



ARCHDIOCESE OF AGAÑA

CHANCERY OFFICE

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Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

“For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility [...] that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross.”
(Eph 2:14-16)

In the conversation with Pope Francis last October, he appealed to me in a particular way to do what I can to bring some healing to the divisions existing in the Archdiocese of Agaña. While I have been on island only two months, hardly a day goes by when that same appeal comes to me from you. From listening to many of you I realize that a number of factors have contributed toward the divisions. I cannot deal with them all at once hence what I outline below represents a beginning.

It has become apparent to me that concerns have arisen among a significant number of the faithful about the way the Eucharist is celebrated by members of the Neocatechumenal Way. Although the Neocatechumenate has been active on our island for many years and has been a blessing to many people, recent years have seen a growing sense of distress about the multiplication of small communities in some of the parishes and about some of the differences in the way the Mass is celebrated among the small communities of the Neocatechumenal Way. In the context of the pastoral charge entrusted to me by the Holy Father, I present the following actions.

First of all, I have asked the lead catechists here in Guam to put a “pause” on the formation of new communities for a period of about a year. During this time I intend to appoint a priest delegate to help me discern the effects of our efforts, to review the Catechetical Directory of the Neocatechumenal Way, and to ensure that catechists are sufficiently formed and certified for their important role. By this I wish to create a kind of moral and spiritual space in which healing can begin.

Second, I exercise my authority to establish norms regarding the regulation of the liturgy, as a way of fostering clarity concerning the celebration of the Eucharist. As many of you know, there are some permissions concerning the celebration of the Eucharist particular to the Neocatechumenal Way. The Rite of Peace is transferred to just after the Prayer of the Faithful. There may be brief admonitions given in advance of the readings. And, “regarding the distribution of Holy Communion under the two species, the neocatechumens receive it standing, remaining in their place” (*Statute*, art. 13.3).

In this endeavor toward clarity and the restoration of unity, I have been moved primarily by some of the remarks of Pope Benedict XVI to the communities of the Neocatechumenal Way in 2012. He said,

“Precisely to encourage people who have drifted away from the Church or have not received an appropriate formation to draw close to the riches of the sacramental life, the Neocatechumens may celebrate the Sunday Eucharist in the small community, after the first Vespers of Sunday, according to the dispositions of the diocesan bishop (*Statute*, art. 13). However, every Eucharistic celebration is an action of the one Christ together with his one Church and is therefore essentially open to all who belong to his Church.”

With the words of Pope Benedict carefully in my heart, and exercising my responsibility and authority to direct the celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy here in the Archdiocese of Agaña, I establish the following norms.

1. As a sign of the unity of the Eucharist within the parish community and the essential openness to all, the Sunday Eucharist after First Vespers and all Solemnities of the small communities must be celebrated at a consecrated altar, either in the main sanctuary or in an approved chapel. If we cannot find unity among ourselves at the one Altar of Sacrifice, where else will we find it?

- If the Mass is one of the regularly scheduled Masses of the parish, its special character must be noted in the bulletin.
- If the Mass is additional to the regularly scheduled Saturday evening Mass, some portion of the collection taken should go to the parish in order to cover costs. The same principle holds for Masses in an approved chapel.
- The pastor has the authority to direct how many of such additional Masses may be allowed.
- If there is more than one small community in the parish, the pastor may direct some number of the communities to celebrate together.

2. It has also come to my attention that there is some confusion concerning the liturgical rubrics about receiving communion “standing, remaining in their place.” Fortunately, the General Instruction of the Roman Missal gives us very clear direction. I quote the rubrics below as an aid to our understanding:

- Regarding the priest: “After this (i.e. after the response ending ‘...I shall be healed’), the Priest says quietly, ‘May the Body of Christ keep me safe for eternal life,’ and reverently consumes the Body of Christ. Then he takes the chalice [...] and reverently consumes the Blood of Christ.” (GIRM, para. 157, 158)
- Regarding the communicant: “If Communion is given only under the species of bread, the Priest raises the host slightly and shows it to each, saying ‘The Body of Christ.’ The communicant replies, ‘Amen’ and receives the Sacrament either on the tongue or, where this is allowed, in the hand. The choice lying with the communicant. As soon as the communicant receives the host, he or she consumes the whole of it.” (GIRM, para. 161)

- These norms concerning the consummation of the Sacred Species must be followed in every celebration of the Eucharist. The priest is to consume the Body and Blood of Christ as soon as he has said the respective prayers, and he must do so prior to distributing the Sacred Species to the communicants. The communicants are to consume the Body and Blood of Christ as soon as the host or the chalice is placed in their hands. There is to be no delay.

I understand that it may take some time to rearrange Mass schedules in order to celebrate at a consecrated altar. In light of that reality, I will allow for a period of two weeks to adjust to this norm. That is to say that I expect all Masses to take place at a consecrated altar or in an approved chapel by the 5th Sunday of Lent.

Regarding the norms concerning the reception of the Eucharist, these take effect immediately, that is, by the 4th Sunday of Lent.

May the Lord Jesus, our Savior and King, cause His peace to reign over us! May Santa Marian Kamalen intercede for us! And may the Holy Spirit flood our hearts with the grace of conversion!

Si Yu'os ma'ase for your prayers and faithful cooperation.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael J. Byrnes", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Most Rev. Michael J. Byrnes
Archbishop of Agaña