Guidelines for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

“The Eucharist is our most precious treasure...it contains all the mystery of salvation.”

Pope Benedict XVI
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diocesan Guidelines for the Selection of Candidates</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion at Mass</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedural Guidelines</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedural Guidelines continued</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribution Procedures</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribution Procedures continued</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to the Sick &amp; Homebound</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedural Guidelines</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedural Guidelines continued</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayer for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix Content Page</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix Materials</td>
<td>13-21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

For Catholics, the Mass is the heart of our faith; a celebration of the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ. The Vatican II document “Sacrosanctum Concilium” (The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy) describes the Mass as: “the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time, it is the fount from which all the Church’s power flows (SC, no. 10).” In short, it is the source and the summit of Christian life and prayer.

The heart of the Mass is the Eucharistic Prayer, the memorialization of Jesus’ command at the Last Supper to “Do this in memory of me.” Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the bread and the wine become the Body and Blood of Jesus, and Christ’s promise to remain with His Church becomes a tangible reality. Every time Catholics gather together at Mass and receive the Body and Blood of Christ, they are joined together as members of Christ’s mystical Body, sharing the one life of the Spirit. It is in the great Sacrament of the altar that we are joined to Christ Jesus and to one another (Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America [NDRHC], no. 5).

Throughout our life, God sends invitations to each of us to share our gifts with the Church and the community. You have received the great privilege of being called and commissioned to distribute the Body and Blood of Christ at Mass when needed, and to bring Him to the sick and home-bound of your parish. Thank you for hearing and responding to God’s call!

Genuine ministry is about humble service. The model for all ministry is Jesus Christ, who came to serve, not to be served. His command to “love one another” (cf. John 13:43) was modeled throughout his life and ministry. He is asking you to do the same, to put aside personal agendas and needs, prejudices and judgments in order to serve the community and give faithful testimony to His enduring presence in the Eucharist.

These guidelines are meant to assist you in this ministry of service and love. They are meant to give you the necessary directives to perform your ministry properly, and to assist you with any questions you may have. As an Extraordinary Minister of the Eucharist, you are called to strengthen your love and devotion to our Eucharistic Lord. May the Holy Communion you receive and give transform you to be an agent of grace and healing within your parish community. Ponder upon this mystery you are called to participate in and “let Jesus, present in the Blessed Sacrament, speak to your hearts. It is he who is the true answer of life that you seek (and share).” St. Pope John Paul II
Diocesan Guidelines for the Selection of Candidates

1) Candidates for commissioning as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion must be fully initiated into the Church (be baptized, received Holy Communion, and be confirmed) and must be living a life according to the teachings of the Catholic Church.

2) The minimum age for an individual aspiring to be an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion is 16 years old.

3) Those participating in service to the sick, whether at home or in the hospital should be mature adults.

4) Each parish should have in place a continuous training program for those who serve in this ministry. That training should include: education, formation and support (NDRHCI, no. 28).

5) As with all liturgical ministries, it is best for the individual and the parish if a person serves in only one ministry at any given liturgy. This is important in order to encourage the involvement of a variety of persons in this parish and to prevent any individual from “taking ownership” in participation.

6) Candidates should be commissioned for a period of no less than 2 years and no more than 4. After the Commissioning ceremony takes place in the parish, the pastor must send the names of the individuals to the Bishop’s Office. The Office for Divine Worship has a formal certificate located on the website that should be downloaded and issued to each person testifying to their Certification and commissioning period.

7) After preparation for this ministry is completed, formal commissioning of the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should take place at a parish weekend Mass. An “Order for the Commissioning of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion” can be found in the Book of Blessings, chapter 63.

8) Commissioned persons should be encouraged to participate in ongoing formation. Parishes are encouraged to work with the Office for Divine Worship to assist with opportunities for reflection on the Eucharist, its place in the minister's life and this particular ministry. Events like this should take place at least once a year or seasonally (i.e. Advent and/or Lent).

9) It is important that each parish keeps accurate records of each EMHC’s ongoing formation and renewal of their term of service.
Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion at Mass

**Ordinary vs. Extraordinary Ministers**

In order to promote fuller participation in the Holy Eucharist, the Second Vatican Council called for the faithful present at each Mass to communicate not only by spiritual desire but also by sacramental Communion (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal 2002* [GIRM 2002], no. 13).

It has become commonplace that due to the lack of available Ordinary Ministers (ordained clergy), parishes rely on the assistance of Extraordinary Ministers to distribute Holy Communion so that the Communion Rite is not unduly long. This is especially true when Communion is distributed under both species (bread and wine). The Church clearly calls for this as preference as it more clearly signifies the Eucharistic banquet (*GIRM 8668*, nos. 847-2).

The use of Extraordinary Ministers should never take place when there are enough Ordinary Ministers in attendance. Every deacon and concelebrating priests must assist with the distribution of Holy Communion before Extraordinary Ministers are called in to assist. When there is needed assistance, the Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion (EMHC), will frequently give this assistance. Instituted acolytes, where they are available, can assist in this manner as well. (*GIRM 8668*, nos. 728 & 840.a; and NDRHC, no. 84).

**Procedural Guidelines**

1. **Reverence, Cleanliness and Attire**

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should show a reverence for the Eucharist. That reverence is reflected in their demeanor at Mass (full, active and conscious participation (CSL, no. 14), their attire and the manner in which they handle the Eucharist (NDRHC, no. 29). An individual should be clean and neat, free of excessive perfumes, colognes or make-up. Nails should be groomed and clean. A neat and reverential appearance is in keeping with the minister’s role and belief in the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The Minster’s attire should not detract from that role.

2. **Hand washing**

It is important for the EMHC to wash his or her hands after checking into the sacristy for their assignment. During winter months when colds and flu are prevalent, it is most appropriate to sanitize one’s hands in the pew before approaching the altar in an unobtrusive manner.

"By virtue of his sacred ordination, the bishop or priest offers the sacrifice in the person of Christ, the Head of the Church. He receives gifts of bread and wine from the faithful, offers the sacrifice to God, and returns to them the very Body and Blood of Christ, as from the hands of Christ himself. Thus bishops and priests are considered the ordinary ministers of Holy Communion."

"In addition the deacon who assists the bishop or priest in distributing Communion is an ordinary minister of Holy Communion. When the Eucharist is distributed under both forms, ‘the deacon himself administers the chalice.’"

"In the distribution of Communion the priest may be assisted by other priests who happen to be present. If such priests are not present and there is a truly large number of communicants, the priest may call upon extraordinary ministers to assist him."

*Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America, #26*

1-General Instruction of the Roman Missal, #162
Procedural Guidelines continued

III. Arrival and Seating

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should arrive at their parish well before the beginning of Mass. They should follow the check-in procedure that is normative for their parish and then be seated amongst the congregation. They should choose seating that allows for ease of exit and near the altar so as not to disturb others when they come forward at communion time. EMHC are called from the community and are members of the community called to serve in a particular liturgical ministry.

IV. Preparation of the Bread and Wine

Careful preparation of the Eucharistic bread and wine is important. There should not be a large amount of hosts consecrated, only what is needed for the liturgy. The same is true for the preparation of wine. It is important to have enough, but not too much.

The wine and hosts should be set out in vessels that are appropriate in number, kind and size. A flagon and one large paten signifies the one bread and one cup by which we are gathered into the “one Body of Christ, a living sacrifice of praise” (NDRHC, no 32). These are to be taken to the back of the church, and placed on a table in order to be brought forward by members of the congregation during the Preparation of the Gifts. This wine is then poured into additional chalices on the altar prior to the Eucharistic Prayer.

If the congregation at any given Mass is great, a single large host may be used for the breaking of the bread with other small hosts provided for the faithful.

V. Approaching the Altar, Receiving Holy Communion & the Sacred Vessels

Local parish customs dictate when the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion approach the altar as well as where they should stand and wait. Only the celebrant and concelebrants may self-Communicate. According to the GIRM, the following hierarchy exists in the reception of Communion:

♦ Priest concelebrants (GIRM 2002, nos. 159, 242-4, 246)
♦ Deacons (GIRM 2002, nos. 182, 244, 246)
♦ EMHC (GIRM 2002, no. 284)

Other ciboria needed for the Communion Rite (from the tabernacle) are to be placed on the altar during the Fractio (breaking of the bread) at the Lamb of God. Afterwards additional vessels needed for the distribution of Holy Communion are also brought to the altar. The deacon or the priest will place the consecrated Hosts into the ciboria for distribution to the congregation. In order to expedite this process, the presider may call upon the assistance of deacons or concelebrating priests. All of this occurs at the altar.

Ideally, Holy Communion should not be distributed from ciboria which have been reserved in the tabernacle. Again, as a general rule, enough hosts and wine for those assembled should be consecrated at each Mass (GIRM 2002, no. 85; NDRHC, no 30 and EM, no. 31).

Once the EMHC have received Holy Communion, the presider hands the vessels containing the Body and Blood of Christ to the deacons and the EMHC who will assist with the distribution of Holy Communion. Also, the deacon may assist the presider in handing the vessels to the EMHC (NDRHC, no. 40). The EMHC should never take the sacred vessels from the altar themselves (NDHRC, no. 38).
VI. Distribution Procedures continued

After everyone in the sanctuary has received Holy Communion, the presider and the other ministers walk to their assigned stations to distribute Holy Communion to the congregation. **All who present themselves to receive Holy Communion should be given it.** The EMHC is not to deny anyone Communion. Should a questionable person present him/herself to receive the Eucharist, they are to be given it at that time. Any questions of propriety or scandal, should be referred to the pastor after Mass.

When Holy Communion is offered under both species, the cup is always to be administered by an ordinary minister or EMHC. The cup is not to be left on the altar for self-communication by the assembly (GIRM 2002, no. 160; NDRHC, nos. 44 & 50). Each communicant makes his/her own decision whether to approach the minister for the reception of the Precious Blood. Remember, Jesus is totality present in both the host and the cup.

As a sign of reverence for the Lord, present in the Eucharist, persons coming forward to receive Communion are to make a sign of reverence before receiving Holy Communion. The Bishop’s Conference of the United States has determined that the communicant should bow their head before receiving Holy Communion (GIRM 2002, no. 160). This gesture expresses our reverence and honor to Christ who comes to us as spiritual food. When Communion is received under both species, this sign of reverence is also made before receiving the Precious Blood.

A. Giving the Host: “The Body of Christ”

When a communicant receives the Body of Christ, he or she will first make a sign of reverence. Then, the minister holds the Host slightly above the vessel for the communicant to see and looks at the communicant while clearly saying “The Body of Christ.” The communicant responds, “Amen.” The minister then gives Holy Communion, respecting the option of the communicant to receive either in the hand or on the tongue (GIRM 2002, nos. 161, 284-7). If the communicant forgets to make a sign of reverence, do not withhold Communion.

B. Giving the Cup: “The Blood of Christ”

Similarly, when a communicant comes to receive the Blood of Christ, he or she will first make a sign of reverence. The minister will then raise the chalice for the communicant to see and look at the communicant while clearly saying “The Blood of Christ.” The communicant responds, “Amen.” The minister then gives the cup 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 chalice (inside and out) with the purificator, and turns the cup before offering it to the next individual. (GIRM 2002, nos. 161, 284-7; NDRHC, nos. 43 & 45). Make sure to use clean parts of the purificator each time you wipe the chalice.


VI. Distribution Procedures continued

Remember, not all persons will receive both the Sacred Host and the Precious Blood due to a personal preference or a medical condition. (Celiac disease and alcoholism is covered in the appendix).

It is important to know what the protocols are for your parish in regards to returning to the sanctuary after you have completed distributing Communion. Some parishes may have you assist another minister, while others will ask that you return to the sanctuary once everyone in your section has received. Any remaining Hosts are to be consumed or reserved in the tabernacle (NDRHC, no. 51; Code of Canon Law, § 939). If any Precious Blood remains in the chalices, it must be consumed upon returning to the sanctuary in order for the sacred vessels to be purified. If you cannot consume the amount remaining, please see another minister to assist you with that task. The Precious Blood is never to be poured into the Sacramentum or in the ground. (NDRHC, no. 55).

Upon completion of your ministry you should reverence the altar with a bow and return to your seat in the congregation to participate in the remainder of the Liturgy.

VII. Purification of Sacred Vessels

The chalice and other vessels used for the distribution of Holy Communion may be taken to the credence table where they are purified. Only a priest or a deacon may purify the liturgical vessels.

VIII. Additional Duties

Usually once Holy Communion has been distributed, your ministry as an EMHC is complete. Depending on the needs of your parish, your pastor may ask you to assist after Mass with clean up or bring Holy Communion to the homebound and sick in your parish. Remember that every task you do is done in love for our Eucharistic Lord. The ministry you provide is a blessing to your parish, and hopefully a great blessing to you spiritually as well!
Another opportunity to serve your parish is by bringing Holy Communion to the sick and homebound. This is a very special ministry, a ministry within a ministry, as it not only provides those who are home and unable to come to Mass the opportunity to receive Holy Communion, but also lends a special connection with their parish community. Before you decide to say “yes” to this ministry, you need to prayerfully consider if it is something you are both called and comfortable with doing. Persons engaged in this ministry should be:

1. Comfortable going into various types of home situations and settings. Remember that you may be asked to visit both the poor and the rich, and accordingly the environments will be different.

2. Comfortable with being around sick people. Often people who are homebound are unable to do things that most of us take for granted. You may see and smell things that may be unpleasant.

3. Able to minister to persons of various cultures and races, treating everyone the same as a brother or sister in the Lord.

4. Be willing to take time out of your own schedule in order to accommodate a visitation time that works for the homebound person. This may mean attending another Mass at a different time or day in order to do so.

If this is something that quickens your heart, it is a wonderful opportunity to bring Jesus in a tangible way into the homes of those who are ill and homebound.

**Procedural Guidelines**

It is good practice for the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to the homebound to be sent forth from their parish after the Communion Rite is completed to bring the Eucharist to those at home. This allows for a visual continuity for those in the parish to see and be united with their brothers and sisters who cannot be at the Sunday Eucharistic Liturgy. It also shows that the ministry being provided is being done so on behalf of and with the blessing of the Church.

Each parish may decide how they wish to send forth their Extraordinary Ministers, but it is good practice for the presiding priest to call them forth, bless them and send them out to into the community. The EMHC should leave the church immediately for their cars. After a brief period of silence, the Mass continues with the Concluding Rite and dismissal of the people.
**Procedural Guidelines continued**

1. After you are dismissed from Mass, take any possessions you may have in the pew, along with the pyx containing the Eucharist to your car. You should go immediately to the person’s home which you will be visiting. It is good practice to contact them a day or two prior to your arrival. This will allow them time to make any necessary preparations for your visit.

2. Do not stop anywhere on the way. This is not a good time to grab a Big Mac! Remember that the Lord is accompanying you on this journey.

3. Retain reverence for the presence of the Lord. Do not turn on the radio or play music. The drive is a good time for you to prepare for your visit prayerfully and silently.

4. When you arrive, keep visiting to a minimum. Do inquire into the person’s health and be cordial. Ask any visitors or members of the family if they wish to receive communion along with the person you are visiting and/or to participate in the ritual. Remember that you are a guest in their home.

5. If possible you may wish to prepare a small devotional space prior to distributing Holy Communion with a crucifix and candles. You may want to bring a corporal with you on which to place the pyx. Be aware that the use of oxygen prohibits open flames.

6. Have water available for the person to moisten their mouth. Remember that the rule for abstaining from food and drink for one hour prior to receiving Holy Communion does not apply in cases of illness. (Canon 919)

7. Politely ask them if you or another person can turn off the television or radio. Once the visit is completed, offer to turn it back on again.

8. Wash your hands both before and after distributing Holy Communion.

9. Follow the “Ministry to the Sick” booklet provided by the Office for Divine Worship.

10. Share the readings of the day from Mass. You will want to choose one, usually the Gospel is a good choice.

11. Prior to leaving, inquire if the person needs anything. Bring along the parish bulletin and other information from the parish and leave it with them. Ask them if they need anything else from the parish (i.e. receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation) and make a note to inform the parish priest if necessary.

12. If you have other persons to visit, keep the visit within a time limit. Thank them for allowing you to come and ask them if they want another visit. This is a good time to set up a schedule. Remember that you may be the only person they have seen in a while!

13. When your visitation schedule is complete, follow your parish’s protocol about what to do with any remaining hosts. You may either return them to the tabernacle or consume them. **You are never to “keep” the Eucharist at home or in the car.**
Conclusion

Serving as an Extraordinary Minister of the Eucharist, whether in the parish or in the home not only provides great assistance to your parish, but it also invites you to live a Eucharistic life in which you have been blessed, broken and given for others. Serving in this ministry does not make you better than others in your parish. Instead it calls you to reflect on your own brokenness, your own need for conversion and your own hunger for the fulfillment of the Kingdom. You are called to continual self knowledge and growth in your own spiritual life with the realization that you are “not there”, but on the journey with your brothers and sisters. And, it is through this ministry that you are called to heal and be healed. May God bless you for your courage to begin and stay the course!

A Prayer for Extraordinary Ministers

of Holy Communion

Take me Lord and transform me with each Holy Communion I give, and each I receive.

Allow me to become a sign of healing and hope in my parish and my community.

Lord, I am not worthy to receive you.

Lord, I am not worthy to share you, to hold you in my hands, to truly touch you, Body, Soul & Divinity.

Yet, you have said the word, and I have been healed. I have been chosen. May my life become a symbol of the Eucharist.

For it is in being formed, that I am transformed.

It is in being broken, that I am healed.

And, it is when I give that I become the recipient of your life, your love, and your peace.

Amen
Appendix

Glossary of Liturgical Terms 13-14
Celiac Disease & Communion 15-16
Mustum 17
Approved Distributers of Low Gluten Hosts & Mustum 18
Accidents 19
Frequently Asked Questions & Answers 20-21
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Glossary of Liturgical Terms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Altar</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A table in the sanctuary of a church, usually fixed in place, at which the central part of the Mass is celebrated. The <em>mensa</em>, or table top, is usually made of fine stone such as marble or granite, but possibly also of wood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ambo</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The lectern in the sanctuary from which the Scripture readings are read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Celebrant</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The priest or bishop leading the assembly in a Mass is often called the celebrant. He celebrates or presides at the Eucharistic liturgy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chalice</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A stemmed cup used on the altar at Mass to hold the wine that is consecrated into the blood of Christ. The chalice is usually to be made of, or at least plated with, a fine metal such as gold, at least on the inner lining of the cup. If Communion is to be distributed under both kinds, there may be several drinking vessels of wine on the altar during the Liturgy of the Eucharist. It is also acceptable to refer to any chalice as a cup.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ciborium</strong> (Ciboria plural)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A large container made of precious metal that holds the hosts to be consecrated for Communion. A ciborium with the Body of Christ is presented to ministers to distribute Holy Communion from. Covered, it holds the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communicant</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The person presenting him/herself forward to receive Holy Communion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Corporal</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A larger linen cloth which is placed on the altar during Mass for the liturgical vessels to set upon. It is also used during other liturgical celebrations that involve the inclusion of the Blessed Sacrament.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Credence Table</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A small side table in the sanctuary. It is used to hold the liturgical vessels needed for Holy Communion as well as any other items that may be needed for that liturgy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eucharist</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The proper name for the consecrated bread and wine which are the body and blood of Christ. Often Catholics will refer to the Eucharist itself, especially the consecrated bread, as Communion or holy Communion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eucharistic Liturgy</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another term for the Mass.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Host</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A common term used for the rounds of unleavened bread consecrated during Mass to become the real body of Christ. Host can be used to describe such bread both before and after its consecration—although in Catholic belief, following the consecration the bread remains only an appearance, while its substance has been changed into the actual body of Christ.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Glossary of Liturgical Terms continued**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lectionary</td>
<td>The book of readings from Scripture, arranged according to what readings are to be read at any particular Mass throughout the year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liturgy</td>
<td>A general term for all the church’s official acts of worship. It includes the Mass, any celebrations of the sacraments, and the Liturgy of Hours.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liturgy of the Eucharist</td>
<td>The part of the Mass in which the celebrant consecrates the bread and wine and the people receive Holy Communion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paten</td>
<td>A plate made of precious metal that holds the large Presider’s host for consecration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purificator</td>
<td>A linen cloth used to catch any of the Precious Blood that may drip from the chalice. It is used to wipe the chalice after each communicant receives Holy Communion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purify</td>
<td>The term used for cleansing the sacred vessels after Holy Communion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pyx</td>
<td>A covered contained used for bringing Holy Communion to the sick and homebound.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman Missal</td>
<td>A book containing the prayers of the Mass, but not the readings from Scripture. The official book used by the celebrant at the altar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacrament</td>
<td>A sink in the sacristy that drains directly to the ground. Used for disposal of water after cleansing sacred vessels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacred Vessels</td>
<td>The chalice, ciboria, and paten used to hold the consecrated bread and wine. They must be made out of precious metals and should not be glass, pottery or wood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacristy</td>
<td>A side room in the church where the celebrant and other ministers prepare for Mass.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanctuary</td>
<td>The area of the church that holds the altar, ambo and celebrant’s chair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tabernacle</td>
<td>A sacred and secure container in which the ciborium with the Body of Christ is reserved for Communion to the sick, viaticum, and Eucharistic devotion. A burning candle is put near the tabernacle, to signal that the Eucharistic Lord is present in the tabernacle. As a sign of reverence for the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, one should genuflect or bow by the tabernacle when they pass in front of it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viaticum</td>
<td>The final Holy Communion received by a person near death. Translated it is “Food for the Journey”.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There has been much written and shared about gluten and gluten free diets in the recent past. While this has allowed for a greater awareness of the role of gluten in one’s diet, it also has lent to a thinking that choosing to partake of foods with gluten is a choice often casually made. Unfortunately, this is a disservice to those individuals who suffer from celiac disease.

What is gluten?
Gluten is a general name for the proteins found in wheat, rye, barley and triticale – a cross between wheat and rye. Gluten helps foods maintain their shape, acting as a glue that holds food together. Gluten can be found in many types of foods, even ones that would not be expected.

Why can’t some people eat foods that contain gluten?
Some people’s bodies are genetically predisposed not to be able to absorb gluten in their bodies and it cause them harm. When a person with Celiac Disease eats a food containing gluten, their body reacts with damage to their small intestine. If this is left untreated, a person can become very sick and develop diseases such as: type I diabetes and multiple sclerosis (MS), dermatitis herpetiformis (an itchy skin rash), anemia, osteoporosis, infertility and miscarriage, neurological conditions like epilepsy and migraines, and intestinal cancers. Celiac disease is an autoimmune disorder, and in essence the body “attacks” itself.

What about “gluten intolerance”?
Gluten intolerance can be a less serious disorder than Celiac disease, however the body still has an “allergy” to food that contains gluten. Some people use the terms to mean the same. Only a doctor can indicate what severity a person’s disease is and what treatment must be followed.

What is the treatment for Celiac Disease?
At this time the only treatment is total abstaining from all foods containing gluten; that is maintaining a 100% gluten free diet.

How does Celiac Disease affect a person’s ability to receive Holy Communion?
Persons with Celiac Disease need special pastoral care and concern to receive Holy Communion. We will look at the considerations closer individually.

Church Teaching on “matter” used for Holy Communion
In 2017, the Congregation on Divine Worship in the Vatican reaffirmed a 2003 letter written by then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger to the Presidents of the Conference of Catholic Bishops about the use of mustum (visited under “Alcoholism”) and low gluten hosts for Mass (Prot. n. 89/78-17498).
Church Teaching on “matter” used for Holy Communion continued

In essence the letter captured the following instructions:
1. Hosts that are completely gluten free are invalid matter for the celebration of the Mass.
2. Hosts cannot be made of any other material but wheat.
3. In order for a host to be “valid matter” for the Eucharist, it must “contain only wheat, contain enough gluten to effect the convection of bread, be free of foreign materials, and unaffected by any preparation or baking methods that would alter its nature.”
4. It is impossible to consecrate a host made of something other than water and wheat.
5. If a person cannot consume a low gluten host they may still receive the Precious Blood. The Church teaches that under the doctrine of concomitance, the whole Christ is received in either species of bread or wine. (GIRM, no. 282).
6. The bishop may grant permission to priests, deacons and the laity to receive Holy Communion via mustum or low gluten hosts.

Parish Practices for the Distribution of Holy Communion to those with Celiac Disease

If a parish determines the need for utilizing low gluten hosts for members of their parish with Celiac Disease the following points are important to note:

1. Low gluten hosts must be refrigerated prior to consecration to maintain freshness. They also have a relatively short shelf life, so it is a good idea to purchase only the amount that is estimated to be needed. The estimated shelf life is approximately two-three months, but many have expiration dates on them.
2. Keep the low gluten hosts completely separate from the other ones. Prior to consecration use a container that holds only them and has never been used for the regular hosts. In preparation for consecration, place them in a pyx or ciborium that has been designated for low gluten hosts only. If the same person is preparing the altar breads for Mass, it is extremely important to keep them separate and wash their hands prior to working with the low gluten hosts. Cross contamination is a real issue and even a trace of gluten can be life threatening for someone!
3. It is extremely good pastoral practice to maintain a separate chalice of Precious Blood for those with celiac disease to partake of that is entirely separate from the cups reserved for the regular communicants. Parishes may wish to choose one that looks different from the others in order to maintain separateness. Doctors have determined that gluten particles can be left on the cup and for an individual with high sensitivity, this can be detrimental. Remember the above comment on cross contamination.
4. The minister serving the low gluten hosts should only touch those hosts. If he or she has received Holy Communion in the hand, they should clean their hands with alcohol sanitizer prior to distributing communion. The same applies to the person handling the chalice of Precious Blood.
5. When cleansing the liturgical vessels used for those with Celiac Disease, it is good practice to maintain them separate from the others.
6. Finally, remember that the person with Celiac Disease is responsible for communicating their needs and concerns with their pastor. Only they, under direction from their medical doctor can determine what is needed in order for them to receive the Precious Body and Blood of Jesus in a safe manner. Every person is different, so needs may vary from person to person.
Mustum is used in place of wine when an individual (usually the priest) suffers from alcoholism. The fermentation process of the grape juice is suspended prior to the alcohol content rising less than 1.0%. Mustum also does not contain additives and the nature of the grape juice should not be amended in any way. The use of pasteurized grape juice or grape juice in which alcohol has been evaporated through high temperatures is invalid matter for Mass.

In the United States, it is illegal to sell wine that does not contain sulfates for preservation, so the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has determined that a small amount of sulfates is acceptable and does not invalidate the matter.

As with low gluten hosts, the permission to use mustum for Mass is under the jurisdiction of the local Bishop. Communicants who wish to receive the Precious Blood could discuss their concern with their pastor. However, most persons who suffer from alcoholism usually refrain from receiving the Precious Blood and receive Christ present in totality in the Sacred Host.

An estimated 3 million persons in the United States annually is diagnosed with alcoholism per the Centers for Disease Control.
Approved Distributors of Low Gluten Hosts & Mustum

The Secretariat of Divine Worship has approved the following distributors to obtain low gluten hosts and mustum. Any other distributors not on the list do not carry the approved materials.

Low Gluten Hosts

Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, Altar Breads Department
31970 State Highway P
Clyde, MO 64432-8100
1-800-223-2772
www.BenedictineSisters.org

Parish Crossroads
PO Box 2413
Kokomo, IN 46904
1-800-510-8842
www.ParishCrossroads.com

Cavanagh Company
610 Putnam Pike
Greenville, RI 02828
1-800-635-0568
www.CavanaghCo.com

Mustum

Mont LaSalle Altar Wines
605 Trancas Street, Suite D
Napa, CA 94558
1-800-447-8466
www.MontLaSalleAltarWines.com

Monks Wine and Candles
PO Box 681248
Schaumburg, IL 60168
1-800-540-6665
www.MonksWineAndCandles.com
Accidents

Despite our best intentions, reverence and care, a Host may fall to the ground or some of the Precious Blood may spill. It happens to the best of us, and while it is dismaying, it is an accident, something that happens to human beings every now and then.

If an accident occurs with the Consecrated Host in church, you have options. If either you or the communicant drops the Host, you can pick it up, take it to the altar and place it on the corporal (to be dealt with after Communion). You also have the option to consume it right there, or hold it in the same hand that you are holding the ciborium for later disposal. After you have completed distributing Communion, you can either consume it or bring it to the altar for the priest or deacon to consume.

Should an accident occur while visiting a home, you should never consume the host. Take it and wrap it in a paper towel and place it aside. You will want to dissolve it in water and pour it either into your parish’s Sacrarium or in the ground where there is minimal traffic. Ask your parish priest which option he would like you to follow should this occur.

If an accident occurs with the Precious Blood, the minister should cover the spillage with a purificator, first asking the communicant to proceed to another minister of the cup. Clean up the space as best you can with the purificator. After Mass, the area should be washed with a damp clean purificator. Clean towels should be used if the area is large. The cloths are rinsed and then wrung in the Sacrarium.

Remember that accidents occur, and our Lord completely understands that. He was human too!
1. I have noticed that some people come up during Communion wanting not to receive the Eucharist, but rather a blessing. What do I do if that happens to me?

The 2004 Directive for the Implementation of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal in the Diocese of Columbus issued by Bishop James Griffin states “The General Instruction makes no provision for the Communion minister to give non-communicants a blessing. While this practice may be appealing to some people, it is confusing and runs the risk of diminishing the unique importance of Communion. Therefore, it is to be discouraged.” Additionally, the Book of Blessings #18 and Canon Law dictates that within the context of the Mass, lay people are unable to give blessings as that is the jurisdiction of the priest (1169, #2). This is something that needs catechesis in the parish setting, and should someone approach you, you may just wish to smile and nod at them as they stand before you.

2. Why can’t a communicant dip the host into the Precious Blood? I have had some people try to do that.

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 (no. 49), the practice of receiving Holy Communion by intinction (dipping the Host in the Precious Blood) is discouraged. This practice seems to stand in contrast to Jesus’ command to “take and drink” (GIRM 2002, no. 281). Additionally, this is seen as a form of self-communication, which is strictly forbidden. Communion under either form, bread or wine, must be given by the minister of Holy Communion (NDRHC, no. 50). If someone attempts to do intinction, hold the chalice and invite them to first consume the Host. When they do so, present the Precious Blood to them. If the person asks “Why can’t I”, explain that it is not done at your parish and invite them to speak to a priest or deacon after Mass. Also, Mass, speak to the parish priest about your experience so he can plan on doing some catechesis on the proper way of receiving Communion within the parish.

3. I have had a lot of people say that they won’t receive the Precious Blood because they are concerned about getting sick. It seems to me that intinction would prevent that fear and encourage more to partake from the cup.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Secretariat of Divine Worship has been in communication with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to discuss the potential of persons obtaining communicable diseases from a common cup. The CDC has stated that they “are not aware of any specific episodes or outbreaks of illness that have been associated with the use of a common Communion cup.” (USCCB, Committee on the Liturgy Newsletter, July/August 1996). They caution that proper precautions should be utilized, such as wiping and rotating the cup after each communicant drinks and have suggested that persons with illnesses such as the common cold and flu should refrain from receiving from the cup while they are ill. No evidence exists to date that life threatening illnesses such as HIV can be transmitted through using a common chalice. During widespread flu epidemics, the Bishop may determine that the use of the cup is to be suspended for a specified time until the illness wanes.
**Frequently Asked Questions & Answers continued**

5. **What should I do if I run out of enough Hosts or Precious Blood and I still have a line of people waiting to receive?**

This is a good question to ask at your parish training. There are many ways to handle this. Some parishes will suggest that if you are distributing the Host, you can break it in half or in smaller pieces and continue distributing. You can also take some Hosts from another minister’s ciborium if it appears that they will not need the amount they have. Hosts may also be taken out of the tabernacle and used for distribution during Mass if needed.

Regarding running out of the Precious Blood during distribution, determine during your parish training what your pastor’s practice is. In some parishes, another minister can pour some into your cup if they have some available or give you their cup if they are finished distributing Communion in their area. In other parishes, the pastor will want you to simply explain that you have no more Precious Blood to distribute and to place the empty cup on the credence table and return to your pew. Be aware that many pastors are not comfortable with EMs pouring the Precious Blood from one cup to another during the distribution of Communion due to the risk of spilling. Also remember under the doctrine of **concomitance**, the whole Christ is received in either species of bread or wine (GIRM, no. 6² 6).

6. **I am aware that there are people receiving Holy Communion who shouldn’t be. If they come to me for Communion can I refuse them?**

Absolutely not. It is not your decision to give or to refuse Communion to anyone. When someone approaches you, you give them Communion in good faith, trusting in the Lord’s mercy and goodness. That person may well have become fully reconciled with the Church without your knowledge. After Mass you may speak to your pastor about your concern. It is for him to approach the person and speak to them, not you.

7. **I am scheduled to assist with Mass and/or to bring Communion to the homebound, but I am not feeling well. I don’t want to let Father/the person down, what should I do?**

Stay home! You need to take care of yourself so you can take care of others. Let your pastor or ministry coordinator know as far in advance that you cannot fulfill your assignment so they can make alternate plans. Never visit a sick/homebound person if you are ill or feeling like you are “coming down with something;” you are putting them at risk of getting sick, and they are often in a compromised state of health.

8. **I am interested in bringing Holy Communion to the sick in a hospital or nursing home. What do I need to do?**

Serving as an EMHC in an institutional healthcare setting is often specific to the facility. If this is something you are interested in, check first with your pastor. He may have an EMHC team in place that serves a particular facility that you might be able to join. If the parish does not have a direct arrangement with a health care facility, you should contact its Chaplain’s Office and let them know you are interested in volunteering there. They can give you all the details or arrange for you to speak to the proper persons. You will need to follow that institution’s guidelines regarding privacy and confidentiality, infection control and needed educational or medical requirements (like having a TB test done). The Office for Divine Worship has *Guidelines for the Distribution of Holy Communion in the Hospital, Extended Care Facility or Nursing Home Setting* as well as Rite cards that will assist you in this ministry.