vera spiritualis utilitas id suadeat, et dummodo periculum vitetur erroris vel indifferentiam, licet christifidelibus quibus physice aut moraliter impossibile sit accedere ad ministrum catholicum, sacramenta poenitentiae, Eucharistiae et unctionis infirmorum recipere a ministris non catholicis, in quorum Ecclesia valida existunt praedicta sacramenta.

§ 3. Ministri catholici licite sacramenta poenitentiae, Eucharistiae et unctionis infirmorum administrant membris Ecclesiarum orientalium quae plenam cum Ecclesia catholica communionem non habent, si sponte id petant et rite sint disposita; quod etiam valet quoad membra aliarum Ecclesiarum, quae iudicio Sedis Apostolicae, ad sacramenta quod attinet, in pari condicione ac praedictae Ecclesiae orientales versantur.

§ 4. Si adsit periculum mortis aut, iudicio Episcopi dioecesanii aut Episcoporum conferentiae, alia urgeat gravis necessitas, ministri catholici licite eadem sacramenta administrant ceteris quoque christianis plenam communionem cum Ecclesia catholica non habentibus, qui ad suae communitatis ministrum accedere nequeant atque sponte id petant, dummodo quoad eadem sacramenta fidem catholicam manifestent et rite sint dispositi.

§ 5. Pro casibus de quibus in §§ 2, 3 et 4, Episcopus dioecesanus aut Episcoporum conferentia generales normas ne ferant, nisi post consultationem cum auctoritate competenti saltem locali Ecclesiae vel communitatis non catholicae, cuius interest.

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Can. 844 §1 Catholic ministers may lawfully administer the sacraments only to catholic members of Christ's faithful, who equally may lawfully receive them only from catholic ministers, except as provided in §§2, 3 and 4 of this canon and in can. 861 §2.

§2 Whenever necessity requires or a genuine spiritual advantage commends it, and provided the danger of error or indifferentism is avoided, Christ's faithful for whom it is physically or morally impossible to approach a catholic minister, may lawfully receive the sacraments of

penance, the Eucharist and anointing of the sick from non-catholic ministers in whose Churches these sacraments are valid.

§3 Catholic ministers may lawfully administer the sacraments of penance, the Eucharist and anointing of the sick to members of the eastern Churches not in full communion with the catholic Church, if they spontaneously ask for them and are properly disposed. The same applies to members of other Churches which the Apostolic See judges to be in the same position as the aforesaid eastern Churches so far as the sacraments are concerned.

§4 If there is a danger of death or if, in the judgement of the diocesan Bishop or of the Episcopal Conference, there is some other grave and pressing need, catholic ministers may lawfully administer these same sacraments to other christians not in full communion with the catholic Church, who cannot approach a minister of their own community and who spontaneously ask for them, provided that they demonstrate the catholic faith in respect of these sacraments and are properly disposed.

§5 In respect of the cases dealt with in §§2, 3 and 4, the diocesan Bishop or the Episcopal Conference is not to issue general norms except after consultation with the competent authority, at least at the local level, of the non-catholic Church or community concerned.