

GUIDELINES FOR EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION

Diocese of St. Petersburg

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INTRODUCTION

“The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her powers flows” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10).

While the Eucharistic Prayer constitutes the heart of the celebration of Mass, the consummation of the liturgy is found in Holy Communion. In the great sacrament of the altar, the faithful are joined to Christ Jesus and to one another.¹

If a large number of the faithful are present, the main celebrant may require assistance in distributing Holy Communion so that the Communion Rite is not unduly long. This assistance may become even more necessary when Holy Communion is offered under both species (the form of Communion that more clearly signifies the eucharistic banquet).² To that end, priests and deacons assist as **Ordinary Ministers** of Holy Communion; a duly instituted acolyte or another member of the faithful who has been entrusted with the duty of assisting in the distribution of Holy Communion acts as an **Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion (EMHC)**.³

These individuals serve Christ (present in the assembly) by administering his Body and Blood to their brothers and sisters. They also serve the Body of Christ by taking Holy Communion to those members who — through sickness, old age, or other causes — are prevented from physical attendance at Mass. For these members of the faithful, Holy Communion should be taken directly from the Sunday Eucharist to the sick and homebound in accord with a most ancient tradition.

¹ *Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America [NDRHC]*, 5.

² *GIRM*, 281-282.

³ *GIRM*, 162 & 284a and *NDRHC*, 28.

DIOCESAN GUIDELINES

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* indicates that the diocesan Bishop is to establish guidelines for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion and, additionally, those pertaining to the distribution of Holy Communion under both kinds.⁴

For the last several years, the Bishop of the Diocese of St. Petersburg has requested that parishes discern the appropriateness of offering Holy Communion under both species and offer requisite education and formation regarding the Eucharist and distribution of Holy Communion.⁵

PREREQUISITES FOR EXERCISING THE MINISTRY

The man or woman who desires to exercise the ministry of Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion should meet the following prerequisites:

1. Full initiation as a member of the Roman Catholic Church
2. Attainment of sufficient age and maturity
3. Exercise of maturity in those situations, when applicable, in which he/she will bring Holy Communion to the sick and homebound⁶
4. Demonstration of the theological virtues (faith, hope and charity) and cardinal virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance) through his/her manner of life
5. Willingness to be formed in the ministry of the Church
6. Abiding reverence for the presence of Christ in the Eucharistic elements

INITIAL TRAINING

Preparation for this ministry occurs on both a diocesan and a parish level, as follows:

1. **Diocesan:** Formal instruction through the Office of Worship includes trainings for parish liturgical coordinators and the publication of general diocesan guidelines.
2. **Parish:** Formation at the parish level regarding local customs and responsibilities; these may also include the opportunity to pray and share with others in the ministry.

⁴ *GIRM*, 283.

⁵ *NDRHC*, 26 & 28.

⁶ Ministers who bring Holy Communion to the sick and/or homebound are to comply with the prescribed parish and diocesan Safe Environment policies regarding volunteer forms and background checks in order to ensure the safety and protection of both the sick person as well as the minister.

After preparation for this ministry is completed, a formal commissioning of EMHCs should take place at a parish Mass. The “Order for the Commissioning of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion” can be found in the *BOOK OF BLESSINGS*, chapter 63.

ONGOING FORMATION

The Diocese of St. Petersburg recommends on-going formational experiences for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion on a regular basis. Each parish should have in place a continuous training program which includes education, formation, and support.⁷ Furthermore, opportunities for reflection on the Eucharist’s place in the minister’s life should take place annually or perhaps even seasonally, such as in Advent or Lent. It is important that each parish keep accurate records of each extraordinary minister’s ongoing formation and renewal of his/her term of service.

LENGTH OF SERVICE

Since the foundation of every ministry involves a twofold call from God and the community, each parish should discern and establish terms of service so that Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are commissioned for a specific period of time. This permits ministers, in discernment with the parish community, to evaluate their involvement and presents them with the opportunity to pursue other ministries at the end of each term. A process of re-certification and re-commissioning of EMHCs depends on parish policy.

As with all liturgical ministries, ideally an individual is to serve in only one ministry at any given liturgy. To encourage the involvement of a variety of persons in this ministry, parishes may wish to limit a person’s formal service to one liturgical ministry.

PROCEDURAL NORMS

A. Reverence and Attire

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion must show a reverence for the Eucharist as reflected by their demeanor at Mass (full, active, and conscious participation in the liturgy), their attire, and the manner in which they handle the Eucharist.⁸

⁷ *NDRHC*, 28.

⁸ cf. *SC*, 14 and *NDRHC*, 29.

A neat and reverential appearance is in keeping with the role of an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion and their belief in the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. In the Diocese of St. Petersburg, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should not wear any special liturgical garb or symbols. They should ensure their hands are clean and also refrain from using strong cologne, perfume, or aftershave (as these scents may aggravate nasal sensitivities and furthermore because fragrances often remain on one's hands and can be transferred to the Eucharist species).

B. Before the Liturgy

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should arrive at their parish well before the liturgy begins and follow their parish's check-in procedure. They should sit among the congregation to demonstrate their coming forth from and returning to the assembly at the conclusion of service. Their inclusion in opening or closing processions is not appropriate.

For Sacristans:

Care should be taken so that enough bread and wine are consecrated for the faithful attending each Mass without a large amount of consecrated Hosts or Precious Blood left over. "It is most desirable that the faithful, just as the priest himself is bound to do, receive the Lord's Body from hosts consecrated at the same Mass" (*GIRM*, 85) rather than from Hosts reserved in the tabernacle.

A flagon and one large paten or bowl can signify the one bread and one cup by which we are gathered into the "one Body of Christ, a living sacrifice of praise" (*NDRHC*, 32). These are brought forward during the Preparation of the Altar (Offertory). The wine may be poured into chalices during the Preparation of the Altar or the chalices may be filled with wine prior to the commencement of the liturgy. Other ciboria needed for the Communion Rite may be placed on the altar during the Fraction Rite.

If there is a considerable number of faithful at any given liturgy, a single large host may be used for the Fraction Rite with other small hosts provided for the faithful. However, the unity of all is best expressed when the one bread to be broken is of sufficient size that at least some of the faithful receive a fragment broken from it (*NDRHC*, 33 and *GIRM*, 321).

C. Procedures for Distribution

According to the document *Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America* (*NDRHC*), the priest breaks the Eucharist as the *Lamb of God* is sung or recited.

At the same time, other ciboria needed for the distribution of Holy Communion may be brought to the altar. At the altar, the priest or deacon places the consecrated Hosts into the ciboria for distribution. In order to expedite this process, the celebrant may utilize the assistance of deacons or concelebrating priests. Ideally, Communion should not be distributed from ciboria

which have been reserved in the tabernacle. As a general rule, enough bread and wine for those assembled should be prepared for each Mass.⁹

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion approach the altar as the priest receives Holy Communion. Local custom determines where they stand and wait.

After the priest has received Holy Communion, the Eucharist is then distributed and received according to the sequence described in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*:

1. Priest concelebrants (GIRM, 159, 242-244, 246)
2. Deacons (GIRM, 182, 244, 246)
3. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (GIRM, 284)

Note: *deacons and lay ministers must receive Holy Communion; they may not self-communicate in the manner of a concelebrating priest. Also, the practice of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion waiting to receive Communion until after the distribution of Holy Communion to the assembly is not in accord with liturgical custom.*¹⁰

After the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion have received Communion, the celebrant then hands the sacred vessels to them for distribution of Holy Communion to the assembly.¹¹ The deacon may assist the celebrant in this.¹²

With sacred vessels in hand, the celebrant and other ministers go to their assigned stations for distribution of Holy Communion. All who present themselves should be given Holy Communion; if there is a question of propriety or scandal, the minister should offer Holy Communion and speak to the pastor after Mass.

When Holy Communion is offered under both kinds, the chalice is always to be administered by an Ordinary Minister (priest or deacon) or Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion; a chalice is never to be left on the altar for “self-communication” by the assembly.¹³ Each communicant may decide if he or she wishes to receive the Precious Blood, always recalling the Church’s teaching that the entirety of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ is contained in even the smallest piece of a consecrated Host (concomitance).

D. Appropriate Gestures before Receiving Holy Communion

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* indicates that the faithful are to make a sign of reverence before receiving Holy Communion.¹⁴ This gesture expresses our reverence and honor

⁹ GIRM, 85; NDRHC, 30 and *Eucharisticum Mysterium*, 31.

¹⁰ NDRHC, 39.

¹¹ NDRHC, 38.

¹² NDRHC, 40.

¹³ GIRM, 160; NDRHC, 44 & 50.

¹⁴ GIRM, 160.

to Christ who comes to us as spiritual food. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has determined that:

- Prior to receiving Holy Communion, the communicant bows his/her head before the sacrament as a gesture of reverence.
- When Communion is received under both kinds, this sign of reverence is repeated before receiving the Precious Blood.

E. Giving the Body of Christ

In presenting Holy Communion, the minister holds a host slightly above the vessel, looks at the communicant, and says in a clear voice: “*The Body of Christ.*” This invitation **must never** be narrowed, expanded, or changed in any way. The communicant responds: “*Amen.*” The minister then gives Communion, respecting the option of the communicant to receive either in the palm of the hand or on the tongue.¹⁵

F. Giving the Blood of Christ

In administering the Precious Blood, the minister holds the chalice up slightly, looks at the communicant, and says in a clear voice: “*The Blood of Christ.*” This invitation **must never** be narrowed, expanded, or changed in any way. The communicant responds: “*Amen.*” The minister then presents the chalice to the communicant who takes it entirely into his/her hands, drinks from it, and returns it to the minister. Then the minister wipes the rim of the cup with the purificator, gives the cup a quarter turn, and offers it to the next communicant.¹⁶

Receiving the Precious Blood is always the choice of the communicant (not the minister), recalling, as mentioned above, the fact that the entirety of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ is contained in even the smallest piece of a consecrated Host.¹⁷

Children are encouraged to receive Communion under both kinds, always taking direction from their parents about receiving the Precious Blood from the chalice. As with adults, they should be properly instructed.¹⁸

G. Intinction

Although described in the *Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America*, the practice of receiving Communion by intinction has been discouraged in the Diocese of St. Petersburg. This practice demands the use of extra vessels and care, and limits one’s ability to receive in the hand.¹⁹

¹⁵ GIRM, 161, 284-287.

¹⁶ GIRM, 161, 284-287; NDRHC, 43 & 45.

¹⁷ NDRHC, 46.

¹⁸ NDRHC, 47.

¹⁹ NDRHC, 49.

If an accident occurs ... don't panic!

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* states: "If a host or any particle should fall, it is to be picked up reverently. If any of the Precious Blood is spilled, the area where the spill occurred should be washed with water, and this water should then be poured into the sacrarium in the sacristy."

With the Body of Christ:

If a consecrated Host is dropped, an Extraordinary Minister should immediately and reverently pick up the Host and either:

1. bring the dropped Host to the altar and place it on the corporal
2. hold the host in the same hand as the vessel until distribution is finished (after, the Host may be given to the celebrant or brought to the sacristy where it may be completely dissolved in a bowl of water which is then poured into the sacrarium)

A dropped Host should never be:

1. replaced in the vessel
2. given to the next communicant
3. immediately consumed by the Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion

With the Precious Blood:

The communicant(s) should be instructed to proceed to another minister of the chalice. Then, the minister should cover the spillage with a purificator, seeking to clean up the space as best as possible. After Mass, the area should be washed with a clean purificator soaked in water; clean (damp) towels should be used for a larger area. These cloths are then soaked in water and wrung into the sacrarium before washing.

H. Blessings

In the United States, sometimes those who are either uninitiated as Catholics or indisposed to receive Holy Communion approach a minister with arms crossed to receive a blessing. An Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion cannot bless people with the consecrated host or by making the sign of the cross over the individual; rather, the EMHC should simply say (without touching the person) "*May God bless you*" and then move on to the next person in line.

I. Purification of Sacred Vessels

After the distribution of Holy Communion, any remaining consecrated Hosts are to be consumed or reserved in the tabernacle for the sick.²⁰

²⁰ NDRHC, 51 and the *Code of Canon Law*, 939).

If any Precious Blood remains, the priest, deacon, and/or EMHCs consumes what remains either immediately after the final communicant or at a side table.²¹ The reverence due to the Precious Blood demands that it be fully consumed after the Communion Rite and **never** be poured into the ground or the sacrarium.²²

The chalice and other vessels used for the distribution of Holy Communion may be purified at the altar or taken to a side table to be purified. Provided that the remaining Precious Blood has been consumed and the remaining Hosts have likewise been consumed or reserved in the tabernacle, the vessels may be set at a side table (suitably veiled and on a corporal) and purified after Mass.²³

The Precious Blood may only be reserved for the sick in the rarest of occasions and at the discretion of the priest. Precious Blood reserved for the sick should be contained in a vessel closed in such a way as to eliminate all danger of spilling.²⁴

MINISTRY TO THE SICK AND HOMEBOUND

When members of the Body of Christ are unable to celebrate fully at Sunday Mass due to sickness or advanced age, the entire community should be informed so that prayers and works of charity can be done on their behalf. The Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion becomes a vital link between the parish community and each homebound or hospitalized member. **NOTE: All EMHCs to the sick and homebound are to complete level-two background screening (which includes fingerprinting) and must complete the Diocesan Safe Environment Program for EMHC to the Sick/Homebound & Pastoral Care Providers.**

An Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion to the sick and homebound should be empathetic and compassionate, and should show sensitivity to the communicant's spiritual, emotional, and material needs while always upholding the individual's dignity and confidentiality. If the homebound or hospitalized individual is in need of a pastoral visit for the sacraments of Reconciliation and/or Anointing of the Sick, the EMHC should inform parish staff.

Visits to the sick and homebound should occur, as much as possible, immediately after a Sunday Mass to manifest their link to the parish celebration. The same is true following weekday Mass (provided the parish has enough ministers). Whenever Holy Communion is brought from a Mass to the sick or homebound, the appropriate moment for a deacon, acolyte, or extraordinary minister to depart with Holy Communion is at the end of the Communion Rite.

²¹ GIRM, 182; NDRHC, 52.

²² NDRHC, 55.

²³ GIRM, 183; NDRHC, 53.

²⁴ NDRHC, 54.

BRINGING COMMUNION TO THE SICK & HOMEBOUND

Do:

1. Make an appointment to visit. Ask how the person is feeling and if others will be present. Also ask if a table with a cloth, candle, cross or crucifix might be prepared.
2. Use Chapter 3 of the ritual “Communion of the Sick” from *Pastoral Care of the Sick* and bring a missalette or Bible to read the day’s scripture readings.
3. Begin informally. Introduce yourself to those who are present and briefly explain what you have come to do. Pay attention to how the sick/homebound person is feeling.
4. Invite those who are present to participate in the prayers. If they feel comfortable, enlist the help of family or friends to offer the readings.
5. Share with him/her the day’s homily.
6. Have a cup of water ready if the person has difficulty swallowing.
7. Maintain their connection to the parish: bring a bulletin, share news from the parish, ask if there is any way the parish can further support him/her.
8. Thank the person for the hospitality and opportunity to pray together.
9. Return any unconsumed hosts to your parish’s tabernacle immediately after your visit.

Don’t:

1. *Don’t* visit a sick person if you are not feeling well yourself.
2. *Don’t* stay too long or take the role of a counselor or confidant.
3. *Don’t* compete with a television or radio; politely ask if these can be turned off during your visit.
4. *Don’t* carry the consecrated host in a plastic bag or other unsuitable container; always use a pyx.
5. *Don’t* leave the consecrated host if the person cannot receive it; instead, return at a later date if the sick person may be able to receive Holy Communion in the future.