

GUIDELINES FOR EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION

Diocese of St. Petersburg

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INTRODUCTION

The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (CSL)*, the first document promulgated by the Second Vatican Council, reaffirmed that Christ is always present in the Church, especially in its liturgical celebrations. Christ is present when the Church prays and sings, in the proclamation of the Word, and in the person of the minister. Finally, the Council stressed that Christ is *especially present* under the eucharistic elements (*CSL*, no. 7).

For the Catholic, the liturgical gathering is of paramount importance. It is fitting then, that our liturgical celebrations are described 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* (*CSL*, no. 10).

While the heart of the celebration of Mass is the Eucharistic Prayer, the consummation of the liturgy is found in Holy Communion. In the gathering, in the breaking of the bread, in the eating and the drinking the faithful are joined together as members of Christ's mystical Body, sharing the one life of the Spirit. In the great sacrament of the altar, they 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).

It is not surprising then, that 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).

If a large number of the faithful are present, the presider will frequently need assistance in distributing Communion so that the Communion Rite is not unduly long. He will regularly need this assistance when Communion is given under both kinds, the form of Communion that more clearly signifies the eucharistic banquet (*GIRM 2002*, nos. 281-282). To that end, deacons and concelebrating priests assist as ordinary ministers of Communion. Instituted acolytes, where they are available, can assist as auxiliary ministers. However, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (EMHC), either formally commissioned for a given period or temporarily deputed by the presider, will frequently give this assistance (*GIRM 2002*, nos. 162 & 284.a. and *NDRHC*, no. 28).

These individuals serve Christ who is present in the assembly by ministering his Body and Blood to their sisters and brothers. They also serve the Body of Christ by taking Communion to those members who, through sickness, old age, or other causes are prevented from taking part in the Mass. In accord with a most ancient tradition, it is most appropriate for Communion to be taken directly from the Sunday Eucharist to the sick and those unable to leave their homes.

Genuine ministry is about humble service. The model for all ministry is Christ the Lord 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. The EMHC must put aside personal agendas and needs, prejudices and judgements in order to serve the community and give faithful testimony to Christ’s presence in the Eucharist.

DIOCESAN GUIDELINES

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* indicates that the diocesan Bishop is to establish guidelines for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion. In addition, the Bishop is to set forth norms regarding the distribution of Communion under both kinds for his own diocese (*GIRM 2002*, no. 283).

For the last several years, the Bishop of the Diocese of St. Petersburg has requested that all parishes within the diocese offer Communion under both kinds at each of the Sunday Masses. Where possible, Communion is also to be offered under both kinds at Masses celebrated during the week.

Of course, the Bishop calls for each parish community to offer the requisite education and formation regarding the Eucharist and distribution of Communion under both kinds (*NDRHC*, nos.26 & 28). These guidelines, then, apply the Church laws and principles regarding EMHC and the distribution of Communion to the practices carried out in parishes throughout the Diocese of St. Petersburg.

SELECTION OF CANDIDATES

Those selected to be Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are to be **fully initiated** members of the community, both male and female, of sufficient age and maturity, and of diverse ethnic backgrounds. Because the parish may also call on them to take Communion to the sick and homebound, those persons selected for this ministry should possess the maturity necessary to minister in these sometimes difficult situations.

Criteria are necessary for the selection, formation, and evaluation of ministers. For those who will serve in the public ministry of the Church, faith must be supported by visible signs. To this end, the following qualifications might be employed to assist the pastoral team in discerning who could take on this ministry: basic human wholeness,

manifestation of the theological virtues (faith, hope and charity), manifestation of the cardinal virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance), a positive sense of Church, a willingness to be formed in the ministry of the Church, and an abiding reverence for the presence of Christ in the eucharistic bread and wine and in the assembly of the faithful.

Finally, ministers who bring Communion to the sick or homebound are to comply with the prescribed parish policies and the policies of the Diocese of St. Petersburg regarding volunteer forms and background checks. These requirements have been put into place for the safety and protection of both the sick person as well as the minister.

TRAINING AND ONGOING FORMATION

Preparation for this ministry includes:

1. Formal instruction through the Office of Worship which includes sessions on ministry, Eucharist, paschal mystery and general guidelines.
2. Instructions from the EMHC's respective parish about local customs and responsibilities, and the opportunity to pray and share with others in the ministry.

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 (*NDRHC*, no. 28). In addition, opportunities for reflection on the Eucharist, its place in the minister's life, and this particular ministry should take place at least once a year or perhaps seasonally (i.e., Advent and/or Lent). The Diocese of St. Petersburg also offers continuing formational experiences for the EMHC on a regular basis.

LENGTH OF SERVICE

Since ministry is a call both from God and the community in which it is exercised, it is appropriate that choices of ministry and renewal of the term of service be mutually agreed upon by the individual and the parish. Parishes should commission Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion for a specific period, perhaps two years. This will allow both the EMHC and the parish community to benefit from this ministry. It also allows the ministers the opportunity to evaluate their involvement and/or to change to another ministry at the end of their term.

Re-certification and re-commissioning of EMHC beyond that period is dependent upon parish policy.

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. To encourage the involvement of a variety of persons in this ministry, parishes may wish to limit a person's service to one liturgical ministry at any given time.

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

It is important that each parish keep accurate records of each EMHC’s ongoing formation and renewal of their term of service.

PROCEDURES

A. Reverence 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 at liturgy – *CSL*, no. 14), their attire, and the manner in which they handle the Eucharist (*NDRHC*, no. 29). A neat and reverential appearance is in keeping with the minister’s role and belief in the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The minister’s attire should not detract from that role.

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should see to it that their hands are clean. They should also refrain from using strong cologne, perfume or aftershave because some people have sensitivities to these scents and because these fragrances often remain on one’s hands and can be transferred to the Eucharist.

In the Diocese of St. Petersburg, it is recommended that the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion do not wear any special liturgical garb or symbols.

B. Before the Liturgy

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should arrive at their parish well before the liturgy begins. They should follow the check-in procedure that is normative for their respective parish.

Careful preparation of the eucharistic bread and wine is important. There should not be a large amount of eucharistic bread left over after the Communion Rite. Any Precious Blood left over from the Communion Rite should be consumed at the end of that rite. The EMHC can consume the leftover consecrated wine. This is best done at a side table or in the sacristy.

Preparations:

Care should be taken so that enough bread and wine (if Communion is given under both species) are consecrated for the faithful attending each Mass. Generally, Holy Communion is given from hosts and wine consecrated at the same Mass, and not from those reserved in the tabernacle, since the reserved Eucharist is primarily for the sick and homebound (*NDRHC*, no. 30; *GIRM 2002*, no. 85, and *Eucharisticum mysterium [EM]*, no. 3).

The wine and hosts should be set out in vessels that are appropriate in number, kind, and size. A flagon and one large paten or bowl aptly signify 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). They are brought forward during the Preparation of the Gifts. The wine can be poured into the chalices on the altar before the Eucharistic Prayer is begun. Other ciboria needed for the Communion Rite are to be placed on the altar during the *fractio* at the *Lamb of God*.

If the number of faithful at any given liturgy is great, a single large bread may be used for the breaking of the bread with other small breads provided for the faithful. However, parishes should be mindful that the unity of all is better expressed when the one bread to be broken is of sufficient size that at least some of the faithful are able to receive a piece broken from it (*NDRHC*, no. 33 and *GIRM 2002*, no. 321).

Finally, it is recommended that the EMHC sit with the assembly. They do not need to be part of the opening or closing processions. It is a powerful sign of unity seeing them come from the assembly and returning to it after having served.

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 alone, or with the assistance of the deacon or other concelebrants, breaks the eucharistic bread as the *Lamb of God* or *Agnus Dei* is sung or recited.

At the same time, other ciboria needed for the distribution of Communion are brought to the altar. The deacon or priest places the consecrated bread into the ciboria for distribution. In order to expedite this process, the presider may call upon the assistance of deacons or concelebrating priests. This is usually carried out at the altar, so that the sharing of all from the one bread and one cup is signified.

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

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion approach the altar as the priest receives Communion. Local custom determines where the EMHC stand and wait. After the priest has concluded his own Communion, he distributes Communion to the EMHC and then hands the sacred vessels to them for distribution of Holy Communion to the people (*NDRHC*, no. 38).

All receive Holy Communion in the manner described in *GIRM, 2002*:

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

The deacons and lay ministers **do not** receive Holy Communion in the manner of a concelebrating priest. Also, the practice of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion waiting to receive Communion until **after** Communion has been distributed to the assembly is not in accord with liturgical custom (*NDRHC*, no. 39).

Once the EMHC have received Communion, the presider hands the vessels containing the Body and Blood of Christ to the deacons and the extraordinary ministers 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 presider and other ministers go to their assigned stations for distribution of Communion. All who present themselves should be given Communion. If there is a question of propriety or scandal, the minister should offer Communion and speak to the pastor after Mass.

When Communion is offered under both kinds, the cup is always to be administered by an ordinary or Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion. The cup is not to be left on the altar for “self-communication” by the assembly (*GIRM 2002*, no. 160; *NDRHC*, nos. 44 & 50). The reception of the cup by the communicants is their personal choice.

D. Gesture before Receiving Communion

The *GIRM 2002* indicates that the faithful are to make a sign of reverence before receiving Communion. The Bishops’ Conference of the United States has determined that the faithful should **bow their head** before receiving Communion (*GIRM 2002*, no. 160). This gesture expresses our reverence and honor to Christ who comes to us as spiritual food.

- ◆ When receiving Communion, the communicant bows his or her head before the sacrament as a gesture of reverence and receives the Body of the Lord from the minister.
- ◆ When Communion is received under both kinds, the sign of reverence is also made before receiving the Precious Blood.

E. Giving the Bread: “*The Body of Christ*”

In giving Communion, the minister holds a host or a piece of the eucharistic bread slightly above the vessel, looks at the communicant and says in a clear voice: “*The Body of Christ.*” 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 (*GIRM 2002*, nos. 161, 284-287).

F. Giving the Cup: “*The Blood of Christ*”

In administering the cup, the minister holds the cup up slightly and says in a clear voice while looking at the communicant: “*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 cup with the purificator, gives the cup a quarter turn, and offers it to the next communicant (*GIRM 2002*, nos. 161, 284-287; *NDRHC*, nos. 43 & 45).

The invitation, “*The Body of Christ*” or “*The Blood of Christ,*” must not be narrowed or expanded as it weakens the communicant’s response. “*Amen*” (“*I believe*”) is an affirmation or profession of faith in three realities:

- the presence of Christ in the assembly;
- the presence of Christ in the communicant; and
- the presence of Christ under the forms of bread and wine.

Changing the invitation restricts the communicant’s affirmation of all three.

It is the choice of the communicant, not the minister, to receive from the cup (*NDRHC*, no. 46).

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* (*NDRHC*, no. 49), the practice of receiving Communion by *intinction* is discouraged in the Diocese of St. Petersburg. This practice seems to stand in contrast with Jesus’ command to “*take and drink*” (*GIRM 2002*, no. 281). The practice of receiving Communion by intinction also limits one’s capacity for receiving Communion in the hand.

Children are encouraged to receive Communion under both kinds. As with adults, they should be properly instructed (*NDRHC*, no. 47). **Also, they should take direction from their parents about receiving the Precious Blood from the cup.**

The communicant, including the Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, is never allowed to self-communicate, even by means of intinction. Communion under either form, bread or wine, must always be given by a minister of Communion (*NDRHC*, no. 50).

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

- ***With the Eucharistic Bread:***

The minister has several options. You may bring the dropped host to the altar and place it on the corporal to be dealt with after communion, or you may hold the host in the same hand as the vessel. *The host that is dropped is never to be replaced in the vessel, given to the next communicant, or consumed by the Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion at that time.* When distribution is finished and the minister returns to the altar, then the host may be consumed or brought to the sacristy where it may be completely dissolved in a bowl of water, which is then poured into the special sink (sacrarium).

- ***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 (damp) towels should be used if the area is larger. The cloths are rinsed and then wrung into the sacrarium.

G. Purification of Sacred Vessels

After the distribution of Communion, any remaining eucharistic bread or hosts are to be consumed or reserved in the tabernacle (*NDRHC*, no. 51 and the *Code of Canon Law*, no. 939).

Also, if there is any remaining Precious Blood, the priest, deacon and/or EMHC consume what remains (*GIRM 2002*, no. 182; *NDRHC*, no. 52). The reverence due to the Precious Blood demands that it be fully consumed after Communion is completed and ***never*** be poured into the ground or the sacrarium (*NDRHC*, no. 55).

The chalice and other vessels used for the distribution of Communion may be taken to a side table where they are cleansed. Provided the remaining consecrated bread has been consumed or reserved in the tabernacle and the remaining Precious Blood has been consumed, the vessels may be left at that side table (suitably covered and on a corporal) and cleansed after Mass (*GIRM 2002*, no. 183; *NDRHC*, no. 53).

The Precious Blood may only be reserved for the sick, and then only at the discretion of the priest. The Precious Blood reserved for the sick should be contained in a vessel that is closed in such a way as to eliminate all danger of spilling (*NDRHC*, no. 54).

MINISTRY TO THE SICK AND HOMEBOUND

When one member of the Body of Christ is unable to celebrate fully at Sunday liturgy 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 EMHC becomes a vital link between the parish community and the member who is hospitalized or homebound.

The EMHC to the sick and homebound should be empathetic and compassionate. It is important they are sensitive to the communicant's needs, i.e., spiritual, emotional, and material, as they may have to inform the parish staff if the person is in need of sacramental anointing, reconciliation or a pastoral visit. They should always maintain the confidentiality and dignity of the individual. **NOTE: All EMHC to the sick and homebound are to have level-two background screening, which includes fingerprinting, and they must complete the Safe Environment Program for EMHC to the Sick/Homebound & Pastoral Care Providers that is provided by the Diocese.**

It is desirable that visits to the sick and homebound occur after a Sunday Mass so the link between the parish celebration and the sick person is maintained. The same is true following a weekday celebration, provided the parish has enough ministers. When Communion is taken from Mass to the sick or homebound, the appropriate moment for the deacon, acolyte, or EMHC to leave is after the Communion of the people.

BRINGING COMMUNION TO THE SICK & HOMEBOUND

Do:

1. Make an appointment to visit. Ask how the person is feeling and if there will be others present. Also ask if they can prepare a table with a cloth, candle, cross or crucifix.
2. Use the ritual "Communion of the Sick" (Chapter 3) from *Pastoral Care of the Sick* and bring a missalette or Bible to read the 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 do the readings.
5. Based on the person's strength/attentiveness, share with them the day's homily.
6. Have a cup of water ready if the person has difficulty swallowing. (You may bring a small amount of consecrated wine if the person cannot swallow the host.)
7. Create links to the parish, e.g., bring a parish bulletin, share news from the parish, ask if there is anything the parish can do for them.
8. Thank the person for the opportunity to pray with them and for their hospitality.
9. Return any unconsumed hosts to the tabernacle at your parish 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 the service.
4. *Don't* carry the consecrated host in a plastic bag or other unsuitable container. Instead, use a pyx to carry the consecrated host.
5. *Don't* leave the consecrated host if the person cannot receive it. Instead, return at a later date to see the sick person.