



## Guidelines for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

### **Introduction**

These guidelines are provided for your use in properly carrying out the important roles and responsibilities associated with being an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion (“EMHC”) at Saint Basil. While our parish priests and deacons are the ordinary ministers of the Holy Eucharist, your ministry assists the ordinary ministers and our parishioners by facilitating the distribution of the Eucharist where large numbers of the faithful seek this Sacrament. In addition, the parish has a significant role in bringing Holy Communion to the sick due to the assisted living facilities within our boundaries and the homebound.

This guide is divided into three sections. The first section contains information regarding the distribution of the sacred species at the Sunday Masses. The second section discusses assisting with the distribution of blessed ashes on Ash Wednesday. The third section covers service as an assisted living minister/homebound minister. This publication is not capable of anticipating many of the situations EMHC will encounter within their ministry, so careful judgment is a requirement. Please note that, unless there is a need due to shortage, you should only fulfill one ministry service at a Mass, i.e., lector or cantor/choir member or EMHC.

### **Section I - Distributing Communion**

“All ministers of Holy Communion should show the greatest reverence for the Most Holy Eucharist by their demeanor, their attire, and the manner in which they handle the consecrated bread or wine.” Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion at Mass – General Principles – U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

#### **General Instructions**

1. Proper attire for performing the duties of this ministry is important. Your dress displays your reverence for your ministry and must never be a distraction to those who will receive Communion from you.

Extreme care must be exercised to present a somewhat conservative and modest appearance. Tight, form-fitting clothes may not portray a modest appearance. Shorts, jeans, athletic attire, tee shirts, flip flops and clothes that are categorically casual are inappropriate for this ministry.

2. Ministers should arrive for Mass approximately 10 minutes prior to the scheduled Mass time. Please stop at the sacristy and check off your name on the schedule to show that you are present. One person must volunteer (sign up) to bring the consecrated hosts from the Tabernacle to the altar during the Our Father. Make sure the Tabernacle key is in place.

**St. Basil the Great Church**  
**Kimberton, Pa.**  
**Guidelines for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion**

3. **If a sacristan is not present**, the ciboria filled with unconsecrated hosts and the wine cruet with about one inch of wine are placed on the tall table in the rear of the church. The water cruet should be on the altar's credence table. Water is not a gift to be processed in the offertory procession. Also, if you arrive for Mass and the chalices are not on the credence table, you need to pour 1/3 c. wine in each of the two chalices which are behind the reredos with a measuring cup. The wine bottle is in the refrigerator in the sacristy and should be returned there after you fill the chalices behind the reredos. Put the filled chalices and the purificators on the credence table.

Distribution at Weekend Masses

1. Holy Communion at Saint Basil is offered to the congregation in two distinct ways. Under one species, only the Sacred Body is offered in the form of the host. Under two species, the Sacred Body is offered as the host and, at the communicant's option, the Precious Blood is offered in the form of wine. There is also the option of low gluten hosts for those who are gluten sensitive. Those communicants place a low gluten host on the altar before Mass and receive the host directly from the priest on the altar. Some are so sensitive that they cannot tolerate the "low gluten" hosts. Therefore, please be aware that a communicant may approach the cup directly and by-pass reception of the host. That is perfectly acceptable behavior. According to Catholic doctrine, the whole of Christ is contained in the Precious Blood alone. It is very important that EMHC be aware of what method will be used at each Mass they serve, and thus, be aware of the number of ministers needed. Distribution of the Precious Blood may be suspended during flu season. Also, if a Deacon is present, one less EMHC is needed. Check the schedule in the sacristy.
2. As the Our Father is begun, the EMHC who volunteered proceeds to the Tabernacle, sanitizing his/her hands on the way, removes the ciboria, brings them to the altar, places them on the corner cloth (corporal), removes the lids and returns to the foot of the altar. An EMHC never redistributes the hosts from ciborium to ciborium. The remaining EMHC, after sanitizing their hands, also align themselves at the foot of the altar.
3. Immediately after the celebrant consumes the Sacred Body and Precious Blood, the EMHC bow together and ascend the steps. The celebrant will distribute Communion to the EMHC. The celebrant will then offer the Precious Blood to the first EMHC who in turn will offer it to the remaining EMHC. If the priest handed you the celebrant's chalice, place that chalice on the altar when finished. (The celebrant's chalice is for those present on the altar.) The other two chalices are for the congregation. If the priest does not offer a second chalice to others on the altar, the second EMHC, after consuming the Precious Blood, takes a chalice from the altar and offers it to the lectors, cantor, and altar servers. Each priest is different; be flexible and go with the flow.
4. After the ministers have received Communion, the priest will hand each EMHC a communion vessel. The EMHC then proceed to their Communion stations.

**St. Basil the Great Church**  
**Kimberton, Pa.**  
**Guidelines for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion**

5. When carrying the communion vessels, ministers move carefully and deliberately to their stations. The Communion vessel is generally held with both hands for safety, as well as to convey the special reverence for its contents. (Kwatera, p. 6).
6. The position of the Communion stations where Holy Communion is offered under *one species* is the same for all Masses.

Two of the stations will be at the front of the altar. The other two are located at each side of the altar.

The position of the Communion stations where Holy Communion is offered under *two species* is the same for all Masses. A total of six distribution points will be served by the celebrant, a deacon (if present), plus five (or four) EMHC.

The Sacred Body is distributed from the positions noted above. The Precious Blood stations are mid-way between the side and center stations distributing the Sacred Body.

7. Ministering The Sacred Body

- a) “Your first act in ministering communion is waiting” (Kwatera, p.6). This means allowing the communicant to reach you and “get settled.” This may take a moment for the mom who is shepherding one or two children down the aisle.
- b) When the communicant is ready (which may be signaled by a slight head bow), the minister makes friendly eye contact, raises the Host to approximately eye level and says “The Body of Christ.” Allow a moment for the communicant to respond “Amen.”
- c) The communicant can receive Communion either on the tongue or in the hands. The minister observes the communicant’s signal – either the up-turned palms of the hands or the opening of the mouth. If placing the host in the hands, **place it** - do not drop it in the palm of the upper hand.
- d) At times, ministers may find they are short of the hosts they need to finish distribution at their station. If there are a large number of people waiting to receive, signal the next person in line to wait, proceed to the closest EMHC or the priest and indicate that you need additional hosts. If it appears that the shortage is small, the minister can remain at the station and carefully break the remaining hosts in half to meet the shortage.
- e) Once the last person in your line has received Communion, check to make sure that no one else is trying to receive. An usher may request that you move to an ill or elderly person unable to walk down the aisle. Also, look to make sure that the other stations do not need help.
- f) Take the communion plate from the altar server, proceed back to the altar and return the ciborium to the priest at his left side on the corporal. Current guidance requires that the priest or deacon will wipe the “fragments” from the communion

**St. Basil the Great Church**  
**Kimberton, Pa.**  
**Guidelines for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion**

plates and purify the vessels. But be flexible. Each priest is different. Return the communion plate to the altar server. Wait for the other ministers to join you. Once all ministers have returned, stay in place until an EMHC is given the ciboria then descend the steps together.

- g) Proceed to the foot of the altar, bow together, and as the EMHC with the ciboria proceeds to the Tabernacle, return to your pew. The EMHC who places the consecrated hosts in the Tabernacle takes responsibility of putting the key in the lockup after Mass.
- h) The altar servers will bring the water cruet to the priest for purifying the vessels and then they will clear the altar and place everything on the credence table. After Mass, **if there is no sacristan**, the EMHC return to the altar and prepare for the next Mass.

Regardless if the celebrant purified the vessels, they should be cleansed at the end of each Mass by rinsing in the sacrarium and washing with soap and water, rinsed, dried and prepared for the next Mass. The empty chalices are placed on the counter behind the reredos with clean purificators ready for the next Mass. The celebrant's chalice is dressed. The finger bowl is emptied and dried. Both the celebrant's chalice and the finger bowl are placed on the credence table. Put the used cloths in the laundry bag. The cruets are taken to the sacristy. Fill the water cruet with water from the refrigerator and the wine to one inch and place both in the fridge. Rinse the wine funnel. The purified ciboria are filled with hosts in the sacristy and are placed to the left of the fridge on the counter.

If it is the last Mass on Sunday, the altar and credence table are cleared except for the silver tray. Red gospel book is placed on the countertop behind the reredos. Chalices go in the cabinets. The finger bowl goes on the counter. The two corporals are folded and returned to the drawer in the sacristy. The cruets are brought back to the sacristy, rinsed thoroughly and put on their sides on the tray to dry.

#### 8. Distributing the Precious Blood

- a) The procedure is similar to that for the distribution of Communion with a few exceptions. After the priest hands you a chalice and a cloth (purificator), proceed to a station.
- b) When the recipient comes forward, slightly raise the chalice and say – “The Blood of Christ.” The proper response by the communicant is “Amen.” Wipe the rim of the chalice with the purificator and rotate the vessel about ¼ turn before offering it to the next person. When the last person has received, you may return to the right side of the altar. Consume any Precious Blood remaining and place the chalice on the altar to the right of the priest for purification. The Precious Blood is never poured in the sacrarium. If you prefer not to consume the remaining Precious Blood, you should request the other ministers to assist you.

**St. Basil the Great Church  
Kimberton, Pa.  
Guidelines for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion**

Miscellaneous Situations - Communion

**Q: What if someone is having difficulty getting up to the altar?**

A: Move towards them to distribute Communion.

**Q: What if you are asked to distribute to someone who can't make it to the altar?**

A: Go to the person after the normal distribution of Communion.

**Q: What if someone brings a pyx to Communion?**

A: An EMHC may present a pyx for the purpose of a Communion visit. However, this should be done after Mass at the Tabernacle.

**Q: What if someone receiving Communion looks “questionable”?**

A: As our role is never to judge, you may give them Communion, but watch where they go. If you feel that a situation is developing that seems questionable, ushers can assist, if necessary.

**Q: What if a non-Catholic I know personally comes forward to receive Holy Communion ?**

A: The overriding concern in such cases is not to cause any embarrassment to the person coming to the altar. Therefore, it is not appropriate to confront someone who approaches the altar reverently. In addition, those charged with distributing Holy Communion are never to judge the worthiness of those seeking this sacrament since we can never know with absolute certainty their “state of grace.”

If someone who has received Holy Communion is not, to your knowledge, a practicing Catholic, it might be appropriate to raise the question of his or her reception in a future social setting. Although you would need to be very non-judgmental in your approach, you might inquire why they chose to receive at a Catholic liturgy. Perhaps they are unaware that our Catholic faith exclusively reserves the reception of Holy Communion for members of the Church in the “state of grace.”

**Q: What if I drop a Host?**

A: Reverently pick up the Host and place it in a clean tissue or handkerchief so it may be consumed or properly disposed in the sacrarium. If you do not have a tissue, hold the Host in your hand.

**Q: What if there are not enough EMHC?**

A: If there are not enough ministers, please proceed to the altar to offer your assistance, if you are neatly attired.

**Q: What if some Precious Blood is spilled?**

A: Slowly and carefully blot the consecrated wine with a part of the purificator. If the cleanliness of the purificator is compromised by this effort, return to the sacristy for a clean one.

**St. Basil the Great Church**  
**Kimberton, Pa.**  
**Guidelines for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion**

**Q: If a youngster seeks to receive the Precious Blood?**

A: Be sure that an accompanying adult indicates reception is permissible.

**Section II – The Distribution of Ashes On Ash Wednesday**

General Instructions

1. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion may be called upon to assist the priests of the parish in the distribution of ashes at the beginning of the Lenten Season.
2. Ashes are generally distributed at Ash Wednesday Masses after the homily. At some Masses, they may be distributed at the end of Mass. Check with the priest.
3. Enter the sanctuary in the same fashion you use for communion. However, the vessels for the distribution of ashes are arranged on the credence table. The ministers should stand near the credence table to receive their sacramental ashes from the priest and to take possession of vessels for distribution.
4. Positions for the distribution of ashes conform to the regular communion stations unless the priest directs you otherwise.
5. Distribution of ashes
  - a) Ashes are mixed with water and given to the ministers in small bowls.
  - b) Dip your left or right thumb into the ashes, which will have a consistency similar to a thick mud.
  - c) Trace a small cross on the forehead of the person receiving the ashes as you say "Turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel!" or "Remember, you are dust, and to dust you will return!"
6. When you have finished distributing ashes, return to the altar and leave the bowl containing the unused ashes on the credence table.
7. Your hands will require washing.
  - a) Ashes are a sacramental and should be treated reverently. The cleanup should be done at a bowl with some soapy water and a few hand towels either at the credence table or, more likely, in the sacristy.
  - b) You may wish to have an available moist towelette in the event the bowl washing fails to get your hands thoroughly clean.
8. Remain on the altar until traffic at the front of the altar permits you to return to your seat.

**Section III – Assisted Living Ministry and Home Visitation**

Booklets are provided with liturgical instructions for group and home visits. It is suggested that the gospel of the day be read in lieu of the gospel readings in the booklet. Be mindful that if a

**St. Basil the Great Church  
Kimberton, Pa.  
Guidelines for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion**

person has a hard time swallowing, either ask if they would like a glass of water before you start or break the host and give them a small piece. Consume any broken pieces rather than return them to the Tabernacle.

Miscellaneous Situations – Assisted Living Ministry

**Q: What if a patient spits up the Host?**

A: Don gloves and attempt to retrieve the host in paper towels or tissue. Ask the nurse for a plastic bag or container and place the bundle in that container. Return to the church and wash the bundle down the sacrarium.

**Q: What if I drop a Host on the floor?**

A: Under no circumstances should you consume the host. The risk of infection is too great. Wrap the host in a tissue. Return to the church and wash the bundle down the sacrarium.

**Resources**

Kwatera, Michael A., (1989), *A Guide to Eucharistic Ministry*, Celebration Press, Kansas City, MO

Saint Patrick's Parish, (2007), *Handbook for Ministry of Extraordinary Minister of the Eucharist*, Stoneham, MA, from the website [www.catholic-church.org/st-patricks/MINISTRY/eucrHB.htm](http://www.catholic-church.org/st-patricks/MINISTRY/eucrHB.htm) on September 19, 2007

Saint Agnes Parish (2011), *Guidelines for Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist*, West Chester, PA.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops from the website [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org)