530.8 RECEPTION OF HOLY COMMUNION BY NON-CATHOLIC STUDENTS

Revised April 2001

Introduction:

The Catholic School seeks to become a genuine "community of faith". The celebration of the Eucharist by staff and pupils is of pre-eminent importance - both as an expression of oneness in faith, and as the chief means by which they grow into a community loving Christ in all they do.

It is in the celebration of Eucharist, however, that a particular problem arises and the reality of the division between Christians must be faced.

The clear Catholic position is that the Eucharist is "an action of the celebrating community, carried out within the community, signifying the oneness in faith, worship and life of the community. Where this unity of sacramental faith is deficient, the participation of Christians of other denominations with Catholics especially in the Sacraments of Eucharist, Penance and anointing of the sick is forbidden. (Directory on Ecumenism, No. 55).

Guidelines:

1. The school, in enrolling non-Catholic pupils, is always respectful of their differing traditions or worship and belief. It takes care never to do or require anything of them that compromises their faith.

2. The teacher has a responsibility to instruct pupils clearly in the Catholic position concerning Eucharist inter-communion. This is done with pastoral sensitivity, taking care to offer individual explanation to non-Catholic pupils as required. Instruction is in accordance with the pupils' age; in Religious Education classes it occurs within the context of a broader consideration of ecumenism.

3. The teacher has a further responsibility in organising school and class liturgies to ensure that the church's discipline concerning Eucharist sharing is respected.

4. At no time is there compulsion for non-Catholic students to attend Mass.

5. Where the inability of non-Catholic students to receive Holy Communion is likely to cause a hurt they are not ready to cope with, or is likely to result in unauthorised reception of the sacrament from peer pressure, the teacher
prudently considers advising such non-Catholics not to attend the Mass. This also applies where students have not yet been adequately instructed in the matter.

6. When the teacher becomes aware of a non-Catholic students approaching Holy Communion contrary to the norms outlined, no action is taken that would embarrass the student or infringe upon his/her personal freedom. However, the matter is discussed in a sensitive manner with the student at an appropriate time.

7. Particularly in secondary schools the whole practice of Eucharist reception by students is regularly reviewed by staff. There is a serious inconsistency in refusing Communion to non-Catholics whose faith leads them to seek it, whilst allowing a situation to develop in which many Catholic students may approach the altar out of routine or with an unformed faith: an inconsistency that should be resolved by encouraging only properly disposed reception by Catholics.

8. As a general norm, attendance at Mass in secondary schools is always voluntary. The Eucharist is always celebrated purposefully and with careful preparation, and never routinely.

9. The Directory on Ecumenism (para 55) recognises certain circumstances in which the reception of Holy Communion by non-Catholics might be allowed. If the Principal determines that such circumstances might exist in a particular case, he/she approaches the Archbishop.