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## Archdiocese of Baltimore Wine for the Celebration of Eucharist

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This is an official response to queries regarding the proper wine to be used at the celebration of Mass, so-called “sacramental” wine and the requirement that it be free of additives.

Wine used for Mass need not be so-called sacramental wine. The labeling of a wine as “sacramental” or “altar” wine is a marketing strategy similar to that of “organic.” Any good house wine is fine, and it may be white or red. The general consensus is that most people prefer a wine that is a bit sweet or fruity. There are many wines available in boxes or cubitainers, which have the advantage of lasting several weeks after opening because air is expelled and spoiling is retarded.

The *Code of Canon Law* Canon 924 §3 states, “The wine must be natural from the fruit of the vine and not be spoiled.” The commentary quotes the GIRM (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*) which states that the wine should be natural and pure, i.e., not mixed with any foreign substance. Therefore it is clear that it may not contain unapproved additives or foreign matter, nor may it be corrupt.

Substances that assist in making sound wine and that remain in the wine in minute traces, such as sulfites, have been and are considered by canonists and theologians to be acceptable for the Eucharist. One such approval, as reported in the *Sacramentary*, was the Holy Office Decree of 2nd August, 1922 (to refer to an old document). See also E. Regatillo, *Ius Sacramentarium*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 1960.

Sulfites in wine are nothing new since they occur naturally. The yeast cells during fermentation produce a small amount of sulfites and the better winemakers have made tiny additions of sulfites for many centuries. The Greeks and Romans used sulfur candles to sterilize wine barrels. So this is nothing new. This miniscule amount of added sulfites acts as an anti-oxidant and as a yeast inhibitor which preserves the natural good condition of the wine and retards spoilage. For the information and protection of those few people who are extremely sensitive or allergic to sulfites, U.S. Federal Law, for some time now, requires that wine containing (10) or more parts per million of sulfites be labeled “contains sulfites”. This labeling requirement is mandatory for all wines produced in the U.S. The wines are the same as they were before such labeling was required.

In order to find a no sulfite-added wine you would have to go to a health food shop. There are virtually none on the market because wine without sulfites spoils quickly and frequently has off flavors. So, pure liturgical wine for the liturgy is definitely going to have sulfites and almost certainly have sulfites added. Sulfite, therefore, is an “approved” additive.

The finer the quality of wine the better it is, especially when one considers that this will become the Body and Blood of Christ!

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