



EXTRAORDINARY
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Low Allergen/Gluten-Free Communion:

Safety and Community

General Principle: Some people with food allergies, celiac, and other food-triggered disabilities are sensitive enough to gluten or other bread ingredients that an invisible residue is enough to provoke a serious medical event- even inhaling bread vapors cooking has provoked some reactions. For many people with celiac disease or food allergies, in order to stay safer and healthier, the rule is “if in doubt, go without” because the risks in accidentally encountering reactive foods is too high to risk exposure. In addition to keeping people safe from the reactions that we get the specific-food wafers for in the first place, having safe handling procedures also helps people who need them to be able to participate fully and feel confidently physically safe, which adds to the community’s experience of communion with each other through God.

Specific Procedures and Resources

- Make sure wafers are always stored 100% separately in a previously unused plastic ziplock or in a closed (airtight) original container.
- On the altar, the wafers need their own container, preferably covered. When gathered this way they become unsafe for the people who need them, defeating the purpose, risking medical crisis, and furthering division in the community. While the idea of sharing one loaf in unity is a strong metaphor, it is diminished if the community is unable to commune together. Optionally, everyone could together use the safer option (unless there are conflicting food access needs).
- The person setting up should wash hands before touching the wafers, and handle them as little as possible.
- If a wafer should fall on a service like a table or floor, don’t use it or set it with wafers that will be used. While waste should certainly not be



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encouraged, the risk of invisible food proteins around other foods is very high.

- The wafer distributor should be a person with recently washed hands distributing, who has not touched the bread. If there are not enough assistants, someone can carefully hold the wafer vessel and individuals can take the wafers.
- Unused wafers should not be returned with the fresh wafers.
- Publish in your bulletin, website, and announce that you have safer wafers so that people who need it know. If possible, publish what brand you are using so that people can research if it is safe for their particular needs, and you can also add "if this brand is not safe for you, let us know and we can find a substitute" (see below for resources)
- Keep the original packaging with the current ingredient list and list of excluded ingredients. Many people will need to see this in order to determine if the substitute is safe for them. Remember that gluten is only one potentially problematic ingredient, and any food can be a problem (although some are more common than others). I recommend keeping the actual package each time, because ingredients and warnings often change.
- If there is a mess up in the process, it is best to announce or not serve GF, because at least then people can make informed decisions about their own safety. For example, "We usually serve these wafers as gluten-free and low allergen, but I am noticing today that they are sitting on the wheat bread. Because they now have wheat on them, we cannot use them safely. Could an assistant please bring the box of new wafers to the front now for those who need them?"

Weigh the small risk of embarrassment against the risk of serious medical reactions (as well as the likely outcome of losing the trust of people attending whether or not a reaction occurs).



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- Always announce and print any changes to brands or ingredients of low-allergen supplies. Also, announce changes, variations, or unexpected ingredients (such as olives or nuts in regular bread or substitution of a different juice for grape juice). People may not have informed you of needs if it appeared that they can take care of it without extra information, but unexpected substitutions could be dangerous.
- Theologically, it is appropriate to remind people that Christ is carried in either element, both elements, and alternatives. Many people/traditions worry about that if they do not take the bread and wine, then communion might not be valid. Since Lutherans do not generally hold this view, it can be liberating to hear it.

Resources

-ELM Diversity and Inclusion Ellipse, contact Jay Wilson

-Article and resources for gluten-free

<http://www.enabling.org/ia/ceciac/communion.html>

-Main source of gluten-free/low allergen wafers is Ener-G brand, which is available from Augsburg, Cokesbury, and direct from Ener-G:

<http://www.ener-g.com/store/detail.aspx?section=15&cat=15&id=21>

Note: These are very good for a number of the most common problematic foods, but not universally safe. Some people may have other specific allergies.

-Other options that may work:

-If you have particular people in a closed event, you could get a list of specifics to avoid and also what specific products are safer for the individuals, and pick from the list.

-Plain brown rice cakes (with no other ingredients) are a relatively safer alternative. Some people do react to rice.

-Plain rice crackers (without sesame or soy) are another lower-risk option, such as Sesmark gluten-free Brown Rice Thins

-If someone does need a gluten-free and rice-free host, if they can tolerate corn a corn could be used. Note that corn is an allergen for some. If not an option, ask the person for a suggestion of what grain-like substitute could work.

-DO NOT use the Catholic low-gluten wafers. The de-glutened wheat starch is still allergenic to people with wheat allergy.

http://www.benedictinesisters.org/bread/low_gluten.php