

Guidelines for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

*A Resource for Pastors, Parish Life Coordinators,
Pastoral Staff and Trainers of Extraordinary Ministers
of Holy Communion*



DIOCESE OF BELLEVILLE



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Richard Gaillardetz, Ph.D.
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“It is, therefore, of the greatest importance that the celebration of the Mass or the Lord’s Supper be so ordered that the sacred ministers and the faithful taking part in it, according to the state proper to each, may draw from it more abundantly those fruits, to obtain which, Christ the Lord instituted the Eucharistic Sacrifice of His Body and Blood and entrusted it as the memorial of his Passion and Resurrection to the Church, his beloved Bride.”

“This will fittingly come about if, with due regard for the nature and other circumstances of each liturgical assembly, the entire celebration is arranged in such a way that it leads to a conscious, active, and full participation of the faithful, namely in body and in mind, a participation fervent with faith, hope, and charity, of the sort which is desired by the Church and which is required by the very nature of the celebration and to which the Christian people have a right and duty in virtue of their Baptism.”

(General Instruction of the Roman Missal, Series 14, Nos. 17, 18)



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THE EXTRAORDINARY MINISTER OF HOLY COMMUNION

Introduction

1. In recent years we have seen a reaffirmation of the dignity of the laity. This has been stated in documents on the role of the lay person in the ecclesiastical community and in the community of the world. Since liturgical celebrations should be the sign of this unique role, lay persons have not only been asked, but welcomed to actively participate in liturgical ministries formerly accorded to ordained ministers.
2. On March 29, 1973, the Congregation for the Discipline of the Sacraments (dated January 29, 1973) issued the instruction *Immensae Caritatis* (Immense Love). One of its provisions was for the introduction of auxiliary ministers of communion, also called Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion. The **ordinary** minister of the Eucharist is always a Bishop, Priest or Deacon.

Pastoral Needs

3. Pope Paul VI decided that the time was opportune for the empowerment of special ministers in order that they could give communion to others for these pastoral reasons:
 - whenever a priest, deacon, or acolyte is unavailable;
 - whenever the ordinary ministers are impeded from administering communion because of another pastoral ministry, ill-health, or old age;
 - whenever the number of the faithful wishing to receive communion is so great that the celebration of Mass or the giving of communion outside Mass would take too long.
4. The instruction also envisioned that these special or extraordinary ministers would bring communion to the sick and infirm, whether they were in a health care facility or living at home. Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum reiterated the importance of this practice for it is an obligation for the Church to provide communion to the sick, aged, or homebound on a regular basis, perhaps even every day (especially during the Easter Season).

Renewal of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

Renewal sessions for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion who have previously served this ministry may include some or all of the elements listed below. Emphasis should be placed upon the spirituality of the minister.

Suggestions for Training/Renewal:

Updated Theology of Eucharist

Church as Eucharistic Community

Minister of Eucharist: Ritual or Way of Life?

Eucharist and Ecumenism

Eucharist and “Internal Forum”

Eucharist and Choreographies for Sanctuary

Eucharist and Word

Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi (The Law of Prayer is the Law of Belief)

A “Breaking Open” of the Prayers of the Mass

Exploring one or more of the Following Scriptures:

John 6

Multiplication of the Loaves and Fish

Any of the Readings from the Votive Masses of the Holy Eucharist or Precious Blood

Eucharistic Adoration and Its Relationship to the Celebration of the Eucharist

Eucharist and Social Justice

APPENDIX

SAMPLE TRAINING AND RENEWAL SESSIONS

Training of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

Instruction of the Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion should be formational in nature, focusing upon the spirituality of the minister as well as the exercise of the ministry. Instructional sessions should include prayer, reflection upon the meaning of ministry, an overview of the diocesan guidelines, and instruction on the distribution of communion at the celebration of the Eucharist and to the sick.

The following is a possible outline for the training of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion conducted in two sessions:

Session I.

Registration
Introduction and Welcome
Prayer Service
Optional: History and rationale of the Ministry
Theological reflection on the Mystery of the Eucharist
Faith Sharing or Breaking Open of the Word
Diocesan Guidelines for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion
Questions and Answers

Session II.

Sign In
Welcome
Liturgy of the Word/Prayer Service
Method of Distribution of Communion
Practice of Distribution of Communion
Ministry of Communion to the Sick/Methodology
Questions and Answers

5. In 1970, the Congregation for Divine Worship extended the permission for the distribution of Communion under both the form of bread and wine by placing its frequency at the discretion of the Ordinary of each diocese (*Sacramentali Communionem*). The bishops of the United States and other Episcopal Conferences appealed for this permission in order that the sign value of the Eucharistic meal might be enhanced. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM, 2011) indicates “Holy Communion has a fuller form as a sign when it takes place under both kinds. For in this form the sign of the Eucharistic banquet is more clearly evident and clearer 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 connection between the Eucharistic banquet and the eschatological banquet in the Kingdom of the Father.” (No. 281) *Communion under both forms is the norm in the Diocese of Belleville*, and therefore requires more than one minister.
6. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should be mature Catholic Christians (usually of at least 18 years of age), who are active in the parish or institution in which they minister. They must be willing to live their lives and to exercise their ministry in a responsible way. Candidates for Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion are to model their lives on the mystery they help distribute to God’s people, a life of willing self sacrifice for the sake of others. They should cultivate devotion to the Holy Eucharist in their communal and personal prayer life and should exhibit care and reverence for Christ under the forms of bread and wine and in the people of God.
7. People with disabilities should be accepted to exercise the role of extraordinary minister if they are able.

Duties of the Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion

8. It is the duty of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to distribute the Body and Blood of Christ to the faithful. Although ministers may exercise the option to receive under one form, ministers may not discriminate as to whether or not they will distribute only the Body or the Blood of Christ.
9. In liturgical celebrations, each minister has an office to perform, and so should not assume other roles (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, No. 28). By the hierarchical and communal nature of the liturgy, it is desirable to see various people exercise the variety of the gifts bestowed upon the assembly.

10. It is the duty of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to bring Holy Communion to the sick, aged, or homebound, giving them personal attention on behalf of the eucharistic assembly from which they are separated.
11. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion may preside at exposition of the Blessed Sacrament according to the Order for the Solemn Exposition of the Eucharist (No. 26), but only with the explicit permission of the pastor or Bishop.
12. Lay ministers may assist in the blessing of throats on the Feast of St. Blase (February 3) and in the distribution of the ashes on Ash Wednesday according to the instructions (Book of Blessings: Nos. 1626, 1659).
13. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are to be attired in a manner that reflects the dignity of the ministry, while fitting the setting of the occasion and place.
14. If Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are seated in a place that is visible to the assembly proper etiquette should be observed (e.g. feet flat on floor or crossed at ankles). If ministers occupy places in the sanctuary during the entire celebration of the Eucharist, they are to avoid appearing as if they are concelebrants.

Continual Formation

15. It is highly recommended that Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion gather as a group at least once-a-year for spiritual renewal and review of the distribution practices of the parish. Gatherings more than once-a-year will foster devotion to the Eucharist and engender a spirit of hospitality and community in the ministers. (See Appendix “*Sample Training and Renewal Sessions*.”)
16. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are encouraged to attend conferences, workshops, and days of renewal sponsored by the Office of Worship. These will help communion ministers in the understanding of the importance of their ministry and the liturgy.

40. Vessels used in the consecration and distribution of the Eucharistic elements may be purified and cleansed as follows.
 - For a small number of vessels, if there is no undue interruption to some time for silent prayer or a song of praise before the prayer after Communion, (a) the priest may purify them at the altar or the credence table or (b) the deacons or duly institute acolyte may purify them at the credence table.
 - For a large number of Communion vessels, it is permissible to wait until after Mass has ended, rather than to purify them at the altar or the credence table during Mass (cf. *GIRM*, #183).
 - In this case the vessels are set on the credence table, suitably covered with an appropriately clean cloth. After Mass, they may be taken to the sacristy where they are purified by either the deacon or the priest after he has greeted the people. *After they have been purified they can be washed by the sacristan or other minister as usual.*
 - In parishes and institutions where there is a deacon(s) assigned
At Masses where a deacon is scheduled, it is most appropriate that, after Mass, he should purify the vessels before they are *washed as usual*.
 - In parishes and institutions where there is no deacon assigned
The chalices and other Communion vessels may be taken to the sacristy after the completion of the celebration of the Mass. If there is a large number of chalices to be purified, or if time constraints warrant it, the priest may purify by pouring water into the first chalice, swirling the water around in the customary manner, and then pouring it into the next chalice, and then into the next, etc. After he has done so with the last chalice to be purified, he consumes the ablution. The vessels may then *be washed by the sacristan or other minister as usual*.

(Revised October 2012)

- After responding, “Amen,” the communicant returns the cup to the minister. The cup should be held by the minister only when the communicant is too feeble or too small to take it by themselves.
 - After the communicant returns the cup to the minister, the minister wipes the lip or rim of the cup, **inside and out**, at the place where the lips of the communicant had made contact. The cup is turned a quarter-turn to allow the surface to air-dry. (Any smudges or lipstick should be wiped clean from the rim of the cup.)
35. Reverence is always to be shown to the Blessed Sacrament. However, the extraordinary minister should avoid scrupulosity. In the distribution of communion and in the purification of vessels, care should be used. However, when the elements no longer have the appearance of bread or wine, they should not be considered the Body or the Blood of Christ.
 36. If the Body of Christ or some particle of it falls, it should be picked up reverently by the minister. The consecrated bread may be consumed or completely dissolved in water before being poured down the *sacrarium*.
 37. Should there be any mishap, for example, if the Blood of Christ is spilled from the chalice, the area should be washed and the water poured into the *sacrarium*.
 38. Ordinary ministers, extraordinary ministers, as well as members of the faithful who have already received communion may help in consuming the Body and Blood of the Christ that remains at the end of communion. Any remaining Precious Blood is to be consumed before purifying vessels. The Blood of Christ may not be poured into the *sacrarium*. Purification of the vessels is to be carried out by the priest or deacon, or in the absence of a deacon, by an instituted acolyte (*GIRM*, Nos. 182, 192, *Norms for the Distribution of Holy Communion under Both Kinds*, No. 52.).
 39. Any of the Body of Christ remaining may be consumed and hosts put in the tabernacle by an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion or Deacon (it is preferable an assisting minister bring the Sacrament to the tabernacle). It is an admirable practice that hosts left after the distribution of communion and consecrated during that celebration of the Eucharist be given to ministers who will be visiting the homebound and the sick immediately after the Mass. This more fully shows the connection between the celebration of the Eucharist and the reception of Communion by those unable to attend the liturgy due to their infirmity.

Requirements for Obtaining the Mandate of the Bishop

Liturgical Law

17. The local bishop has the faculty to designate upon request from the pastor or parish life coordinator, lay men and women who will serve in the role of Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion in the parish (*Immensae Caritatis*, 1973). Ordinarily, at diocesan liturgical celebrations, priests and deacons distribute communion when sufficient numbers of ordinary ministers are present.
18. Policy in the Diocese of Belleville requires that those who wish to serve in this capacity must receive instruction and the mandate of the bishop before exercising this ministry and that they must renew this mandate every three years.
19. Anyone, in case of real necessity, may be authorized to distribute communion on a single occasion. They should be commissioned according to the rite prescribed in Appendix III of the Roman Missal.

Instruction and Renewal of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

20. Instruction of the Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion should be formational in nature, focusing upon the spirituality of the minister as well as the exercise of the ministry. Instructional sessions should include prayer, reflection upon the meaning of ministry, an overview of the diocesan guidelines, and instruction on the distribution of communion at Eucharist and to the sick. (See Appendix “*Sample Training and Renewal Sessions*.”)
21. Renewal of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion who have exercised this ministry for three years may include some or all of the elements listed above. Emphasis should be placed upon the spirituality of the minister. (See Appendix “*Sample Training and Renewal Sessions*.”)
22. Instruction and renewal can be provided on a regional or deanery basis throughout the diocese by the Office of Worship. However, pastors, parish life coordinators, or other qualified persons are encouraged to provide instruction or renewal in their parish or institution. Local personnel should notify the Office of Worship of instructional sessions in advance so that other parishes in the area may be invited to participate. A list of the persons attending and the parish where they exercise their mandate should be sent to the Office of Worship.

The Request for the Mandate of the Bishop

23. The pastor, parish life coordinator, liturgical ministry coordinator or a person responsible on the pastoral team should formally request the mandate of the Bishop of the Diocese of Belleville for those who have been instructed or who seek a renewal of their mandate and have completed the necessary formation. The Office of Worship will be notified of approval, pending satisfaction of the requirements of the mandate.
24. A certificate for each extraordinary minister will be issued by the Office of Worship.

Commissioning Service

25. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should be commissioned at a gathering of the faithful, preferably at a celebration of the Eucharist. The Order for the Commissioning of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion is found in the Book of Blessings, chapter 63, nos. 1871-1896.

Distribution of the Body and Blood of Christ

26. Normally whenever there is a sufficient number of ordinary ministers present, they should distribute communion to the faithful. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are to distribute communion only when enough ordinary ministers are unavailable and the time for distribution of communion would be unduly lengthened.
27. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should know the proper names and the location of the vessels and materials with which they exercise their ministry.
28. After the priest has concluded his own Communion, the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion approach the altar. A bishop, priest and/or deacon distributes Communion to the extraordinary ministers. The ordinary minister of communion then hands the sacred vessels to the extraordinary ministers for distribution to the faithful.
29. The patterns for the movement of people should be clear and unencumbered so that there is an orderly flow for the communion procession. Ministers should be properly positioned so as to encourage the flow. Access to the extraordinary minister stations should be provided for handicapped persons in the assembly.

30. The norm for reception of Holy Communion in the diocese of the United States is standing. Communicants should not be denied Holy Communion because they kneel or genuflect. Rather, such instances should be addressed pastorally, by providing the faithful with proper catechesis on the reasons for this norm.
31. In the distribution of communion, it must be remembered that attention should be focused on the communicant and the interaction taking place.
32. When receiving Holy Communion, the communicant makes a simple bow before the sacrament as a gesture of reverence and receives the Body of the Lord from the minister. The consecrated host may be received either on the tongue or in the hand, at the discretion of each communicant. When Holy Communion is received under both forms, the sign of reverence is also made before receiving the Precious Blood. Intinction (dipping of the host in the Precious Blood) *by the communicant* is forbidden.
33. Distribution of the Body of Christ

- As the communicant approaches, a portion of the Eucharistic bread or host is raised to eye-level of the communicant. The minister looks the person in the eye and directly addresses the communicant with the words “The Body of Christ.” No other words or names should be added; and the formula should not be edited in any way. The moment should be reverent and should have no appearance that the minister is simply performing a function.
- The communicant says, “Amen.”
- The ministers places the Eucharistic bread or host in the hand or on the tongue of the communicant as the communicant prefers.

34. Distribution of the Blood of Christ

- The cup is presented to the communicant at a comfortable level.
- In presenting the cup, the minister directly addresses the communicant with the words, “The Blood of Christ.” No other words or names should be added; and the formula should not be edited in any way. The moment should be reverent and should have no appearance that the minister is simply performing a function.