

NORMS FOR EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION

The Office of Worship has prepared the following norms for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion at Sunday Mass, as well as other Eucharistic celebrations.

The purpose of these norms is to provide some general principles and guidance regarding this important ministry of the Church. They define clearly the contents of the liturgical law on this matter, the demands of a good Eucharistic liturgy, and the expectations of the universal and local Church.

MINISTRY OF HOLY COMMUNION

The administration of Holy Communion during the Mass is truly a ministry. It is the ministry of bringing the sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ to the People of God. It also witnesses to our faith in the Real Presence of Christ in the Most Holy Eucharist. This ministry should, therefore, be treated with utmost dignity and reverence.

When there are not enough priests and deacons available for the large number of communicants, the priest may call upon extraordinary ministers to assist, (e.g. duly instituted acolytes* or even other Faithful who have been deputed for this purpose). (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 162*) Thus, "Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion" is the proper title for those lay men and women who serve the Church in this way. References such as "Eucharistic Minister" or "Special Minister of the Eucharist" should be discontinued.

It should be kept in mind that ordained ministers (priests and deacons) present for the celebration of the Eucharist are the ordinary ministers of Holy Communion and are expected to distribute Holy Communion, unless they are too frail or sick to do so. (*Inestimable Donum, 10, Redemptionis Sacramentum, 158*).

REQUIREMENTS AND SELECTION OF MINISTERS

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion must meet the following criteria:

1. Be fully initiated Roman Catholics having received Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist.
2. Be at least 16 years of age.
3. They should be persons who sincerely try to live the Gospel in their communal and individual lives. They should faithfully participate in the life

of the Church and, with God's grace, strive to live their faith in every aspect of their lives.

4. If they are married, they must be married in the Catholic Church.
5. They must be properly trained in the parish and appointed by their Pastor for this ministry before they serve. It is no longer necessary to submit their names to the Bishop.

All new Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should be commissioned, preferably during a Sunday Mass. The Rite of Commissioning is found in the *Book of Blessings*, Chapter 63.

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are to wear proper attire. The use of a symbol such as a cross or a medal is permissible.

Proper terms should always be used when referring to the sacrament. The consecrated hosts should always be referred to as the "Body of Christ" and the consecrated wine should always be referred to as the "Precious Blood." To refer to them as "bread" and "wine" after they are consecrated may contribute to undermining our understanding of the Eucharist as the Real Presence of Christ.

At least once a year, each parish is encouraged to arrange some program or retreat to renew the faith, prayer, and commitment of the present ministers. These meetings/retreats could also include the discussion of issues that have arisen in the course of their ministry.

All Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should be encouraged to attend diocesan workshops on liturgy sponsored by the Office of Worship as well as relevant workshops offered by other diocesan offices (e.g. Religious Education, Parish Resources, etc.).

SERVING AT MASS

The Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are part of the Faithful that form a holy people. They are to take an active part in Mass by joining in the prayers and the singing, the hearing of the Word of God and in the common offering of the Sacrifice of the Mass.

They 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, 29*)

Normally, the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should be seated with the assembly before the liturgy begins.

If ... the tabernacle with the Most Blessed Sacrament is situated in the sanctuary, the Priest, the Deacon, and the other ministers genuflect when they approach the altar and when they depart from it, but not during the celebration of Mass itself. (*GIRM, 274*)

After the priest and deacon have received Communion, the extraordinary ministers approach the altar and stand at a convenient place to receive Holy Communion. (*GIRM 162, Norms, 38*).

After all Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion have received Communion, the priest hands the vessels containing the Eucharistic species to the deacons and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion and they go their assigned place. (*GIRM 162*)

Extraordinary Ministers may not self-communicate by taking their own host or passing the ciborium from person to person. (*GIRM, 160*)

If the whole assembly is not being offered the Precious Blood of Christ, it is not appropriate to offer it to the ministers only. In this case, the extraordinary ministers should only receive Communion under the one species.

MINISTRATION OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

After the communicant makes a sign of reverence by bowing his/her head, the Body of Christ is administered with the words, "The Body of Christ." After the communicant has responded, "Amen," the host is placed in the hand or on the tongue, according to the manner indicated by the communicant. (*GIRM, 160*)

The Body of Christ is always administered to the communicant. Communicants are not permitted to take their own hosts and communicate themselves. (*GIRM 160*)

Care should be taken to see that enough hosts are consecrated for all that are present at a Mass. It is most desirable that the Faithful, just as the priest himself is bound to do, receive the Lord's Body from hosts consecrated at the same Mass. (*GIRM, 85*) The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* makes no mention of bringing the ciborium(a) with host consecrated at an earlier Mass to the altar during the Eucharistic celebration. However, if the ministers of the Body of Christ realize that they do not have sufficient hosts for the number of communicants, another minister or the Master of Ceremonies should be ready to go to the tabernacle to bring the ciborium(a) to the ministers of Holy Communion who do not have sufficient hosts.

If a host falls to the ground during the distribution, the minister should pick it up and either consume it, or after the distribution is over, completely dissolve it in water and pour it into the sacrarium or directly into the ground if it seems to be contaminated and not advisable to consume.

Although the official norms are silent on this subject, it is suggested that if someone who is not receiving Communion comes in the Communion Procession to the minister of the Body of Christ, the minister may offer a simple Sign of the Cross on the forehead without any words.

At the end of the Communion Rite, any remaining consecrated hosts must be consumed or placed in a ciborium and reserved in a tabernacle. Care should be taken with any fragments remaining on the corporal or in the sacred vessels.
(*Norms, 51*)

MINISTRATION OF THE PRECIOUS BLOOD OF CHRIST

After the communicant makes a sign of reverence by bowing his/her head, the chalice is offered to the communicant with the words, "The Blood of Christ," to which the communicant responds, "Amen." Generally, the communicant should be given the chalice, hold it firmly in both hands, and drink from it. However, in the case of physical disability or weakness, the minister should be ready to assist in holding the chalice.

After each person has received the Precious Blood of Christ, the minister should wipe both sides of the rim of the chalice with a purificator and turn the chalice slightly before repeating the procedure for the next communicant.

The chalice is always ministered to the communicant. (*GIRM 160*) The Chalice may never be left on the altar or another place to be picked up nor passed from one communicant to another.

Any danger of spilling the Precious Blood should be carefully avoided. If by chance, it should spill, the area should be covered with a purificator immediately until it can be washed after Mass.

After the Communion Rite, the ministers should consume the remaining Precious Blood from their chalices at a side table. It should never be poured into the ground or the sacrarium, unless for some reason it has become contaminated and unfit for consumption.

Priests, deacons, or instituted acolytes* should purify the vessels after the Communion Rite at a side table. It is also permissible to leave the empty vessels

suitably covered at a side table on a corporal to be purified immediately after Mass. (GIRM 163, 183, 192, 279, 284b)

COMMUNION UNDER BOTH KINDS

In the Diocese of Honolulu, Communion under both kinds, the Body and Blood of Christ, is normative on Sundays and Holy Days, and even weekdays, unless the pastor of a parish has determined some legitimate reason for not doing so, such as an inadequate number of extraordinary ministers, perennial abuses, etc.

Holy Communion has a fuller form as a sign when it is distributed under both kinds. For in this form the sign of the Eucharistic banquet is more clearly evident and clear expression is given to the divine will by which the new and eternal Covenant is ratified in the Blood of the Lord, as also the relationship between the Eucharistic banquet and the eschatological banquet in the Father's Kingdom. (GIRM, 281)

The freedom of each communicant to choose or not to choose Communion under both kinds should be understood. Even if a person is unable to receive Communion under the form of the consecrated bread – the Body of Christ, he/she may choose to receive Communion under the form of the consecrated wine – the Precious Blood of Christ – alone.

COMMUNION BY INTINCTION

Ministration of Communion by intinction, that is, by dipping the consecrated host into the Precious Blood, is reserved to the priest (GIRM 287). In the Diocese of Honolulu it is generally not practiced since it eliminates the communicants' legitimate option to receive Communion in the hand, and also denies the right of the Faithful to receive Communion in the form of the consecrated host only. If a communicant with a consecrated host in hand approaches a minister distributing the Precious Blood with the intention of intincting the host, it is advisable to very kindly say something like: "I'm sorry, but that is not permitted. Would you like to drink from the chalice?"

CHILDREN AND COMMUNION FROM THE CHALICE

Children are encouraged to receive Communion under both kinds. Special care should be taken when children receive Communion from the chalice. Children are to be prepared catechetically and liturgically for the option of Communion under both kinds. Parents should be instructed that Communion under both kinds is an ancient tradition for children old enough to drink from a cup. Ideally, children

should have some familiarity with drinking wine at home before they are offered the chalice. Those preparing them for First Holy Communion should consider offering a small taste of unconsecrated wine in a vessel that is not normally used for Mass, so that children can become accustomed to its taste and the manner of receiving from the chalice. The children should be taught the difference between the unconsecrated wine and the consecrated Blood of Christ, even though they cannot perceive a difference with their senses. They should also be taught that they are not obliged to receive the Precious Blood, and that if they find the wine distasteful, they should not receive from the chalice. (*This Holy and Living Sacrifice* #49).

MINISTERS TO THE SICK AND HOMEBOUND

Ordinarily each commissioned Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion may take Communion to the sick. However, there may be certain specifically commissioned persons who are sent by the parish to minister to the sick or homebound on a regular basis.

Ideally, ministers to the sick are sent by the parish each Sunday to take the Eucharist to those who are prevented from being present because of age or illness.

The ministers may be blessed and ritually sent to extend the unity of the Eucharist with those who are sick. The formula for the ritual sending may be in these or similar words:

“My brothers and sisters, you are sent to bring the Word of God and the Bread of Life from this assembly to the sick and homebound members of our parish family. Go to them with our love and our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.”

(Liturgical Life 1988, Vol. II. No. 4, p. 9)

Ministers may also be sent in this manner at weekday Masses.

The practice of a minister asking that a pyx be filled while she/he is in the Communion line is highly discouraged. Only authorized Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, or those designated by the parish priest for a particular occasion, may take Communion to the sick.

The minister to the sick may celebrate the Communion Service in one of two ways: a) In the context of a Liturgy of the Word; or b) In a brief form for use in more restrictive circumstances (*Pastoral Care of the Sick, Chapter 3*). 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.

When Communion is brought to the sick or homebound it should be carried in a pyx. Ideally, a table is to be prepared with a cloth and a lighted candle. A vessel of holy water may also be made available.

Those who care for the sick or family members may also participate in the Communion Service and receive Communion.

Consecrated hosts that cannot be distributed immediately and consumed at once by the sick and homebound, should be consumed by the minister or returned to the tabernacle. No consecrated hosts should be kept overnight in the minister's home or vehicle.

If the sick person can only receive Communion under the form of the Precious Blood, the parish priest must first give authorization. A container of the consecrated wine may be brought from the Sunday or weekday celebration of the Eucharist. It is to be placed in a properly covered container and kept in the tabernacle until the minister is able to take it to the sick person. If any of the Precious Blood remains after the Communion Service, the minister is to consume what remains and properly purify the vessel.

Priests with pastoral responsibilities should also see to it that the sick who are confined to home or health care institutions be able to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance, and if necessary, the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. 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 the reverence and decorum expected in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. The words, actions, and presence of the minister in carrying the Body of Christ (and if necessary, the Precious Blood of Christ) should clearly reflect the words, actions, and presence of Christ.

VIATICUM

Viaticum is the reception of Holy Communion by a dying person. The norm for the reception of viaticum is within the context of the celebration of Mass with the dying person. However, when this is not possible due to circumstances and/or the condition of the dying person, an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion may distribute viaticum outside of Mass using the appropriate ritual. (*Pastoral Care of the Sick, Chapter 5*). The extraordinary minister should notify the parish priest that he/she did so. (*Code of Canon Law, #911*).

CONCLUSION

"Receiving the Bread of Life, the disciples of Christ ready themselves to undertake with the strength of the Risen Lord and his spirit the tasks which await them in their ordinary life. For the faithful who have understood the meaning of what they have done, the Eucharistic celebration does not stop at the church door. Like the first witnesses to the resurrection, Christians who gather each Sunday to experience and proclaim the presence of the Risen Lord are called to evangelize and bear witness in their daily lives." (*Dies Domini* #45)

*NOTE: Instituted acolytes receive the commission from the Bishop in a special liturgical rite. Normally this only pertains to candidates for the diaconate and priesthood. Most parish Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, though commissioned by their pastors, are not instituted acolytes.

RESOURCES

General Instruction of the Roman Missal. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Liturgy Documentary Series 2, 2003.

Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Liturgy Documentary Series 13, 2002.

Pastoral Care of the Sick. International Commission on English in the Liturgy, Catholic Book Publishing, New York, 1983.

Approved by Bishop Larry Silva on December 21, 2011.