

Guidelines for the Distribution of Holy Communion in the Hospital, Extended Care Facility or Nursing Home Setting



The Catholic Diocese of Columbus
Office for Divine Worship
197 E. Gay Street
Columbus, OH 43215

Phone: 614 221-4640

Fax: 614 241-2513

E-mail:

LITMAILBOX@columbuscatholic.org



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Guidelines continued:

- Some individuals may only be able to receive a small piece of the Host. It is OK to break off a small piece and give it to them.
- You may offer water to moisten the mouth either before or after giving Communion.
- In the hospital or other health care facilities, it is appropriate to follow an abbreviated version of the Communion Rite. The Diocese has Ritual Cards available as pocket cards.
- If a patient is unable to receive Holy Communion offer to pray the prayer of Spiritual Communion with him/her. An appropriate prayer is available on the other side of the Ritual cards.
- Under no circumstances are you to “bless” anyone by making the Sign of the Cross in the air. It is appropriate to join the patient in blessing his/her self by making the Sign of the Cross on yourself.
- After the patient receives, you may offer Communion to any Catholic in the room who desires to receive. If a non-Catholic requests Communion for you, *gently* explain to them of your inability to give the Body of Christ to non-Catholics.
- **Do not, under any circumstances, consume a Host after it has been given to a patient or dropped on the floor.** Please take it and wrap it in a piece of tissue and place it in a plastic bag. Take the Host to the chapel and place it in warm water to dissolve it. Pour the liquid down the Sacramentarium (a sink that goes straight down to the ground; many Catholic hospitals have this, secular or others will not) or on the outside grounds away from direct traffic. This act maintains the reverence due to the Blessed Sacrament and allows for hospital safety regulations to be followed. It is good practice to have a protocol that addresses this need that is appropriate to your facility.
- Return all unconsumed Hosts to the tabernacle if the hospital/facility has one, or consume the remaining Hosts yourself.

The ministry of bringing Holy Communion to the sick is a venerable practice that can be dated to the early Church. The very practice of reserving the Eucharistic Bread stemmed from the Church's desire to share the Body of Christ with those members who were too ill to be present at a liturgical gathering. Then, as is now, it remains as a sign of unity with our brothers and sisters in faith.

[A Specialized Ministry](#)

The initial training for an Extra-Ordinary Minister of the Eucharist is parish based, focusing on the distribution of the Body and Blood of Christ during the Liturgy. For those, who wish to bring Communion to the sick on behalf of their parish, the focus is ministering in the home. Often people who have served for many years in these environments become initially overwhelmed when they minister to the sick in an institutional health setting.

Distributing Holy Communion within the hospital, extended care facility or nursing home is different than doing so in church or even at home. The hospital is a highly regulated environment with standards that are monitored very closely by various accreditation agencies (e.g.: The Joint Commission and the Ohio board of Health). Those individuals charged with bringing the Body and Blood of Christ to the faithful in the hospital must be able to accommodate both the reverence for our Eucharistic Lord and the practices and norms of hospital policies and procedures, especially those related to infection control and safety. This can be difficult, but not impossible and it must be attended to in order to provide a safe environment for both the patient and the minister.

To assist you in this important ministry, the Diocese has

prepared this brochure of information and guidelines.



Remember... The ministry which you have been called to is the central mystery of our faith. Christ himself has called you to bring His precious Body and Blood to the sick. This is both a gift and an awesome responsibility, one that should never become routine.

[DIOCESAN GUIDELINES:](#)

- Prepare yourself spiritually before visiting patients. Take time to recollect yourself in prayer. Ask the Lord to guide you as you bring Him to the sick.
- Bring enough Hosts to cover all the patients on your list. You may wish to bring a few extra for guests in the patient's room. Hosts should be placed in a pyx and carried close to the body.

- Know and follow the policies regarding hand washing, isolation patients, and other infectious control and safety regulations for the facility you minister at. **It is necessary to use a hand sanitizer between visits.** Most facilities have these routinely available on the units.
- Check with the nurse to ensure a patient may receive the Eucharist if you have questions. Some physicians do not want their patients to receive anything by mouth (NPO) prior to procedures.
- The one hour fast before receiving Communion is dispensed with for the sick and for those who care for them (Canon 935).
- Introduce yourself and your purpose. Be polite, smile. Remember you are representing Christ and His Church. Adjust your conversation according to the need of the person you are visiting.