

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

General Guidelines

Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion at Mass

Code of Canon Law

Can. 910 §1 The Ordinary Minister of Holy Communion is a bishop, priest, or deacon. §2 The Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion is an acolyte or another member of the Christian faithful designated according to the norm of can.

Can. 230 §3 When the need of the Church warrants it and ministers are lacking, lay persons, even if they are not instituted lectors or acolytes, can also supply certain of their duties, namely, to exercise the ministry of the word (Readers)...and to distribute holy communion (Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion), according to the precepts of the law.

General Instruction of the Roman Missal

GIRM no. 162 In the distribution of Communion the Priest may be assisted by other Priests who happen to be present. If such Priests are not present and there is a truly large number of communicants, the Priest may call upon Extraordinary Ministers to assist him, that is, duly instituted acolytes or even other faithful who have been duly deputed for this purpose. In case of necessity, the Priest may depute suitable faithful for this single occasion. These ministers should not approach the altar before the Priest has received Communion, and they are always to receive from the hands of the Priest Celebrant the vessel containing the species of the Most Holy Eucharist for distribution to the faithful.

Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds for the Dioceses of the United States of America [NDRHC] (August, 2002)

NDRHC, no. 27 In every celebration of the Eucharist, there should be a sufficient number of Ministers of Holy Communion so that it may be distributed in a reverent and orderly manner. Bishops, priests and deacons distribute Holy Communion in virtue of their office as Ordinary Ministers of the Body and Blood of the Lord.

NDRHC, no. 28 Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should receive sufficient spiritual, theological, and practical preparation to fulfill their role with knowledge and reverence. In all matters they should follow the guidance of the diocesan bishop. When recourse is had to Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, especially in the distribution of Holy Communion under both kinds, their number should not be increased beyond what is required for the orderly and

reverent distribution of the Body and Blood of the Lord. In all matters such as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should follow the guidance of the diocesan bishop.

For further reference see also:

Redemptionis Sacramentum, Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of Sacraments, 25 March 2004.

Blessings for Noncommunicants, Archbishop Chaput of Denver, Colorado, in an article from 2003.

Qualifications to be an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion

To be an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion you must:

- be at least 16 years old
- be a fully initiated Catholic (having received the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and First Holy Communion) and, if you are married, you must be married in accordance with the Law of the Church.
- be in good standing with the Catholic Church.
- be of good moral character and distinguish yourself by striving to live a good Christian life of faith and morals.
- be a regular participant in the sacramental life of the church and act as an example to the other faithful by cultivating a devotion to the Holy Eucharist and showing piety and reverence for this Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar.
- be a registered member of the parish.
- be duly instructed

Attire

In the General Instruction of The Roman Missal, the attire for “other ministers” in the liturgy is designated as “albs or other lawfully approved attire”. Lawfully approved attire includes a cassock and surplice for male Adult Servers.

In our parish, we usually suggest that “Sunday Best” is the best attire for serving in the role of Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion. Your respect for the Ministry should be reflected in your appearance and attire. This includes being properly groomed, wearing a suit and tie, or clean, nicely creased trousers with a collared shirt or nice sweater (for men); dress, pantsuit, skirt or slacks with blouse/sweater (for women). The shoulders should always be covered (you may wear a shawl or jacket if necessary), necklines kept high, and skirts ought to be below the knee.

Please note: No jeans or shorts at any time! No shirts or clothing with mundane or offensive statements which would be distracting to the Assembly. Excessive jewelry, especially bracelets, should not be worn.

A Few Questions and Answers:

Why do we need Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion?

Only out of true necessity is there to be recourse to the assistance of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion in the celebration of the Liturgy. Such recourse is not intended for the sake of a fuller participation of the laity but rather, by its very nature, is supplementary and provisional. Furthermore, when recourse is had out of necessity to the functions of Extraordinary Ministers, special urgent prayers of intercession should be multiplied that the Lord may soon send a Priest for the service of the community and raise up an abundance of vocations to Holy Orders. (*Redemptionis Sacramentum*, 151)

Why do we use the title of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion?

Those who assist during the mass in the distribution of Holy Communion are referred to as EXTRAORDINARY Ministers to distinguish them from the ORDINARY Ministers of Holy Communion: bishops, priests, and deacons. (Cf. Code of Canon Law, Can. 910)

Wait, I thought I was a “Eucharistic Minister.” What does the abbreviation E.M. Mean?

E.M. Is short for Extraordinary Minister; it does NOT mean Eucharistic Minister. Eucharistic Ministers are those capable of performing the consecration of the bread and wine so that it becomes the Body and Blood of Christ; i.e. Only Bishops and Priests are Eucharistic Ministers.

The function of an Extraordinary Minister is to be understood strictly according to the name by which it is known, that is to say, that of an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, and not “special minister of Holy Communion” 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)

When do the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion come forward to receive Holy Communion for themselves?

As the Agnus Dei (Lamb of God) is begun, the Bishop or priest alone, or with the assistance of the deacon, and if necessary of concelebrating priests, breaks the Eucharistic bread. Other empty ciboria or patens are then brought to the altar if this is necessary. The deacon or priest places the consecrated bread in several ciboria or patens, if necessary, as required for the distribution of Holy Communion. If it is not possible to accomplish this distribution in a reasonable time, the celebrant may call upon the assistance of other deacons or concelebrating priests.

If extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are also required by pastoral need, they should not approach the altar before the priest has received Communion. After the priest has concluded his own Communion, he distributes Communion to the Deacon, Altar Servers and then to any Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (GIRM no. 162).

Note: All receive Holy Communion in the manner described by the General Instruction to the Roman Missal, whether priest concelebrants (cf. GIRM, nos. 159, 242, 243, 246), deacons (cf. GIRM, nos. 182, 244, 246), or Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (cf. GIRM, no. 284). Neither deacons nor lay ministers may ever receive Holy Communion in the manner of a concelebrating priest. 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 (Cf. NDRHC, 39; GIRM, no. 160).

When do Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion receive the Sacred Vessels?

After all Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion have received the Eucharist, the bishop or priest celebrant reverently hands the sacred vessels containing the Body or the Blood of the Lord to the deacons or Extraordinary Ministers who will assist with the distribution of Holy Communion. The deacon or Adult Servers may assist the priest in handing out the sacred vessels containing the Body and Blood of the Lord to the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion. (NDRHC, no. 40).

Special Note: At Our Lady of the Valley in Ft. Payne, those EM's who are not also Adult Servers at the Mass, will only receive the ancillary cups for the distribution of the Precious Blood. After receiving the sacred vessels, the Extraordinary Ministers are to proceed directly to their stations located in the nave on the right and left sides of the communion rail.

What do Extraordinary Ministers say at the distribution of Holy Communion?

The proper and only permissible formula for distributing Holy Communion is to offer the consecrated bread by saying, "The Body of Christ" and to offer the consecrated wine by saying, "The Blood of Christ." No other words or names should be added; and the formula should not be edited in any way. (Cf. GIRM, nos. 161; 284287).

Additionally, the ONLY proper response of the communicant who receives the Body or the Blood of Christ, is "Amen;" which means: "Truly, I believe."

How do Extraordinary Ministers actually give out Holy Communion to those elderly or injured persons who cannot come forward in line?

One of the Adult Servers, directed by an usher, will take the Consecrated Host to anyone unable to approach the altar in order to receive communion. At no time will the cups be taken into the congregation for distribution of the Precious Blood.

Distribution of The Precious Body

Reverently hold up one consecrated host between you and the receiver and looking the receiver in the eye, say "The Body of Christ". Wait for the person receiving communion to say "Amen" and then place the host in their hand or on their tongue, depending on which method of reception they prefer.

Note: If you run out of consecrated hosts, tell the person who is the next in line to wait a moment, then go to the priest, who will either share from his ciborium, direct the other communicants to come to him, or will retrieve an extra Ciborium with consecrated hosts from the altar or Tabernacle for you to use.

Distribution of the Precious Blood

Reverently hold up the chalice between you and the receiver and looking the receiver in the eye and say "The Blood of Christ". Wait for the person receiving to say "Amen" and then hand them the cup. Make sure the person has a good grip before releasing it. Be careful when the person hands the cup back to you; the exchange should be firm but gentle, not forceful enough to cause a "splash" or a spill. Be especially vigilant when the communicant is a young child. After the person has handed the chalice back to you, wipe the place on the chalice where they drank, and turn the chalice a quarter turn before presenting the cup with the Precious Blood to the next communicant. Additionally, the EM should be sure to use a fresh spot on the purificator to wipe the cup after each communicant.

What about the reception of Holy Communion by Intinction?

Communion by Intinction (the dipping of the Host into the Precious Blood for their reception together) is normative in the Eastern Rite Churches and is allowed in the Western Rite Church, however, it requires a special Intinction tray and cup and only the Bishop or Priest may distribute to a communicant in this manner, never an Extraordinary Minister or the communicant themselves.

If a communicant approaches the EM with a consecrated host in hand, the EM shall not permit a communicant to intinct the consecrated host, but shall rather direct the communicant to consume the host PRIOR to be presented the cup containing the Precious Blood in the usual manner. "Communicants must not be permitted to intinct the host themselves in the chalice, nor to receive the intincted host in the hand."

(Redemptionis Sacramentum, 104)

What do I do if I see someone who receives the Host, but does not consume it?

It is your responsibility to defend the Blessed Sacrament from profanation and scandal. You may either alert one of the ushers or question the person directly. Ask them to consume the Blessed Sacrament or return it to you. Remain until they have consumed it. If there is any doubt or question, alert the priest.

What if there is an accident and we drop the host or spill the precious blood?

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, however, accidents will happen. You're human. Should someone drop the Precious Body or spill the Precious Blood **DO NOT PANIC!** It is important for you to remain calm. The way you react will in turn influence the way that parishioners react. Stop what you are doing. Your demeanor will reassure those communicants in line or, in particular, the person who may have caused the spill.

If the consecrated host or some particle of it falls, it should be picked up reverently and held in the palm of your hand until after the reception of Holy Communion is complete; then take it directly to the priest. The host may be consumed by the priest or he may instruct the sacristan to make sure it is completely dissolved in water and only then poured down the sacrarium.

If the precious blood is spilled from the cup, you should immediately cover the spot where the precious Blood was spilled with the purificator, and then approach a server in order to obtain an extra purificator to use upon returning to their station.

Immediately after Mass, inform the priest of the situation so that he can ensure that all traces of the Precious Blood are removed and the spot is properly cleaned and the water poured into the sacrarium (Cf. GIRM no. 280; NDRHC no. 29).

Can Extraordinary Ministers give a blessing to those people who come forward with their arms crossed during Holy Communion?

There are times in the liturgical year when the laity assist in specific acts of blessing, such as the blessing of throats or the distribution of ashes. These are clearly indicated in the Book of Blessings. But Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion do not have a commission to bless in the name of the Church, as priests and deacons do. At this point in the liturgy, they have a very specific function: to collaborate with the clergy in the distribution of Holy Communion.

The blessing of the assembly properly occurs at the end of the Mass. As the body of Christ, the assembly is blessed together before we depart to live the fruits of the liturgy. (Cf. Blessings for Noncommunicants Archbishop Chaput of Denver, Colorado, 2003)

What would be appropriate for children to do who accompany their parents in the Communion procession, and adults who do not receive Communion?

The Communion procession is an opportunity for parents to begin to teach their children about the great gift of the Eucharist. First of all, children could learn to give reverence to the Lord hidden under the forms of bread and wine. Children can already learn from their parents, and others receiving holy Communion, to give honor to the Lord by bowing reverently.

Regrettably, we don't talk about spiritual communion as we once did. But Thomas Aquinas, Alphonsus Liguori and many other great saints strongly encouraged spiritual communion as a practice. This spiritual communion would more authentically carry out the spirit of the liturgy. Being faithful to the truths of the sacramental celebration allows all of us, young and old, to enter more deeply into worship. (Cf. *Blessings for Noncommunicants* Archbishop Chaput of Denver, Colorado, 2003)

Both children and adults can make a spiritual communion. They may come forward with their arms crossed and bow before the Eucharist. Then the priest, deacon or extraordinary minister could say to them kindly, 'Receive the Lord Jesus in your heart.' This is not a blessing, but an invitation to worship, so no gestures are made.

What should we do when we have finished the distribution of holy communion or when our cup is empty?

When there are no more communicants who wish to receive, or when your cup is empty, the EM should place the purificator over the top of the cup and step back, then return to the side of the sanctuary; one of the altar servers will take your cup and purificator and place them on the credence table or on the altar as they have been instructed. Then, remain standing in that place reverently until the distribution of communion is concluded. This is signaled by any remaining consecrated hosts being placed into the Tabernacle. When the Tabernacle door is closed, the EM's should participate in reverencing the Tabernacle by genuflecting with the priest and servers (or with a profound bow for those who are unable to genuflect), then return to your pew in the congregation.

What if there is still some of the precious blood left in the cup or hosts left in the Ciborium and there are no communicants left to receive?

The amount of wine to be consecrated should be carefully measured before the celebration so that none remains afterward. In those instances when there remains more consecrated wine than was necessary, if needs dictate, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion may consume what remains of the Precious Blood from their cup of distribution with the permission of the diocesan bishop. If you leave any of the precious blood in the cup when you return it to the sanctuary, then the priest or deacon must consume it before the sacred vessels are purified. Remember, it is strictly forbidden to pour the precious blood of Christ into the ground or into the sacrarium. (NDRHC, nos. 51 55). When the distribution of Communion is over, the Priest himself immediately and completely consumes at the altar any consecrated wine that happens to remain; as for any consecrated hosts that are left, he either consumes them at the altar or carries them to the place designated for the reservation of the Eucharist. (GIRM no. 163). Remember, at least some "consecrated hosts are to be reserved in a ciborium or vessel in sufficient quantity for the needs of the faithful; they are to be

frequently renewed and the old hosts properly consumed" (Code of Canon Law, no. 939). Burying consecrated hosts is strictly forbidden.

What about purifying and washing the sacred vessels after Holy Communion?

Only an Ordinary Minister of Holy Communion (bishop, priest, or deacon) are to allowed to purify the sacred vessels (Chalice, Paten, Ancillary Cups and Ciboria) during mass at the altar or at the credence table. Upon returning to the altar, the Priest collects the fragments, should any remain, and he stands at the altar or at the credence table and purifies the paten or ciborium over the chalice, and after this purifies the chalice, saying quietly the formula "Quod ore sumpsimus, Domine" (What has passed our lips), and dries the chalice with a purificator. If the vessels are purified at the altar, they are carried to the credence table by a minister. Nevertheless, it is also permitted to leave vessels needing to be purified, especially if there are several, on a corporal, suitably covered, either on the altar or on the credence table, and to purify them immediately after Mass, after the Dismissal of the people. (GIRM no. 163).

If the sacred vessels are not purified until after mass, then either an Ordinary Minister of Holy Communion or an Instituted Acolyte may purify them in the sacristy before they are washed. In any case, purification of the sacred vessels should NEVER be done by a Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion or even a Sacristan.

Extraordinary Ministers and Taking Holy Communion to the Sick and Homebound

This Ministry is an extension of the EM's service to the parish community that requires additional training. The following Diocesan norms and guidelines are intended to assist parishes in the choice, formation, and support of those persons who are privileged to be appointed by the Bishop as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to the Sick and Homebound. The Bishop has the faculty to appoint qualified persons, men and women, as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion. (CCL 910; 230 §3)

I. General Principles

Bishops, priests, and deacons are the Ordinary Ministers of Holy Communion and, therefore, assume this responsibility first. It is only when the number of ordinary ministers is insufficient to meet the pastoral needs of the sick, that Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion assist in this ministry.

1. Extraordinary Ministers may also be appointed to bring Holy Communion to the sick, the elderly and homebound, who, by reason of their illness and/or confinement at home or other care facilities, are not able to be physically present for the celebration of Mass. The purpose of this ministry is to bring Holy Communion to them and thus unite them spiritually to the worshipping community.
2. Those men and women chosen for this ministry must be comfortable in the presence of those who are sick, aged, injured or dying, so that their presence aids the person(s) in their understanding and acceptance of their condition as being joined to our Lord.

II. General Norms

1. The Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion to the Sick is to approach the altar after the distribution of Holy Communion has been completed, but before the Prayer after Communion, to receive the pyx with the Blessed Sacrament from the priest or deacon. The community may be invited to pray for them and those to whom they will minister. The Extraordinary Minister(s) is(are) then to leave the altar with the pyx(es) and proceed immediately to the assigned sick person(s). They are not to remain for any further prayers or blessings or gatherings. Because they are carrying Holy Communion, their reverent demeanor will be an example to others.
2. The Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion to the Sick is to use the Rite of Administration of Communion to the Sick by an Extraordinary Minister as it is found in the ritual book.

The Rite of Administration of Communion to the Sick should take place immediately upon arrival, that is, after greeting the sick person and family members. The rite may be found in the *Roman Ritual, Pastoral Care of the Sick*, nn. 76-92. There is a separate,

bilingual pamphlet of this rite printed by the USCCB in 1999 which is recommended for use.

The time for visiting is *after* Communion has been received and the rite has been completed. In this way, all will come to a deeper reverence of Holy Communion and the abiding, real presence of Jesus Christ in this Sacrament.

Can I go to the store or out to eat before bringing Holy Communion Sick and Homebound?

A Priest or Deacon, or an Extraordinary Minister who takes the Holy Eucharist when an ordained minister is absent or impeded in order to administer it as Communion for a sick person, should go insofar as possible directly from the place where the Sacrament is reserved to the sick person's home, leaving aside any mundane business so that any danger of profanation may be avoided and the greatest reverence for the Body of Christ may be ensured. Furthermore, the *Rite for the Administration of Communion to the Sick*, as prescribed in the Roman Ritual, is always to be used. (*Redemptionis Sacramentum*, 133).

Procedure for obtaining Appointments as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to the Sick and the Homebound

1. The Pastor of a parish is to submit to the Bishop, in writing, the names of those persons who qualify and have been chosen to be appointed as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to the Sick. When submitting first names, the full baptismal name is to be given rather than shortened names or nicknames.
2. The appointment is made to a specific parish and is exercised in that parish only. If the minister moves to a different parish, the appointment ceases.
3. The appointment as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion is a privilege, not a right. Therefore, the appointment is made for a specific period of three years and may be terminated before the completion of the term.
4. The Pastor has the option of resubmitting the names of the same persons for a second term of three years. At the end of this second term, an entirely new group of ministers is to be chosen. This change has the merit of avoiding the presumption that this ministry belongs by right to any individual, family or group. A specific period of time for the appointment has the additional value that the minister, by his/her choice, is able to leave the ministry if necessary, and/or, for the Pastor, if necessary, to request that a particular person leave the ministry.
5. A letter of approval for the appointments will be issued from the Chancellor of the Diocese along with certificates of appointment and copies of these guidelines for each person so appointed.
6. The Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to the Sick are to be commissioned to this ministry in the presence of the parish community at a Sunday Mass. The rite of commissioning to be used is found in the *Book of Blessings*, which is

part of the *Roman Ritual: Order of Commissioning Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion within Mass*, (pages 79599 in the Catholic Book Company, 1989 version), nn. 871 to 1881.

Reverence in Obtaining Holy Communion for the Sick and Homebound

For those Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to the Sick who obtain the Blessed Sacrament at Mass, please note well:

1. It is improper to come forward in the Communion procession and ask for the Blessed Sacrament to be placed in a pyx either before or after you yourself have received Holy Communion.
2. The proper procedure is to come forward to the altar after the distribution of Holy Communion has been completed, and before the Prayer after Communion, to receive the Eucharist. You are then to go directly to the person(s) to whom you are bringing Holy Communion as noted above in nn. 1 and 2 of the General Norms.
3. It is a liturgical abuse for any duly appointed Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion to the Sick to come forward in the Communion Procession with an open pyx and expect to have the Blessed Sacrament placed in their pyx, saying “I’ll take one (or whatever number) please.”
4. It is a liturgical abuse for any priest, deacon or duly appointed Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion to place the Blessed Sacrament in a pyx held by any person in the Communion Procession.
5. It is a liturgical abuse for any duly appointed Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion to the Sick to obtain the Blessed Sacrament from the Tabernacle before Mass and then remain at Mass with the Blessed Sacrament on his or her person.
6. It is a liturgical abuse for any duly appointed Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion to the Sick, even though he or she receives the pyx containing the Blessed Sacrament at the proper time during Mass [or after Mass], to remain afterwards for any social gathering or meeting with the Blessed Sacrament on their person. The Blessed Sacrament is to be brought directly to the sick person. (Cf. above, II General Norms, 1 and 2; and n. 7, below.)
7. The proper time for an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion to the Sick to obtain the Blessed Sacrament is after the distribution of Communion has been completed at Mass. The Extraordinary Minister(s) of Holy Communion to the Sick is(are) to come forward to the altar before the Prayer after Communion to receive the pyx containing the Blessed Sacrament. Having received the pyx, the minister(s) is dismissed and is to leave the Church immediately to bring the Blessed Sacrament to the Sick. Under no circumstances may the Extraordinary Minister keep the Blessed Sacrament until later in the day for distribution.

8. The practice of leaving the pyx, containing the Blessed Sacrament, on the altar for the Extraordinary Minister to pick up himself/herself is improper. The pyx is to be given to the minister by the priest or deacon.
9. If the Blessed Sacrament for the Sick is not obtained at Mass, then the local parish must decide on the procedure to obtain the Blessed Sacrament keeping in mind due custody for the key to the Tabernacle and the proper reverence shown to the Blessed Sacrament.
10. Any other particular pastoral situations or liturgical concerns are to be addressed to the Office for Divine Worship for guidance and/or clarification.