

# NORMS FOR EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION

Diocese of Covington

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The Second Vatican Council teaches that the Eucharist is the "source and summit" of the Christian faith. The entire Church draws her life from the celebration of the Eucharist. "At Mass - that is, the Lord's Supper-the people of God are called together, with a priest presiding and acting in the person of Christ, to celebrate the memorial of the Lord, the Eucharistic Sacrifice" (*General Instruction on the Roman Missal* #27).

The *General Instruction to the Roman Missal* further states,

The Eucharistic celebration is an action of Christ and the Church, namely, the holy people united and ordered under the Bishop. It therefore pertains to the whole Body of the Church, manifests it, and has its effect upon it. It also affects the individual members of the Church in different ways, according to their different orders, offices and actual participation. In this way, the Christian people, "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people," expresses its cohesion and its hierarchical ordering. All, therefore, whether they are ordained ministers or lay Christian faithful, in fulfilling their office or their duty, should carry out solely but completely that which pertains to them (# 91).

The permission for extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, given in 1969 by Pope Paul VI, was implemented by the instruction aptly entitled *Immensae Caritatis* - "Immense Love". In that instruction we read:

Christ the Lord has left to the Church, his spouse, a testament of this immense love. This wonderful gift of the Eucharist, which is the greatest gift of all, demands that such an important mystery would be increasingly known and its saving power more fully shared..  
. . Present day conditions demand that, while the utmost reverence owing to such a Sacrament is maintained, greater access to Holy Communion should be made possible so that the faithful, by sharing more fully in the fruits of the sacrifice of the Mass, might dedicate themselves more readily and effectively to God and to the good of the Church and of humankind.

This instruction reflects a growing awareness on the part of the Church for the importance of communion in the life of the faithful believer. Since the early part of the 20th century, when Pope Pius X gave instruction that the faithful might receive communion frequently and at an early age (1905, 1910), large numbers of persons have come forward for communion at liturgy, and those who are sick or confined felt a special need for the comfort of this sacrament. In addition, the action taken by Pius XII to revise the Eucharistic fast regulations, and the permission granted by Paul VI to restore the ancient practice of communion under forms of both

bread and wine have made necessary additional ministers. The ministry of the extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion thus came about as a direct result of the great reverence and hunger Catholics feel for the Eucharist, and their desire to receive it frequently.

While granting permission for extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, the Church has always made it clear that the ordinary ministers of Holy Communion are the ordained bishops, priests and deacons.

Moreover, also by reason of their sacred Ordination, the ordinary ministers of Holy Communion are the Bishop, the Priest and the Deacon, to whom it belongs therefore to administer Holy Communion to the lay members of Christ's faithful during the celebration of Mass. In this way their ministerial Office in the Church is fully and accurately brought to light, and the sign value of the Sacrament is made complete (*Redemptionis Sacramentum* #154).

In addition to the ordinary ministers there is the formally instituted acolyte, who by virtue of his institution is an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion even outside the celebration of Mass. (*Redemptionis Sacramentum* #155).

All the faithful should clearly understand that the title "extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion" is one that is clearly and deliberately chosen and used by the Church:

This function is to be understood strictly according to the name by which it is known, that is to say, that of extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, and not [Eucharistic ministers] nor "extraordinary minister of the Eucharist" nor "special minister of the Eucharist," by which names the meaning of this function is unnecessarily and improperly broadened (*Redemptionis Sacramentum* #156).

Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion may assist the priest with the distribution of Holy Communion at Mass in accordance with the guidelines set forth by the Church in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (2002), *Redemptionis Sacramentum* (2004), and *Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America* (2001) from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. They may also assist in the distribution of Holy Communion to the sick and homebound.

## **II. EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION**

The decision to implement the use of extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion in any given situation requires consideration of several factors. Those responsible for the celebration must always keep these factors in mind when making pastoral decisions about the use of extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion. Some specific considerations are the following:

The priest may be assisted in the distribution of Communion by other priests who happen to be present. If such priests are not present and there are a very large number of communicants, the priest may call upon extraordinary ministers to assist him (*GIRM* #162).

In every celebration of the Eucharist there should be a sufficient number of ministers for Holy Communion so that it can be distributed in an orderly and reverent manner (*Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America* #26).

In practice, the need to avoid obscuring the role of the priest and the deacon as the ordinary ministers of Holy Communion by an excessive use of extraordinary ministers might in some circumstances constitute a reason either for limiting the distribution of Holy Communion under both species or for using intinction instead of distributing the Precious Blood from the chalice (*Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America* #24).

The extraordinary minister of Holy Communion has a distinct role in the liturgical celebration. Even though the minister may serve in other liturgical ministries, he or she should serve in only one ministry at a particular Mass.

### **III. SELECTION**

The persons who serve in the role of extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are recommended by their respective pastor/parochial administrator/parish life collaborator or chaplain of religious order. (The extraordinary minister of Holy Communion is not a "volunteer" position.) Recommended persons will be appointed to a particular parish. They must be fully initiated, mature, members of the Church, who have by their actual Christian living shown that they have taken their faith seriously. They should embody the Christian life of service, and be willing to grow in their love for the Eucharist.

Health care institutions and schools are served by extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion appointed by the bishop for the parish at which they are registered and active.

The following are qualifications for a person to serve as an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion in the Diocese of Covington. An extraordinary minister of Holy Communion must:

- I. be Catholic and have received all of the sacraments of initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist);
2. live his or her life in such a way that their love for the Eucharist is evident by their regular participation in the Eucharistic liturgy;
3. demonstrate acceptance of the teachings of the Church by his/her way of life;
4. be adequately formed to carry out this ministry as the Church intends, and take part in continuing formation through parish and/or diocesan workshops and/or retreats;

5. be recommended by their pastor/parochial administrator/parish life collaborator or chaplain to the Bishop who may accept the recommendation for a four year term renewable;
6. be at least sixteen (16) years of age;
7. not labor under a canonical penalty whether imposed or declared (e.g., not be in an invalid marriage or be a laicized cleric; see RS 168);
8. commit to a faithful and reliable presence at the liturgies to which they have been assigned.
9. be VIRTUS trained, compliant, and up-to-date on bulletins.

#### **IV. FORMATION**

Before being appointed by the Diocesan Bishop, a candidate must participate in both a diocesan and parish training program. Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion should also participate in yearly spiritual growth and training programs offered by their parish or the Diocese.

**Diocesan Formation Program:** The diocesan training program for extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion will include the following:

1. Reflection on the nature of liturgical ministry, the mystery of the Eucharist and the theology of the Mass.
2. Renewed appreciation of the ritual nature and structure of the Mass, especially the importance and role of the baptized assembly and the multiple liturgical roles within it.
3. The relationship between Communion of the sick and the assembly's celebration of the Mass, especially on Sunday.

**Parish Formation Program:** The parish training program for extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion will include the following:

1. Rehearsal of the practical function of the extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion both at Mass and in visitation of the sick. In addition, where it is necessary for such ministers to lead Communion services outside of Mass or to assist with public Eucharistic adoration, they must be specifically prepared for their role as leader of the community's prayer and in the use of the prescribed ritual.
2. Spirituality of the liturgical minister.
3. Ongoing enrichment. The Office of Worship and Liturgy will serve as a resource center to assist parishes in providing the ongoing enrichment.

## **V. APPOINTMENT**

All extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are appointed by the Diocesan Bishop (*Redemptionis Sacramentum* #155). Through the Office of Worship and Liturgy, the local pastor or priest chaplain will submit the appropriate form nominating the individual minister(s) for appointment by the Bishop. The nomination form will indicate that the nominee has met all of the criteria listed in the "Selection" section above.

## **VI. COMMISSIONING**

After the completion of the diocesan and parish formation programs and appointment by the Bishop, persons are called forth in a community celebration (Sunday Eucharist, weekday Eucharist, or liturgy of the Word outside Eucharist) to be commissioned as extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion. A rite of commissioning can be found in the *Book of Blessings*(Chapter 63).

A person is appointed as an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion for a particular parish for a set term. On an occasion such as a wedding or funeral, an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion from one parish/institution may be given permission to function for the single occasion in another parish/institution. The permission is given by the pastor or chaplain where the celebration occurs.

In the interest of allowing many willing parishioners to serve in this ministry, a term of service of four years is hereby established in the Diocese of Covington. Individual extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, who desire to do so, may conclude their ministry at the end of the four year term. At the same time, the local pastor or chaplain, may choose not to submit the name of the minister to the Bishop for reappointment bearing in mind the needs of the parish or institution and the capabilities of the individual.

## **VII. REVERENCE**

"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 and wine" (*Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America* #29).

## **VIII. CLOTHING**

Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion should always dress in a fashion that becomes the dignity of the office they hold and the sacredness of the sacrament they distribute. Good taste and common sense are the best guides in this area. *In the dioceses of the United States of America, acolytes, altar servers, lectors, and other lay ministers may wear the alb or other suitable vesture or other appropriate and dignified clothing (GIRM#339).* Albs are permitted, though not required.

## **IX. PROCEDURES AT THE CELEBRATION OF THE EUCHARIST**

### **A. Before the Mass**

1. Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion take their seats in the assembly area and participate in the Mass as active members of the assembly.

### **B. At the Breaking of the Eucharistic Bread**

1. As the Lamb of God is begun, the priest breaks the Eucharistic bread. Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion may approach the sanctuary at this time but do not approach the altar or assist with the fraction rite.
2. After the priest concludes his own Communion, he distributes Communion to the extraordinary ministers, and then hands them their vessels for the distribution of Holy Communion to the faithful. (Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion do not take their vessels from the altar; vessels are always handed to them by the celebrant, concelebrant, or deacon.)

### **C. Distribution of the Body and Blood of the Lord**

1. The extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion go to the assigned places to distribute the Holy Eucharist to the assembly.
2. Holy Communion is given with the words *the Body of Christ* or *the Blood of Christ*, without changing or adding words, including the communicant's name.
3. Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are not permitted to give blessings.

#### **When offering the Body of Christ:**

- a. Reverently hold the ciborium (show care for the sacred elements);
- b. Allow the communicant to stand before you and make a bow of the head in reverence to the Lord;
- c. As the communicant steps forward and bows his/her head as a sign of reverence, the minister takes the Sacred Body of Jesus, raises it slightly, and showing it, says, *the Body of Christ*. The individual replies, Amen, extends the hand or tongue, and the Host is given accordingly.  
*Note:* The choice of how one receives the Eucharist, whether in the hand or on the tongue, belongs to the communicant.
- d. The extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion must ensure that the communicant actually consumes the sacred host.

### **When sharing the chalice of the Blood of Christ:**

- a. Reverently hold the chalice and purificator.
- b. Allow the communicant to stand before you and make the bow of the head to honor the Lord.
- c. Present the chalice with the words, *the Blood of Christ*.
- d. Let the communicant take the chalice (helping those who may seem a little unsteady).
- e. Accept the chalice back, wiping it well inside and out, turning the chalice and using different areas of the cloth for wiping.

### **D. Completion of the Communion Rite**

After the distribution of Holy Communion, whatever remains of the Body and Blood of the Lord is taken to the altar. There, the priest or deacon reverently consumes what remains of the Blood of Christ. Remaining hosts are also consumed or are taken to the tabernacle. Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion may assist in consuming what remains of the Blood of Christ.

### **E. Cleansing of Vessels**

1. The sacred vessels are purified by the priest, the deacon or an instituted acolyte. The purification of the chalice is done with water alone, which is then consumed by whoever does the purification. The paten is usually wiped clean with the purificator.
2. The sacred vessels may be purified right after Communion or they may be taken to the credence table, placed on a corporal and covered with a cloth. They are then purified, normally at the side table, following the dismissal of the people.
3. If the priest, deacon, or instituted acolyte purifies the vessels during Mass, he does so at the side of the altar or at the credence table. (If purified at the altar, a server then takes the vessels to the credence table.)
4. After Mass, a more thorough washing with hot water and soap and careful drying is recommended. This may be done by the sacristan or by others, always handling the vessels with respect. Jewelry must be removed before cleansing the vessels.

### **F. Mishaps**

If a particle of the Eucharistic bread should fall, it is picked up reverently and consumed or allowed to dissolve completely in water and then poured into the sacrarium. If any of the Precious Blood spills, the area of the spill should be covered if necessary. As soon as possible, the spot should be washed and the water poured into the sacrarium. Any unusual mishaps should be referred to the priest.

## **X. EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION FOR THE SICK AND THE HOMEBOUND**

Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion who take Communion to the sick and homebound have a role in sharing the Church's total ministry to the sick after the manner of Jesus. In bringing Communion to the sick and homebound, the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion represents Christ and manifests faith and charity on behalf of the whole community toward those who cannot be present at Sunday Mass. This ministry is a sign of support and concern shown by the community for its members.

Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion should be called forward after the Communion Rite at Mass, receive the pyx containing the Sacred Host(s) which are to be distributed to the sick or homebound. Individual parishes and institutions may develop the specific procedure for the extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion who receive the Blessed Sacrament in the pyx at the conclusion of the Communion Rite. An outline of this procedure will be provided to parishes and diocesan institutions by the Office of Worship and Liturgy.

**It is never permissible for the extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, or anyone else to simply present a pyx requesting a host(s) during the normal Communion procession.**

**It is not permissible for someone taking part in the Communion procession to take an additional Sacred Host from the minister in order to take Holy Communion to someone in the Church who is not able to participate in the Communion Procession.**

It may be helpful for there to be special seating in the Church for those persons who find it too difficult to participate in the Communion Procession. This will allow the priest, deacon or extraordinary minister of Holy Communion to distribute Holy Communion directly to such persons.

When the Eucharist is brought to the sick it must be carried in a pyx. Ideally, a table is to be prepared with a cloth and a lighted candle for the Eucharist.

When bringing Holy Communion to the sick, the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion must take the pyx which contains the Blessed Sacrament directly to the person without making any other stops enroute.

When the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion gives Communion outside of Mass to persons who are sick, he or she uses the Rite of *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass*. This rite is found in various publications, including the *Pastoral Care of the Sick*.

The minister to the sick may celebrate the Communion service in one of two ways:

- a) in context of a liturgy of the Word; or
- b) in a brief form for use in more restrictive circumstances (such as hospitals, etc.)

It is recommended that whenever possible a group of sick or aged persons be brought together to celebrate the liturgy of the Word and the Communion Service in a communal manner. If this is impossible, the minister should try to celebrate the Communion Service as fully as possible, depending on the condition of the patient.

Those who care for the sick or family members may also participate in the Communion Service and receive Communion even if they have already received Communion for that day.

Priests with pastoral responsibilities should also see to it that the sick who are confined to home or health care institutions have the Sacrament of Penance available. Ministers to the sick should routinely remind those to whom they minister of such availability.

The extraordinary minister of Holy Communion is always to exercise his/her service with reverence in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. The words, actions and presence of the minister carrying the consecrated Bread should clearly reflect the words, actions and presence of Christ.