



Guidelines for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

The proper function of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (EMHC) is defined in the following guidelines: Note: The term “Eucharistic Minister” is appropriate only for an ordained priest or bishop.

At the direction of Pope Benedict XVI, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (EMHC) will no longer be permitted to assist with the purification of the sacred vessels used at Mass, either during or after its celebration. The three-year indult which had once allowed for this was not renewed. The sacred vessels are to be purified by “the priest, deacon, or an instituted acolyte after Communion or after Mass” (*General Instruction to the Roman Missal (GIRM, 279)*).

- The celebrant is assisted in the distribution of Holy Communion by other ordinary minister (bishops, priests, and deacons) who are present. When additional ministers are needed, “the priest may call upon extraordinary ministers to assist him” (*GIRM, 162*).
- Pastors and chaplains must request permission from the Bishop for each person that they desire to serve as EMHC in the parish or institution under their care. Pastors make these requests as a group once a year through the Office of Sacred Liturgy. Individual permissions may be requested throughout the year by a pastor through the Office of Sacred Liturgy.
- In cases of necessity, the priest may appoint qualified individuals as EMHC for single occasions. They are to be properly commissioned according to the rite provided in the *Roman Missal*.
- EMHC may also be designated for ministry to the sick and shut-ins to allow for a more frequent reception of the Eucharist than would otherwise be possible.

Nomination, Appointment, Training, and Commissioning of EMHC:

- EMHC are fully initiated into the Church, practicing Catholics in good standing with the Church, nominated by their pastor or chaplain, appointed by the Bishop of Birmingham, properly trained, and liturgically commissioned.
- The Bishop of Birmingham appoints EMHC to primarily serve only in their parish or institution. Within the Diocese of Birmingham, however, they may also serve when other extraordinary needs arise, and the priest celebrant requests their assistance. This privilege does not apply to EMHC who have been appointed by a bishop in another diocese.
- Appointments to serve as EMHC are valid for up to three years before they must be renewed. Renewals are processed each September and forms sent to each pastor through the Office of Sacred Liturgy. At the end of a three-year term, each EMHC requires renewal. If appointment is not renewed, they may no longer serve as EMHC.
- An individual who has been appointed, properly trained, and commissioned may serve both during Mass and outside of Mass (i.e. to the homebound, hospital, etc.).
- The local pastor or chaplain is responsible for ensuring the proper training of EMHC, though the Diocese will occasionally offer workshops on the subject.
- The proper commissioning ritual is found in the *Book of Blessings*, chapter 63 or in the *Roman Missal*.

EMHC during Mass:

- EMHC who assist during Mass are expected to be familiar with the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (especially *GIRM*, 160-165, 283-284); *Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America* (*USCCB Norms*); and the diocesan liturgical policies outlined in these guidelines.
- EMHC “should not approach the altar before the priest has received Communion” (*GIRM*, 162) but rather “approach the altar as the priest receives Communion” (*USCCB Norms*, 38).
- EMHC “are always to receive from the hands of the priest celebrant [or assisting deacon] the vessel containing either species of the Most Holy Eucharist for distribution to the faithful” (*GIRM*, 162). They never take it for themselves.
- **EMHC are not to bring ciboria from the tabernacle or to return ciboria to the tabernacle after the distribution of Communion. This is proper to the priest or deacon.**
- EMHC – or any other communicants – may consume what remains of the Precious Blood (*USCCB Norms*, 52).
- The three-year indult which had allowed EMHC to assist with the purification of the sacred vessels at the Mass was not renewed. The sacred vessels are to be purified by “the priest, deacon, or an instituted acolyte after Communion or after Mass” (*GIRM*, 279).

EMHC to the sick and homebound:

- EMHC who bring communion to the sick and shut-ins are to be familiar with *Holy Communion and the Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass*, particularly the introduction to Chapter I and the entire contents of Chapter II.
- Their training should include the reverent carrying of the Eucharist and the necessity of going directly to their destination. At no time are they allowed to keep possession of the Eucharist in their home or vehicle. If the empty pyx is not immediately returned to the tabernacle, proper purification of the pyx should also be addressed.

All priests and deacons, as Ordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, are to know the norms stated in the revised *General Instructions of the Roman Missal*, the *USCCB* documents, and the particular law for the Diocese of Birmingham, and to follow them in all liturgical celebrations throughout the Diocese of Birmingham.

- When conditions require them, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion may assist with the distribution of Holy Communion (*GIRM*, 162, *USCCB Norms*, 28).
- Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are to be properly prepared (*USCCB Norms*, 28).
- The number of EMHC should not be increased beyond what is required for orderly and reverent distribution (*USCCB Norms*, 28).
- In the event of any mishap, hosts or particles are to be picked up reverently. Any spills of Precious Blood should be washed and the water from this washing poured into the sacrarium (*GIRM*, 280). Precious Blood is never poured into the ground or the sacrarium (*USCCB Norms*, 55).
- When disposing of consecrated hosts, old hosts are “properly consumed” (*Code of Canon Law*, 939). Burying hosts or consecrated Eucharistic bread is absolutely forbidden.

The Extraordinary Minister within the Liturgy of the Eucharist

- EMHC approach the altar as the priest receives communion (*USCCB Norms*, 38).
- EMHC receive Holy Communion from the priest or deacon, then they receive the vessels for distribution from the priest or deacon (*USCCB Norms*, 38).
- The manner for receiving Holy Communion is as described in the *GIRM*. Deacons and EMHC do not receive as a concelebrating priest. Neither do EMHC wait until after to distribution of Holy Communion to receive themselves (*USCCB Norms*, 39).
- When distributing Holy Communion, the only proper and permissible formula is to say, “The Body of Christ” or “The Blood of Christ” (*GIRM*, 284-287; *USCCB Norms*, 41,43).
- When Precious Blood remains, it may be consumed by EMHC (*USCCB Norms*, 52, *Bishop Aquila’s Particular Norms for Holy Communion*).