

Office for Worship  
Diocese of Norwich

Guidelines for  
EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION



MARCH 2007

## **Introduction**

The Office for Worship together with the Diocesan Liturgical Commission has prepared the following guidelines for extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion serving during Mass.

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide help in this important ministry of the Church. For a smooth functioning of this ministry, the expectations of the universal and local Church, as well as those of the particular faith community, must be made known. Our guidelines define clearly the contents of the liturgical law on this matter and the requirements of a good Eucharistic liturgy.

## **Ministry of the Eucharist**

1. The distribution of the Body and Blood of Christ during the Mass is truly a ministry to the People of God. 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

## **Ministers of Communion**

2. In every celebration of the Eucharist there should always be a sufficient number of ministers for the distribution of Communion. Priority is always given to ordinary ministers, i.e. bishops, priests, deacons. If such ordinary ministers of Holy Communion are not present, "the priest may call upon extraordinary ministers to assist him, i.e. formally instituted acolytes or even some of the faithful who have been commissioned according to the prescribed rite." (GIRM, no. 162).

## **Requirements**

3. Women and men who are eighteen years or older and fully initiated i.e., confirmed, are eligible for this ministry. They should be Catholics who sincerely try to live the Gospel message in their communal and individual lives. They should participate in the Sunday Eucharist regularly and practice their faith. In addition, they should be willing and able to carry out the ministry on behalf of the community.
4. It is recommended that a term limit of three years be followed, to enable others to serve in this ministry. It is appropriate that each member of the parish participate in only one ministry at a time, to encourage more people to undertake liturgical ministries.

The extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion need not wear a special robe during the Mass, but proper attire is required. The use of a cross or a medal is permissible, depending on local parish norms (See GIRM #339).

5. All newly approved extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion must be properly prepared for this ministry. For this purpose, the Diocesan Office for Worship provides for education sessions regularly.
6. All new extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion should be commissioned, preferably during a Sunday Mass. The Rite of Commissioning during Mass and outside Mass are found in the *Book of Blessings*, #1874 – 1896.
7. Parish communities are encouraged to schedule regular programs to renew the faith, prayer and commitment of extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion. These sessions could also include discussions of the problems that might have arisen in the course of their ministry. The Office for Worship has recourse to resources for evenings or days of renewal. In addition, the Office for Worship and other diocesan offices jointly sponsor days of enrichment

### **Procedure During the Mass**

8. The extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion do not take part in the entrance procession. They should be seated in the congregation during Mass.
9. Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion approach the altar as the priest receives Communion. After the priest has concluded his own communion, he distributes Communion to the special ministers, assisted by the deacon, if present, and then hands the sacred vessels to them for distribution of Holy Communion to the people. The practice of extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion waiting to receive Holy Communion until after the distribution of Holy Communion is not in accord with liturgical law.
10. Communion under both forms is given to the special ministers. Then, the ciborium or cup with purificator is handed to each minister. The ministers go to their respective stations for the administration of Communion to the congregation. If a deacon is present, he administers the chalice to communicants (see GIRM #182).
11. After the distribution of Communion, the extraordinary ministers of the cup consume what remains of the Precious Blood from their chalice of distribution. They then return the vessels to a side table or the altar, where the ordinary minister purifies them either during or after Mass. Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion do not assist in the purification of the vessels.
12. Following the distribution of Communion, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion return to their places within the assembly.
13. The details of exactly when extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion approach the altar, as well as stations for the distribution of Communion under both kinds, must be determined in each parish.

### **Ministration of Hosts**

14. The host is administered with the words: "The Body of Christ." After the communicant has responded "Amen", the host is placed on the tongue or in the hands according to the manner indicated by the communicant.
15. The host is always ministered to the communicant. Communicants are not permitted to take their own hosts and communicate themselves.
16. If a host falls to the ground during the distribution of Communion, ordinarily the minister should pick it up and consume it.

### **Communion From the Cup**

17. The distribution of Communion under both kinds, especially at the Sunday Mass, is normative in the Diocese of Norwich, provided there are sufficient ordinary and extraordinary ministers available. The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM) states:

*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 (#281).

18. The distribution of Communion under both kinds is regulated by *Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in Dioceses of the United States of America*, promulgated by the United States Conference of Bishops on March 28, 2002 (USCCB Publication no. 5-432).
19. Prior to introducing the use of the cup, each parish should provide proper catechesis on the theological, liturgical and symbolic aspects of this practice. The freedom of each communicant to choose or not to choose Communion under both kinds must be maintained.

### **When Not Approved**

20. Communion under both kinds is not permitted in the following cases:
  - a. at Masses celebrated in the open with a great number of communicants (e.g., in a stadium with several thousand people in attendance)
  - b. at other Masses where the number of communicants is so great as to make it difficult for Communion under both kinds to be given in an orderly and reverent way (e.g., Masses celebrated in a civic square or building that would involve the carrying of the sacred species up and down a number of steps);

- c. at Masses where the assembled congregation is of such a diverse nature that it is difficult to ascertain whether those present have been sufficiently instructed about receiving Communion under both kinds;
- d. when circumstances do not permit the assurance that due reverence can be maintained towards the consecrated wine both during and after the celebration (cf. *Inaestimabile Donum*, 13-14).

### **Ministration of the Cup**

- 21. Generally, when the faithful receive from the chalice, there should be two ministers of the chalice for each minister with the host. Ministers should stand several feet from each other. In this way, the distribution of Communion will be at the same time efficient and reverent.
- 22. The chalice is offered to the communicant with the words, "The Blood of Christ," to which the communicant responds, "Amen." Generally, the communicant should hold the chalice firmly in both hands and drink from it. However, when and where necessary, the minister should be ready to assist in holding the cup.
- 23. After each communicant has received the Blood of Christ, the minister carefully wipes both sides of the rim of the chalice with a purificator. This action is a matter of both reverence and hygiene. For the same reason, the minister turns the chalice slightly after each communicant has received the Precious Blood (USCCB Norms #45).
- 24. With regard to children's Communion, the USCCB Norms state:
  - Children are encouraged to receive Communion under both kinds provided that they are properly instructed and that they are old enough to receive from the chalice (#47).
- 25. Any danger of spilling the Precious Blood should be carefully avoided. If, by chance, it should spill, the area should be marked and then washed after the Mass. The water used to purify this area should then be poured into the sacrarium. In the absence of sacrarium the water should be poured into the ground.
- 26. Normally, the ministers consume the remainder of the consecrated wine at the altar after the distribution of Communion and before the Prayer after Communion. If needed, they may seek the help of others.
- 27. The consecrated wine may not be reserved in the tabernacle for later use.

In the case of Communion to the sick under the form of the Precious Blood only, some of the consecrated wine is placed in a suitable vessel and carried to the sick either after the Communion Rite or after the Mass. The vessel should have a proper cover. If, after the Communion of the sick, some consecrated wine remains, the minister shall consume it. Then the vessel is purified.

## **Communion by Intinction**

29. Communion by intinction, that is, by dipping the host into the Precious Blood, is distributed only by ordinary ministers of Holy Communion. However, this practice eliminates the communicant's option to receive Communion in the hand. It also eliminates the right of the communicant to receive Communion under the form of bread only. For these reasons, distribution of the Precious Blood from a chalice or cup is always preferred over any other form of distribution (see the directory *This Holy and Living Sacrifice*, #44).

If Communion from the chalice is carried out by intinction, each communicant, holding a communion plate under the chin, approaches the priest, who holds a vessel with the sacred particles, a minister standing at his side and holding the chalice. The priest takes a host, dips it partly into the chalice and, showing it, says, "The Body and Blood of Christ." The communicant responds, "Amen," receives the sacrament in the mouth from the priest, and then withdraws. (GIRM #287).

## **Guidelines for Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist Bringing Holy Communion to the Sick and Homebound**

### **From Pastoral Care of the Sick**

The Church shows the solicitude (of Christ) by visiting those who are in poor health...and by nourishing them with the Eucharist during their illness and when they are in danger of death. (Finally) The Church offers prayers for the sick to commend them to God, especially in the last crisis of life (Decree, Congregation for Divine Worship, December 7, 1972).

### **From "Introduction to Pastoral Care of the Sick"**

#### **#32 Offices and Ministries for the Sick**

If one member suffers in the Body of Christ, which is the Church, all the members suffer with that member (1 Cor. 12:26). For this reason, kindness shown toward the sick and works of charity and mutual help for the relief of every kind of human want are held in special honor.

- #33 It is thus fitting that all baptized Christians share in this ministry of mutual charity within the Body of Christ by doing all that they can to help the sick return to health, by showing love for the sick, and by celebrating the sacraments with them. Like the other sacraments, these too have a community aspect, which should be brought out as much as possible when they are celebrated.

#### #46 Visits to the Sick

Those who visit the sick should help them to pray sharing with them the word of God proclaimed in the assembly from which their sickness has separated them. As the occasion permits, prayer drawn from the psalms or from other prayers or litanies may be added to the Word of God. Care should be taken to prepare for a future visit during which the sick will receive the Eucharist.

#### #51 Communion to the Sick

Because the sick are prevented from celebrating the Eucharist with the rest of the community, the most important visits are those during which they receive Holy Communion. In receiving the body and blood of Christ, the sick are united sacramentally to the Lord and are reunited with the Eucharistic community from which illness has separated them.

#### Guidelines

Not all persons called to be extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion in their parishes are called to bring Communion to the sick. Often however, some receive both calls. Since Communion to the sick demands **added** pastoral and professional skills and familiarity with the Church's ritual *Pastoral Care of the Sick*, it is diocesan policy that those called to visit and bring Communion to the sick **are first** prepared as extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion. As a rule they must attend the educational sessions for this ministry as these are arranged through the Office for Worship.

The ministry to the sick has special needs to be addressed. In addition to the general guidelines below, this ministry requires specialized formation in the parish, tailored as far as possible to the people for whom the ministry is exercised. Such a program will address the basic skills for pastoral visits to the sick and dying, as well as the procedures to be observed for visits to local hospitals or nursing homes.

It is required that:

1. The persons interested in this ministry receive the approval/permission of the Pastor.
2. Extraordinary ministers who bring Communion to the sick or homebound receive their pyxes before the post-communion prayer or after Mass.
3. The ministers should be publicly sent forth by the presider at that time(See Appendix B in this document). It is not appropriate to distribute extra hosts to a special minister during the assembly's reception of Communion.
4. Only the proper number of hosts should be taken in the pyx, reflecting the number of sick or homebound persons the minister will visit. Additional hosts may be brought to a home when family members or caregivers are prevented from participating at Mass because they are needed at home.
5. Extraordinary ministers who bring Communion to the sick and homebound go directly to the homes or institutions where those persons are. It is recommended that the Blessed Sacrament be kept in a pyx which is in a pouch worn about the neck, and not in one's purse or pocket.

6. Ministers are to maintain a spirit of recollection and reverence when carrying the Eucharist. It is never appropriate to carry or keep the Eucharist for periods of time, or during activities not related to bringing Communion directly to the sick or homebound.
7. The *Rite for Communion to the Sick* is to be followed, even in abbreviated form. The Rite includes the following elements: (1) Introductory rite (2) Penitential rite (3) Liturgy of the Word (4) Our Father (5) Communion (6) Concluding rite
8. Televisions, radios or other such equipment should not be in use when the *Rite for Communion* is being celebrated
9. Extraordinary ministers who bring communion to the sick take hosts only from the parish from which they are commissioned. Unused hosts are either consumed by the communicant during the pastoral visit or returned to the tabernacle of the extraordinary minister's parish.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are an important part of the ministry of Communion in our parishes. The ministry complements and extends that of the clergy. It is a particular way of exercising our baptismal priesthood. It is of the greatest importance that the ministration of Communion should be done with dignity and reverence.

### **Appendix A**

*BCL Newsletter*, May 1993, Vol. XXIX

#### **COMMUNION UNDER BOTH KINDS AND HEALTH CONCERNS**

The Secretariat for the Liturgy has received several inquiries for current information concerning potential health hazards associated with the practice of communion under both kinds. On November 10, 1985 the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy, under the chairmanship of Archbishop Daniel E. Pilarczyk, issued a statement entitled "Communion Under Both Kinds and Certain Health Concerns" (see, *Newsletter*, December 1985, Vol. XXI). Approved for publication by the Executive Committee of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, the statement provides basic theological and liturgical principles which need to be taken into consideration when the issue of communion under both kinds and health concerns is raised. These principles remain as important today as they were in 1985.

Since 1985 the USCCB Liturgy Secretariat has contacted the Centers of Disease Control (CDC) in Atlanta on a regular basis to request their latest advisories concerning the possible health risks associated with drinking from a common communion cup. Each time the CDC, while not ruling out the fact that there are some risks involved in the practice of drinking from a common cup, has stated that with proper precautions (such as wiping both sides of the rim of the chalice after each communicant has received the Precious Blood) such risks are greatly reduced. The CDC has also responded that there is no clinical evidence that life-threatening pathogens such as the HIV virus has been transmitted through the Precious Blood. The CDC has not recommended to the Catholic Church that it abandon the practice of drinking from the cup because of these risks.

The 1985 statement of the Bishop's Committee on the Liturgy notes that the restoration of the fuller sign of holy communion under both forms, in obedience to the command of the Lord to "take, and eat" and "take, and drink," outweighs the risk that drinking from the same communion cup poses. Nevertheless, it counsels that communicants should use good common sense and not drink from the communion cup when they are more susceptible to being infected or to infect others even with the common cold, etc.

## Appendix B

**(When Communion has been distributed to the faithful and before the final prayer the priest calls forth the ministers to the homebound)**

**N.B.** (In these or similar words.)

**Priest:** "Will the ministers to the homebound please come forward..."

The summit and source of the Church's life is the Eucharist, which builds up the Christian Community and makes it grow. It is your responsibility to assist me and the gathered assembly by bringing Christ's Body and Blood to the faithful who cannot be with us.

In performing your ministry bear in mind that, as you share the Eucharist with our brothers and sisters, they are united with Christ and us.

Show a sincere love for God's holy people who are homebound.

In your service and in your daily life be obedient to the commandment which the Lord gave to the apostles at the Last Supper: "Love one another as I have loved you."

Today as you bring the Body and Blood to the homebound, may the Lord bless + you, (name).

Amen.

## Appendix C

**The Rite of Commissioning and sending extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist to the sick and homebound.** ( In these or similar words.)

Dears Friends in Christ,

Our brothers and sisters N.\* and N. are to be entrusted with administering the Eucharist, with taking communion to the sick, and with giving it as viaticum to the dying.

THE CELEBRANT PAUSES, AND THEN ADDRESSES THE CANDIDATES:

In this ministry, you must be examples of Christian living in faith and conduct; you must strive to grow in holiness through this sacrament of unity and love. Remember that, though many, we are one body because we share the one bread and one cup.

As ministers of Holy Communion be, therefore, especially observant of the Lord's command to love your neighbor. For when he gave his body as food to his disciples, he said to them: "This is my commandment, that you should love one another as I have loved you."

AFTER THE ADDRESS THE CANDIDATES STAND BEFORE THE CELEBRANT, WHO ASKS THEM THESE QUESTIONS:

Are you resolved to undertake the office of giving the body and blood of the Lord to your brothers and sisters, and so serve to build up the Church? R/. I am.

Are you resolved to administer the Holy Eucharist with the utmost care and reverence. R/. I am.

ALL STAND. THE CANDIDATES KNEEL AND THE CELEBRANT INVITES THE FAITHFUL TO PRAY:

Let us pray with confidence to the Father; let us ask him to bestow his blessings on our brothers and sisters, chosen to be ministers of the Eucharist to the sick and homebound.

PAUSE FOR SILENT PRAYER. THE CELEBRANT THEN CONTINUES:

Merciful Father, creator and guide of your family, bless our brothers and sisters N and N. May they faithfully give the bread of life to your people. Strengthened by this sacrament, may they come at last to the banquet of heaven. We ask this through Christ our Lord. R/. Amen.

“My dear friends, you are now to carry the Body of our Lord from this Eucharistic assembly to our brothers and sisters who are unable to be here with us. Give them our greetings and our love, read today’s Holy Scriptures with them, pray with them, and minister to them this most precious sacrament.”

## RESOURCES

Hoffman, Elizabeth, ed. *The Liturgy Documents: A Parish Resource*. Third Edition. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1991.

International Commission on English in the Liturgy, Inc. (ICEL). *Documents on the Liturgy*. Collegeville, The Liturgical Press, 1963-1979.

International Commission on English in the Liturgy, Inc. (ICEL). *General Instruction of the Roman Missal (Third Typical Edition)*, 2002.

*The Mystery of Faith: A Study of the Structural Elements of the Order of the Mass*, Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions (FDLC) in cooperation with the Bishops’ Committee on the Liturgy, 1981, 2003. Reprinted with corrections 2004, 2005, 2006.

## HELPFUL WEBSITES

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), Committee on the Liturgy, [www.usccb.org/liturgy](http://www.usccb.org/liturgy).

[www.fdlc.org](http://www.fdlc.org), Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions

[www.litpress.org](http://www.litpress.org), The Liturgical Press

[www.ltp.org](http://www.ltp.org), Liturgy Training Publications

[www.ocp.org](http://www.ocp.org), Oregon Catholic Press, publishers of *Today's Liturgy*

[www.rpinet.com](http://www.rpinet.com), Resource Publications, publishers of *Ministry and Liturgy*.

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