

Guidelines for Extraordinary Ministers of Communion

The following guidelines for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion reflect current liturgical practice at St. Francis Xavier parish in Parkersburg, WV, for Eucharistic celebrations on Sundays and Holy Days and for distribution of Communion to the sick or homebound; the guidelines have been developed from the *General Instruction on the Roman Missal* (GIRM) and the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston's *Celebration of Sunday Eucharist*. It is important to remember that separate mandates are granted for distribution of Holy Communion at Mass and to the sick or homebound. Since they are separate ministries, a mandate for one does not automatically extend to the other, and the guidelines have been structured accordingly.

What is an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion?

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM) and *Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America* refer consistently to “Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion.” 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 “special minister of Holy Communion,” nor “extraordinary minister of the Eucharist,” nor “special minister of the Eucharist,” nor “Eucharistic Minister,” by which names the meaning of the ministry is unnecessarily and improperly broadened. For ease of reference, the official term “Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion” will be abbreviated to “EM” as appropriate throughout this document.

- Through Baptism, we are all called to be a “holy people and royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9), whose right and privilege it is to participate in Christ's own ministry. How we do so varies from person to person, but the most important way is “conscious, active, and fruitful participation in the mystery of the Eucharist” (GIRM, Intro. 5). Since the Eucharist is the “action of the whole Church” (GIRM, Intro. 5), all of us have an “individual right and duty to contribute” (GIRM, 58). Some are called to do so in a more particular way through liturgical ministries, such as Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, Lector, or Altar Server.
- Given the centrality of the Eucharist to our lives as Catholic Christians, the importance of this ministry cannot be over-emphasized. It is an honor and privilege to serve as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion.
- At the same time, it must be understood as the Church's ministry, not one's own; that is to say, it exists only as a pastoral dispensation in those cases where too few ordinary ministers of Holy Communion, i.e., priest or deacons, are available to provide for the orderly and timely distribution of Communion, either at Mass or to the sick and homebound.

Functions of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

- Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion may be commissioned for two different functions: 1) Those who assist the celebrant in administering Holy Communion at Mass and 2) Those who bring Holy Communion to the sick or homebound outside of Mass.
- Rather than replacing the priest or deacon, the Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion is an extension of the community's need to address large numbers of communicants where ordinary ministers of Communion (i.e., priests and deacons) are too few as well as the community's concern for the sick and homebound.
- As far as the sick and homebound are concerned, it is the Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion's responsibility to request periodically that the priest make himself available to them so that they will not be deprived of the sacraments of Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick.
- The responsibilities for ministry at Mass and to the sick and homebound are separate since they require different talents, different formation, and different procedures. One person may feel comfortable serving at the altar but uncomfortable in dealing with the sick or elderly. Another may be comfortable in working one-on-one but awkward in front of a group.
- It is possible that a person be mandated for both ministries at the same time. However, this should not be an automatic procedure. Talents, preferences, and parish needs should be taken into consideration.

Selection of Candidates

- The pastor will consult with staff members and members of the Parish Liturgy Committee to determine the number of EMs needed, suggest names of potential candidates, and decide on formation programs to be offered. Ministry always involves responding to authentic needs, not individual wishes.
- Only those who have received an official mandate in writing from the Bishop may serve as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion. Names for delegation will be submitted in writing to the Office of Worship and Sacraments by the pastor or his delegate. Mandates (certificates) are mailed to the pastor and given to candidates at the time of public commissioning.
- The pastor's letter of request to the Bishop will specify the pastoral need, the formation to be given, the full names of the candidates, and the type of mandate requested (at the altar, for the sick, or both).

- A mandate is granted for three years and will be renewed at the end of that time if the person is to continue to serve as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion.
- The written form of the mandate is a certificate which designates a person by name to serve as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion at the altar, for the sick, or both in a particular parish. The specific three-year term of service is noted. The certificate will bear the signature of the Bishop and provide space for the signature of the local Pastor.
- A person is mandated for a specific parish and not the Diocese at large.

Commissioning

When new Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are mandated, a public commissioning ceremony will take place in the parish. Ideally, this ceremony will take place at a Sunday Mass.

Candidate Pre-requisites

Women or men who are confirmed, active members of the parish and who exhibit sufficient maturity may be proposed as candidates. In the judgment of the pastor and his staff, they should be serious about this ministry and striving to live our communal faith.

- “The persons who have been appointed to be Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are necessarily to be duly instructed and should distinguish themselves by Christian life, faith, and morals. Let them strive to be worthy of this great office; Let them cultivate devotion to the Holy Eucharist and show themselves as examples to the other faithful by their piety and reverence for this most holy Sacrament of the altar. Let no one be chosen whose selection may cause scandal among the faithful” (*Immensae Caritatis*, 6).
- Consideration will be given to an individual's gifts to perform this ministry well (gifts such as a respect for symbol and ritual communication, a sense of presence, an attitude of reverence, an interest in, caring about, being at ease with other people, and comfort in dealing with the sick, the elderly, and physically or mentally challenged individuals).
- Potential candidates, whether by personal request or specific invitation, must understand that a discernment component is built into the formation process. Hence, at any time, either the candidate or the Pastor may discern that another form of ministry would be more compatible with the candidate's particular gifts.

Formation

Since EMs actually participate in an ecclesial (church) and liturgical ministry and are not simply functionaries, they are required to have adequate training and preparatory formation. This is not optional. It brings depth, reverence, and insight to this ministry.

- The Candidates are to be given instruction on the nature of Jesus' mission, the centrality of the Eucharist, and a contemporary sense of lay ministry. In particular, they are to be given a clear and detailed presentation of the theology of Eucharist that puts it in the context of the Eucharistic celebration.
- The Candidate should be instructed in the manner of ministering Communion at the altar and/or to the sick. It is expected that this presentation also will provide rationale for the “how-to” of ministry. Part of this instruction will be experiential: opening and closing the tabernacle, getting the feel of a chalice and ciborium, going through the ritual, etc.
- In the case of those who are being prepared to be Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion outside of Mass, some instruction in pastoral practice concerning the sick, aged, and dying is to be provided.

Manner of Liturgical Function

Reception of Communion by Ministers

The EMs should come to the front of the pews as the Sign of Peace is concluding and move to the step on the side of the sanctuary during the *Agnus Dei* after all are assembled. After the celebrant's communion, the deacon receives under both kinds and then may assist the celebrant in ministering communion to the EMs. When additional priests or deacons are present, he is one of the ordinary ministers of the sacrament.

- At St. Francis Xavier parish and in the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, Communion by intinction is not the norm. “Among the ways of ministering the Precious Blood as prescribed by the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, Communion from the chalice is generally the preferred form in the Latin Church, provided that it can be carried out properly according to the norms and without any risk of even apparent irreverence toward the Blood of Christ” (*Norms for the*

Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America, 42).

Act of Ministering

At St Francis Xavier parish, the norm is to provide communion under both species, and two chalices should be provided for each ciborium, especially in the larger celebrations to ensure availability to the faithful and a dignified liturgy. Fewer may be used in smaller celebrations.

- EMs are scheduled for Sunday and feast day masses in advance. Scheduling is handled by the parish office (304.422.6786). EMs' preferences as to Mass times are taken into account, but flexibility to accept assignments outside those preferences are strongly encouraged. Ministers will receive specific instructions as to how to update their preferences and notify the scheduler of vacations, etc.
- If a deacon serves at Mass, he will be an ordinary (as opposed to extraordinary) minister of Holy Communion. When there is no deacon, the schedule will list three or five EMs. Schedules are published quarterly and made available to all ministers.
- EMs should arrive 15 minutes before Mass and check in at the sacristy.
- Prior to the beginning of Mass, ministers should be encouraged to wash their hands and even to use an alcohol-based solution such as waterless hand gels before and after distributing Holy Communion. This gel is available in the sacristy and gathering space for that purpose.
- After "checking in," EM's are asked to serve as Greeters at the front entrance to the church.
- EMs will join in the procession with the other ministers (i.e., priest/altar servers).
- If you are not able to assist at a Mass for which you are scheduled, it is your responsibility to arrange for a substitute. Regular substitutes are listed on the schedule, or you may make arrangements with another qualified EM. Failure to get a substitute often results in confusion or delay during Mass. *Under no circumstances should the celebrant be expected to find substitutes for "no shows."*
- At the *Sign of Peace*, the assigned EMs should advance to the front of the pews. After all are assembled, they should make a profound bow and move into the sanctuary on either side of the altar before the end of the *Agnus Dei*. They will receive the Body of Christ from the celebrant. The celebrant or deacon will then hand them the chalice(s) and/or the ciborium at the celebrant's discretion. Those who receive the chalice should ensure that the other EMs are communicated. At that point, EMs may proceed as needed to distribute Communion.

- The chalices should be at a sufficient distance from the ciborium or paten to allow reverent consumption and to allow for flow of the communion procession. The best positions to ensure an orderly flow are 1) at the intersection of the sanctuary step and the side aisle, and 2) in front of the first pillars in the nave. Ideally, there are two chalices for every paten. If there is only one, please go to position 1.
- The communicant has the option of receiving the Precious Body on the tongue or in the hand. The choice is the communicant's, not the minister's. The practice of self-intinction (whereby the communicant takes the Consecrated Bread and dips it in the Precious Blood contained in the chalice) is not permitted nor may an EM intinct for the communicant.
- When distributing the sacred host, direct contact between the distributor's fingers and the hand or tongue of the communicant should be avoided. Please realize that this may take practice in order to ensure that the consecrated bread does not fall on the ground.
- The minister holding the Consecrated Bread addresses the communicant with the words, "The Body of Christ." The communicant answers, "Amen." This is the ritual language of the Church; substitutions are not to be used. Some EMs make it a practice to add the communicant's name to the ritual language. While this practice is well-intentioned, it should be avoided since 1) it is not part of the formula and 2) it could have the unintended consequence of making those whose names are not known to the EM to feel awkward or left out.
- Those needing Gluten Free hosts should see the Pastor prior to Mass for special instructions. Ministers should be aware that there is a designated pyx for that purpose.
- The minister holding the chalice addresses the communicant with the words, "The Blood of Christ." The communicant answers "Amen." The minister then gives the chalice to the communicant. The minister then wipes the lip of the chalice with a cloth (purificator), inside and out, and turns the chalice approximately ninety degrees.
- The action of distribution, whether it is on the tongue, in the hand, or from the chalice, is an action of ministry. Eye contact and a reverent presentation of the Body and Blood of Christ are important. Persons (particularly children) who come forward with arms crossed on their chest are signaling their inability or unreadiness to receive. A simple blessing, such as "May you receive the Lord Jesus in your heart," is appropriate in these cases.
- It is important to remember that the presumption on the part of the EM is that the communicant has a right to receive Holy Communion and should not be denied. No Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion may refuse Communion to someone who comes forward to receive. If there are questions or concerns about someone's eligibility, it may be discussed privately with the pastor at an appropriate time outside of Mass.
- If a piece of consecrated bread falls to the ground during administration of Communion, the EM should pick it up immediately and consume it. In circumstances where the consecrated bread has been partially consumed but is accidentally dropped, the remaining amount should be

wiped into a purificator. The remains can then afterwards be placed in a small dish with water to dissolve. This can later be properly disposed into the sacrarium in the sacristy.

- If consecrated wine is spilled, the remains should be covered with a purificator. After Mass, the purificator can be used to wipe the remains. If it is spilled on carpet, water may also be used to cleanse the area with the purificator.
- The appropriate place for consumption of remaining consecrated wine is at the foot of the sanctuary steps before returning the chalice to the altar.
- After all have communicated, the ciborium, the paten, and the chalices are brought to the Sacristy where the ministers purify them.
- It is recommended that the already purified vessels be washed, especially the chalices, with soap and hot water on a regular basis. Washing the vessels is completely excluded from the rites and is aimed at sanitizing the vessels and preserving their appearance. Washing may be done by an EM, an acolyte, a sacristan, or a member of the Rosary Altar Society outside of Mass.
- When the vessels are cleansed, they should be returned to their proper storage cabinet.

Attire

Since this ministry is an exercise of the Baptismal priesthood of the faithful, and because EMs are seated in the assembly with their families when they are not ministering, it is appropriate that they dress neatly in lay apparel that is consistent with the dignity of their ministry.

- At a minimum, “business casual” is recommended. At greater feasts, more formal attire may be appropriate.
- Pectoral crosses are available in the Ministers’ Sacristy. The crosses or other appropriate but discreet emblems may be worn at the EMs’ discretion. The operative word is “discreet”; it is OK to make sure people know your function but not to set yourself apart in an ostentatious way or in a way that implies you are not a lay minister.

Ministry to the Sick and Homebound or Those in Institutions

General Principles

The ministry provided by the EM supplements and assists but does not substitute for the ministry of the priest.

- In enlisting ministers for service to the sick, special care will be taken in choosing persons who have sensitivity to the needs of others and who can convey the compassion of the Lord to the sick. In addition, special formation will be given these ministers.
- The pastor or his delegate will arrange an introduction of the EMs to the individual sick people, assuring the home or hospital bound that his own availability will not be lessened. The EM is yet another expression of the community's concern for the sick and homebound, and this ministry is greatly encouraged.
- The Minister visiting the sick, should follow the appropriate ritual. A suggested booklet is *Communion of the Sick*, published by The Liturgical Press. Copies of this ritual are available in the Priest Sacristy in the drawer marked "Extraordinary Ministers." Additional resources include *Administration of Communion to the Sick by an Extraordinary Minister*, which can be ordered from the Diocesan Office of Worship and Sacraments. Also available from the Diocese are pastoral guidelines for the sick, the elderly, and the homebound.
- It is preferable that hosts for the sick and homebound be consecrated in the Mass from which they will be taken and in which the Ministers have participated. At St. Francis Xavier parish, EMs authorized to do so may come forward during Communion and request the celebrant or other minister to place the appropriate number of hosts in a container known as a pyx for distribution immediately after that Mass to the sick or homebound. The operative phrase is "...immediately after that Mass"; this means it is inappropriate to let other activities interfere with immediate distribution, such as going to breakfast or engaging in unnecessary conversations.
- In unusual circumstances outside Mass, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion may take the appropriate number of hosts from the tabernacle and place them in a pyx for transport. A key to the tabernacle can be found in the sacristy.
- In all cases, worthy Eucharistic containers are to be used by EMs to the sick and homebound. The consecrated host is not to be carried in a handkerchief, envelope or similar unworthy container. In addition, an appropriate cloth may be used on which to reverently place the pyx prior to Communion of the sick or homebound. If circumstances, such as a crowded hospital room, do not allow for placement of the cloth, you may forego its use. Parishioners are asked to please inform the Pastor when there is a need to arrange for communion to the sick, and ministers should inform him of the persons they are visiting.
- Consecrated hosts which cannot be distributed immediately and consumed at once by the sick and homebound should be returned to the tabernacle. They should not be left to be received at a later time, carried around while doing other business, or kept in the car or home of the Minister.

Hospitals and Nursing Homes

- For hospitals or nursing homes, the pastor will propose candidates to serve as EMs. In cases where a number of parishes utilize the same hospital or care facility, each parish provides for its own parishioners. St. Francis Xavier parish and its sister parishes also provide regular Masses for residents of nursing homes on an alternating basis.
- Communication: In the case of hospitals and nursing homes, a clear explanation must be made to the administrators of that institution that, in addition to the usual priests and/or deacons, EMs will serve the sick there as well. The EM should be aware of all laws regarding the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) with regard to strict privacy and the non-disclosure of medical information and the policies of the institution they are visiting.
- Supervision: The pastor has a responsibility for ongoing supervision. He will meet regularly with EMs regarding various details of their ministry.

Questions or Additional Guidance

Requests for training of EMs, matters relating to the issuance of mandates, and questions about these guidelines should be directed to the pastor. Questions relating to Communion for the sick and homebound may be referred to Sally McDonie (304.428.2651), or the pastor.