

EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION GUIDELINES

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In 2002 and 2003 two important new documents dealing with the celebration of the liturgy were promulgated: *The Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States* and the revised *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*. The following guidelines serve to bring the practices of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion in the Diocese of Owensboro into accord with these two new documents.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the past few decades, the faithful of the church have witnessed a variety of changes in the area of our worship together. Of these, the decision to allow lay women and men to assist in administering communion stands out to many as a chief example of the spirit of renewal which inspired these changes. In the institution of this ministry, we have a powerful and symbolic recognition that all the faithful, by the grace of baptism, are recognized as God's holy people, called to minister to one another as the Body of Christ enfleshed.

The permission for this ministry, given in 1969 by Pope Paul VI, was implemented by the instruction aptly entitled *Immensae Caritatis* – “Immense Love”. From the instruction we read:

Christ the Lord has left to the Church, his spouse, a testament of this immense love. This wonderful gift of the Eucharist, which is the greatest gift of all, demands that such an important mystery would be increasingly known and its saving power more fully shared. . . . Present day conditions demand that, while the utmost reverence owing to such a Sacrament is maintained, greater access to Holy Communion should be made possible so that the faithful, by sharing more fully in the fruits of the sacrifice of the Mass, might dedicate themselves more readily and effectively to God and to the good of the Church and of humankind.

This instruction reflects a growing awareness on the part of the Church for the importance of communion in the life of the faithful believer. Since the early part of the 20th century, when Pope Pius X gave instruction that the faithful might receive communion frequently and at an early age (1905, 1910), large numbers of persons have come forward for communion at liturgy, and those who are sick or confined feel a special need for the comfort of this sacrament. In addition, the action taken by Pius XII to revise the

Eucharistic fast regulations, and the permission granted by Paul VI to restore the ancient practice of communion under forms of both bread and wine have made necessary additional ministers. The ministry of the Eucharistic minister thus came about as a direct result of the great reverence and hunger Catholics feel for the Eucharist, and their desire to receive it frequently.

II. SELECTION

The persons selected for the role of service as Eucharistic Ministers should be fully initiated, mature, members of the Church, who have by their actual Christian living shown that they have taken their faith seriously. They should embody the Christian life of service, and be willing to grow in their love for the Eucharist. Under normal circumstances, the age of eighteen would seem to be the guide for maturity. However, a one-on-one interview with the person would help to determine maturity of each individual.

No one should be excluded from this ministry because of race or sex, and it is important and desirable that communion ministers are representative of the make up of their parish community as regards age groups, ethnic diversity, and sex.

III. FORMATION

Before being commissioned, a candidate must participate in an approved training program. Communion ministers should also participate in yearly spiritual growth and training programs offered by their parish or the diocese.

A training program might include the following:

1. Reflection on the nature of liturgical ministry, the mystery of the Eucharist and the theology of the Mass.
2. Renewed appreciation of the ritual nature and structure of the Mass, especially the importance and role of the baptized assembly and the multiple liturgical roles within it.
3. The relationship between Communion of the sick and the assembly's celebration

- of the Mass, especially on Sunday.
4. Rehearsal of the practical function of the minister of Communion both at Mass and in visitation of the sick. In addition, where it is necessary for such ministers to lead Communion services outside of Mass or to assist with public Eucharistic adoration, they must be specifically prepared for their role as leader of the community's prayer and in the use of the prescribed ritual.
 5. Spirituality of the liturgical minister.
 6. Ongoing enrichment.

IV. COMMISSIONING

After the completion of the period of formation, persons are called forth in a community celebration (Sunday Eucharist, weekday Eucharist, or liturgy of the Word outside Eucharist) to be commissioned as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion. A rite of commissioning can be found in the *Book of Blessings* (Chapter 63).

In the interest of allowing many willing parishioners to serve in this ministry, it is recommended that a term of service, such as two or three years, be established for Ministers of Communion. At the end of a term, the ministers should be given the option of leaving this ministry or rededication for another term of three years.

V. CLOTHING

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should always dress in a fashion that becomes the dignity of the office they hold and the sacredness of the sacrament they distribute. Good taste and common sense are the best guides in this area. *In the dioceses of the United States of America, acolytes, altar servers, lectors, and other lay ministers may wear the alb or other suitable vesture or other appropriate and dignified clothing* (GIRM 339). Albs are permitted, though not required.

VI. MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION

The priest may be assisted in the distribution of Communion by other priests who happen to be present. If such priests are not present and there is a very large number of communicants, the priest may call upon extraordinary ministers to assist him (GIRM 162).

In every celebration of the Eucharist there should be a sufficient number of ministers for Holy Communion so that it can be distributed in an orderly and reverent manner.
(Norms for Communion 26)

The Eucharistic Minister has a distinct role in the liturgical celebration. Even though the minister may serve in other liturgical ministries, he or she should serve in only one ministry at a particular Mass.

VII. REVERENCE

All ministers of Holy Communion should show the greatest reverence for the Most Holy Eucharist by their demeanor, their attire, and the manner in which they handle the consecrated bread and wine. Norms for Communion, 29

VIII. PROCEDURES AT THE CELEBRATION OF THE EUCHARIST

A. Before the Eucharist

1. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should arrive at least 15 minutes before the Liturgy begins and make their presence known to the presider and/or to the captain of the Communion Ministers for that Mass.
2. The bowl for the hosts and wine pitcher should be filled as needed for that celebration and placed in the area designated for the presentation of the gifts by the faithful.

3. The following should be placed on the credence table: the priest's chalice, purificator, corporal, pall (if necessary), and any extra vessels for communion.
4. Communion Ministers take their seats in the assembly area and participate in the Mass as active members of the assembly.
5. Communion Ministers do not enter in the procession with the other ministers.

B. At the Breaking of the Bread

1. As the Lamb of God is begun, the priest breaks the eucharistic bread (with the assistance of other concelebrating priests, if necessary). The priest places the consecrated bread in several ciboria and pours the Precious Blood into additional chalices. (Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion do not approach the altar at the Lamb of God and do not help with the fraction rite.)
2. The extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion approach the altar as the priest receives Communion.
3. After the priest concludes his own Communion, he distributes Communion to the extraordinary ministers, and then hands them their vessels for the distribution of Holy Communion to the faithful. Communion ministers should not wait until the end of the Communion rite to receive Holy Communion. They themselves should humbly accept the holy gifts of the altar and then, in the Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ, share these gifts with their brothers and sisters. *(The practice of extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion waiting to receive Holy Communion until after the distribution of Holy Communion is not in accord with liturgical law. Norms 39)*

C. Distribution of the Body and Blood of the Lord

1. The Communion ministers go to the assigned places to share the Eucharist with the

assembly.

2. Communion is given with the words *The Body of Christ* or *The Blood of Christ*, without changing or adding words.

When offering the Eucharistic bread:

- a. Reverently hold the bowl or cup (show care for the sacred elements);
- b. Allow the communicant to stand before you and make a bow of the head in reverence to the Lord;
- c. As the communicant steps forward and bows his/her head as a sign of reverence, the minister takes the Sacred Body of Jesus, raises it slightly, and showing it, says, *The Body of Christ*. The individual replies, *Amen*, extends the hand or tongue, and the Host is given accordingly.

Note: The choice of how one receives the Eucharist, whether in the hand or on the tongue, belongs to the communicant.

- d. Show care for these words (addressed to each person, not mumbled, not shouted).
- e. Show care for the gesture (not grandiose or indifferent).
- f. Show care for the communicant (young, old, various abilities).
- g. Be skillful and gracious in giving the Eucharistic bread.

When sharing the chalice of the Lord's Blood:

- a. Gracefully hold the chalice and purificator.
- b. Allow the communicant to stand before you and make the bow of the head to honor the Lord.
- c. Present the chalice with the words, *Blood of Christ*.
- d. Let the communicant take the chalice (helping those who may seem a little unsteady).

- e. Accept the chalice back, wiping it well inside and out, turning the chalice and using different areas of the cloth for wiping.
- f. Refill the chalice if necessary during the rite.
- g. Graciously leave the Communion station if your vessel is empty and is not to be refilled.

D. Completion of the Communion Rite

After the distribution of Communion, whatever remains of the Body and Blood of the Lord is ordinarily taken to the altar. There, the priest reverently consumes what remains of the Blood of Christ. Remaining hosts are also consumed or are taken to the tabernacle. When required, Communion ministers may assist in consuming what remains of the Blood of Christ.

E. Cleansing of Vessels

1. The sacred vessels are purified by the priest, the deacon, or an instituted acolyte.
The purification of the chalice is done with water alone or with wine and water, which is then drunk by whoever does the purification. The paten is usually wiped clean with the purificator.
2. The sacred vessels may be purified right after Communion or they may be taken to the side table, placed on a corporal, and covered with a cloth. They are then purified, normally at the side table, following the dismissal of the people.
3. If the priest purifies the vessels during Mass, he does so at the side of the altar or at the side table. (If purified at the altar, a minister then takes the vessels to the side table.)
4. After Mass, a more thorough washing with hot water and soap and careful drying is recommended. This may be done by the sacristan or by others, always handling the vessels with respect. (It may be helpful to remove any jewelry that may scratch the vessels while cleaning.)

F. Mishaps

If a particle of the Eucharistic bread should fall, it is picked up reverently and consumed or allowed to dissolve completely in water and then poured into the sacrarium. If any of the Precious Blood spills, the area of the spill should be covered if necessary. As soon as possible, the spot should be washed and the water poured into the sacrarium.

IX. EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION FOR THE SICK AND THE HOMEBOUND

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (EMHCs) who take Communion to the sick and homebound have a role in sharing the Church's total ministry to the sick after the manner of Jesus. In bringing Communion to the sick and homebound, the EMHC represents Christ and manifests faith and charity on behalf of the whole community toward those who cannot be present at Sunday Mass. This ministry is a sign of support and concern shown by the community for its members.

The EMHC becomes a vital link between the parish community and the member who is sick or homebound. It is beneficial for visits to the sick and homebound to occur after Sunday Mass so that the link between the parish liturgical celebration and the parishioner is maintained. Taking a parish bulletin also helps maintain that link.

EMHCs do not replace the ministry of the priest to the people, but rather extend and expand it so that all will have more regular contact with Christ in Holy Communion. EMHCs who minister to the sick and homebound should be empathic and compassionate. They should be sensitive to the sick and homebound person's needs including the spiritual, emotional, and material. They should always take care to maintain the confidentiality and dignity of the individual. They should also maintain contact with the pastor and inform him if the person is in need of sacramental anointing, the sacrament of reconciliation, or a pastoral visit. In addition, if EMHCs

observe a particular physical or social need of a homebound person, they should bring this need to the attention of the pastor as well so that the parish may respond appropriately.

The Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion may be called forward after the Communion Rite at Mass, receive the pyx containing host(s), and be sent from the church or chapel with a blessing. The formula for the ritual ending may be in these or similar words:

“My brothers and sisters, you are sent to bring the Word of God and the Bread of Life from this assembly to the sick and shut-in members of our parish family. Go to them with our love and our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ the Lord”. (The prayers after communion follow.)

The Extraordinary Minister will then proceed directly from the church or chapel to the place where Communion is to be distributed.

When the Extraordinary Minister gives Communion outside of Mass to persons who are sick, he or she uses the Rite of Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass.

This rite is found in various publications, including:

- a) ***Pastoral Care of the Sick***
- b) ***A Ritual for Laypersons***

The minister to the sick may celebrate the Communion service in one of two ways:

- a) in context of a liturgy of the Word; or
- b) in a brief form for use in more restrictive circumstances (such as hospitals, etc.)

It is recommended that whenever possible a group of sick or aged persons be brought together to celebrate the liturgy of the Word and the Communion Service in a communal manner. If this is impossible, the minister should try to celebrate the Communion Service as fully as possible, depending on the condition of the patient.

When the Eucharist is brought to the sick it should be carried in a pyx. Ideally, a table is to be prepared with a cloth and a lighted candle for the Eucharist.

Those who care for the sick or family members may also participate in the Communion Service and receive Communion even if they have already received Communion for that day.

Priests with pastoral responsibilities should also see to it that the sick who are confined to home or health care institutions have the Sacrament of Penance available. Ministers to the sick should routinely remind those to whom they minister of such availability.

The extraordinary minister of Holy Communion is always to exercise his/her service with the reverence and deportment expected in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. The words, actions and presence of the minister carrying the consecrated Bread should clearly reflect the words, actions and presence of Christ.

Care should be taken to bring only the amount of hosts needed for distribution. Any remaining hosts are to be returned directly to a tabernacle. If this is not possible, then the remaining hosts are to be consumed by the Extraordinary Minister. Hosts are not to be kept in a house, in a car or on one's person.

The pyx should be kept in a safe and respectful place when not in use. The minister should bring the pyx to the community's celebration of Eucharist on the day of visiting the sick. When a minister no longer needs the pyx, it is returned to the parish office or the pastor.