

### **POLICY 2.5.3    Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion**

*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 and wine.*

The Church's belief about the Eucharist is clear: that it is indeed the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. How the transformation of ordinary bread and wine becomes Christ's Body and Blood is a profound mystery, and theologians over the centuries have reflected on the mystery that it is. St. Thomas Aquinas spoke of this mystery as "transubstantiation" – that the physical attributes of bread and wine (appearance, taste, smell, texture) remain the same, while the deeper essence (or substance) has changed. If we personally believe what the Church teaches on this matter, then the way we approach, receive and treat the Eucharist must be with deep reverence and respect. Keeping this always in mind, the following directives are meant to express our high regard for the Body and Blood of Christ that we receive.

#### **Faculty**

- The faculty is granted to parish priests and priest-chaplains to appoint extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion in their parishes or institutions.<sup>1</sup>
- The faculty is granted to all priests to designate suitable persons to distribute Communion for a specific occasion when there is genuine necessity to do so.

#### **Appointing Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion**

The following norms are to be followed in appointing extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion who will function on a regular basis within Mass or Communion services in their own parish or institution.

1. There must be a genuine need for such a ministry. A need exists when ordinary ministers (priests and deacons) are not available or a sufficient number of them are not present to respond to the faithful requesting Communion within a short period of distribution.
2. When such a need exists, the parish priest or priest-chaplain may select and appoint men and women, lay or religious, to be extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion. **A general call for volunteers should not be extended.** The number of candidates should be determined by need and there should not be so many extraordinary ministers that each does not serve at least monthly.
3. Those chosen to be extraordinary ministers must be Catholic; leading an exemplary Christian life; participate regularly in the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church; respected by the faith community (see AGM Policy Manual 6.2); have received all of the sacraments of Initiation; and are mature persons fifteen years of age or older. If married, the marriage must be one recognized by the Church.

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<sup>1</sup> See Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, instruction on certain matters to be observed or avoided concerning the Most Holy Eucharist, *Redemptionis sacramentum* at n.158

The Instruction Immensae Caritatis says: “Let them strive to be worthy of this great office; let them cultivate devotion to the Holy Eucharist and show themselves as an example to the other faithful by their piety and reverence for this most holy Sacrament of the altar.”

4. The pastor has the responsibility of providing instruction of both, the candidates for this ministry and those to whom they will minister to ensure acceptance, understanding and appreciation of the ministry.<sup>2</sup>
5. Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion who function on a regular basis in their own parish or institution should be appointed for a specific period of time, generally three years. Whenever there is a change of extraordinary ministers, parish priests are to submit the names to the chancery office. These directives as well as Policy 6.2 (AGM) are to be kept in mind before presenting parishioners as extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion to the chancery.
6. It is recommended that extraordinary ministers be formally Commissioned, preferably during a Mass in the presence of the faith community.<sup>3</sup>
7. Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are to limit the exercise of their ministry to their own particular parish.
8. Service as an extraordinary minister is not intended to be a permanent ministry. At the discretion of the Archbishop, a period of three years has been discerned as a term of service (see #5). After discernment by both the extraordinary ministers and the parish priest, the person may be re-instated for another term (see #5 & 6).
9. Extraordinary ministers should not exercise another liturgical ministry within the same Mass in which they distribute Communion.
10. Parish priests are to keep a record of extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion appointed by them (see #5).

It is understood that a parish priest or bishop may terminate the service of an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion at any time, and the extraordinary minister may also resign at any time.

If there is a change in the good standing of an extraordinary minister in relation to the law of the Church, that person is no longer permitted to serve as an extraordinary minister until such time as resolution is reached and re-appointment will not cause scandal or dissent.

11. The rite also permits presiding priests to appoint suitable ministers for a specific occasion when there is a need. (Ordo 12c)
12. Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion should dress in a manner consonant with the dignity of the service they offer. (GIRM 339)

### The Distribution of Holy Communion within Mass

The following guidelines apply to the distribution of Communion within Mass.

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<sup>2</sup> Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion should receive sufficient **spiritual, theological and practical** preparation to be able to fulfill their role with knowledge and reverence. It is the responsibility of the pastor to ensure that this formation is provided.

<sup>3</sup> Celebrations of Installation and Recognition, CCCB Publications

1. As one with the worshipping assembly the extraordinary minister is expected to fully participate in the entire liturgy.
2. Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion do **not** wash their hands in the ablution bowl in the sanctuary either before or after distribution of Holy Communion. All extraordinary ministers are reminded to wash their hands in the sacristy or the rest room before Mass begins.
3. The extraordinary ministers should not approach the altar before the priest has received Communion. (GIRM 162) However, they should gather in the sanctuary area as the Lamb of God is begun.
4. Only after the priest has received Communion is Communion given to the deacon and extraordinary ministers. The practice of extraordinary ministers waiting to receive Holy Communion until after the distribution of Holy Communion is not in accord with liturgical law. (*They do come to the altar to receive communion before distributing it to the people, following the principle that one cannot give what one has not received.*)
5. After all the Eucharistic ministers have received Communion, the priest celebrant may be assisted by the deacon and other ordinary ministers in handing vessels containing the Body or the Blood of the Lord to the deacons and extraordinary ministers who will assist with the distribution of Holy Communion. (GIRM 86, 162).
6. If a deacon is present, he administers the chalice to communicants (GIRM 182).
7. The extraordinary minister of Holy Communion CANNOT be expected to decide to whom to give or deny Communion as the communicants present themselves.
8. When receiving Holy Communion the communicant bows his or her head before the sacrament as a gesture of reverence (GIRM 160). The Body of Christ is administered with the words, *The Body of Christ*. After the communicant has responded *Amen* the consecrated bread is placed in the hand or on the tongue according to the manner indicated by the communicant (GIRM 161). **The Body of Christ is always ministered to communicants. They are not permitted to take their own consecrated bread and communicate themselves.**

The choice of receiving Communion in the hand or on the tongue rests with each individual communicant and must be respected by the minister distributing Communion.
9. If a piece of consecrated bread falls to the ground during the distribution of Communion, the extraordinary minister should pick it up immediately and consume it then or after distribution is over. (GIRM 280)
10. Should an extraordinary minister believe that a communicant has not consumed the Body of Christ, this should be brought to the attention of the priest celebrating the Mass at an opportune time (e.g., after the distribution of Communion or immediately following the Mass).
11. Distribution of Communion under both kinds is recommended in all celebrations of the Eucharist, but it is the communicant's option to receive from the chalice. Careful judgment should be made before Mass that enough wine, but not too much, is made ready for consecration and distribution. (GIRM 285a)

12. 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.
13. The cup is offered to the communicant with the words, *The Blood of Christ*, to which the communicant responds, *Amen*. (GIRM 284-287) Generally, the communicant should hold the cup firmly in both hands and drink from it. However, in the case of physical disability or weakness, the extraordinary minister should be ready to assist in holding the cup.
14. After the Blood of Christ has been received, the minister should wipe the rim of the cup inside and out with a purificator and turn the cup slightly before presenting it to the next communicant.
15. The cup is always ministered to the communicant; it may never be left for self-communication except in the case of concelebrating priests. The practice of self-intinction is not permitted. The General Instruction does allow Communion by intinction, but only by the priest, in which case everyone receives Communion in this same way. (GIRM 287)

Should it become apparent that communicants are receiving the Sacrament by self-intinction, the parish priest is responsible for ensuring the appropriate catechesis is offered (e.g., in a homily, bulletin insert, etc.)

16. 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.
17. If the consecrated wine is spilled, the area should be covered immediately with the purificator and washed after Mass with the water then poured into the sacrarium (GIRM 280). In the absence of a sacrarium, the water should be poured onto the ground in a non-travelled area (e.g., flower bed).
18. When they have finished the distribution of Communion, the extraordinary ministers of communion return the vessels of Eucharistic Bread and consecrated Wine to the priest or deacon at the altar (GIRM 163). When fragments of the hosts adhere to the fingers, the ministers of the consecrated bread go to the credence table to purify their fingers, and then they return to their places (GIRM 278).

If an excess amount of consecrated Wine remains, the priest-celebrant may request extraordinary ministers to consume the Precious Blood from their cup of distribution. This should take place at the side of the altar or at the credence table immediately after the distribution of Communion is completed. The consecrated wine is never to be poured into the ground or a sacrarium. (GIRM 163, 182, 279)

19. The consecrated wine may not be reserved in the tabernacle for later use.
20. The chalice(s) and other vessels are taken to the altar or to a side table (credence) where they are purified by the priest, deacon(s) or instituted acolyte. (GIRM 183, 279) It is recommended that this purification take place immediately following the conclusion of the congregations reception of the Eucharist. At the conclusion of the Mass, the vessels should be washed by the sacristan, an extraordinary minister of communion, or some other designated person.
21. Remaining consecrated Bread can be consumed or reserved in the Tabernacle (GIRM 163)

22. Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion should participate in ongoing theological and ministerial formation at the parish and/or diocesan level.

### **Who May Receive?**

There is always the difficult question of who may (or may not) receive Communion. In the Catholic Church's tradition, Communion in the Body and Blood of Jesus reflects not only faith in Him, but also full "communion" with the Catholic Church. With some few and extraordinary exceptions, only those who are *bona fide* Catholics, and whose lifestyle is consistent with Church teaching and who practice, should seek to receive Communion. All others are (and should be made to feel) warmly welcome at our celebrations of the Eucharist, but they should refrain from receiving Communion.

Those receiving Holy Communion should not have chewing gum, cough drops or any other forms of candies in their mouth as they receive the Body and Blood of Christ.

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

### **When Distribution of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds is Not Approved**

Communion under both kinds is not permitted in the following cases:

1. At Masses celebrated in the open with a great number of communicants (e.g., in a stadium with several thousand people in attendance);
2. 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);
3. 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;
4. 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.)

### **The Distribution of Communion to the Sick and Homebound**

A genuine need exists outside of Mass, when the ordinary minister is unable to give the sick and the homebound 'every opportunity to receive the Eucharist frequently, and even daily during the Easter season'. (Pastoral Care of the sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum, 72)

*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. (Decree, Congregation for Divine Worship, December 7, 1972)*

Extra-ordinary Communion ministers make it possible to bring communion to the sick more frequently, and thus free the priest for his other responsibilities to the sick: visiting them, celebrating reconciliation with them, and giving them the anointing of the sick.

The parish priest, in conjunction with members of the parish community, should develop a list of persons suitable to be extraordinary Communion ministers to the sick and homebound. It should include women and men, lay and religious. The list should be submitted to the chancery office for approval by the Archbishop.

There is no restriction on the number of people who are named to this ministry.

Prior to being accepted as extra-ordinary ministers of communion to the sick and homebound, the Selection and Screening procedures (Policy 5.1) must be completed.

Prior to their designation to this ministry, the ministers should be adequately prepared. Since Communion to the sick demands added pastoral and possible professional skills and familiarity with the Church's ritual *Pastoral Care of the Sick*, professional Health Care Worker(s) might be asked to assist in the training in this ministry. It is recommended that they be formally commissioned in a ceremony witnessed by members of the faith community.

#### **AFTER THE COMMUNION RITE OR AT THE END OF MASS**

Though extra-ordinary ministers of communion may bring communion to the sick or homebound at any time, the sign value is enhanced when the Eucharist is carried directly from the Mass. The communion is thus clearly related to the community table.

At the preparation of the gifts:

1. The celebrant may prepare the pyxes on the altar with bread to be consecrated at that Mass, and then, after the Communion Prayer, 'send out' the ministers as community representatives. (Option One and Two)

#### **OPTION ONE**

2. After the distribution of Communion to the assembly is complete, the EMHC approaches the altar. The Presider or parish priest presents the EMHC with the pyx for distribution of Communion to the sick or housebound. No prayer or words are prescribed at this time, since it is the action of handing the elements to the ministers that is important. Moreover, a sending forth ceremony would break the flow of the communion hymn.
3. The ministers either leave immediately to bring Communion to the sick or remain near the altar and leave from the closing procession.

#### **OPTION TWO**

4. The ministers may remain at their place until the end of the Mass and approach the altar after the blessing to be handed the pyxe and proceed from the procession to take Communion to the sick or homebound .

**TO BE NOTED:**

5. The practice of the extraordinary ministers holding up a pyx to receive the Eucharistic Bread at the same time that they themselves receive Communion is not to be encouraged.
6. 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.

### OPTION THREE

7. Apart from the Mass, the extraordinary ministers of communion may go to the tabernacle, place the required number of hosts into the pyx and take Communion to the sick or homebound.

The way the pyx is carried should respect the dignity of the sacrament. A pyx should not be carried in one's pant pocket. Special carry cases are available. On their way to the sick or homebound, ministers should avoid long or unnecessary distractions. Other members of the community may accompany the minister.

On arrival at the home, the minister greets the family and the sick person in a friendly manner. In many carry cases for the pyx is a small corporal. The corporal should be opened on a table or at a bedside and the pyx is placed on it. The prayers begin using the rite in the Handbook for Special Ministers of Communion or other prepared and approved ritual. Be sensitive to the condition and needs of the sick person.

See **Do's and Don'ts** below.

What remains of the consecrated bread after visitations may be consumed or returned to the tabernacle.

### **Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion: Dos and Don'ts of bringing Communion to the Sick and Homebound**

#### **DO:**

- Make an appointment to visit or hold a regular schedule. Ask how the person is feeling and if there will be others present so you will have sufficient hosts for all to receive (see page 5 Who can receive.)
- Use the ritual "Communion of the Sick" from Pastoral Care of the Sick. Bring your Sunday missal or Bible for Scripture readings.
- Begin informally. Introduce yourself to those who are present and explain what you have come to do. Pay attention to how the sick or homebound person is feeling. If needed, ensure that a glass of water is present for the sick person if they have difficulty swallowing the host.
- Invite participation in the prayers by those present. If they feel comfortable, enlist the help of a family member or friend to do the Scripture readings.
- Offer the host or a piece of a host to the sick or homebound person first. If needed, present the person with water if there is difficulty in swallowing. If Communion is received by the Precious Blood, a sip of water may also be necessary. Be attentive.

- Create a link with the parish, e.g., bring a parish bulletin, share news from the parish, ask if there is anything the parish can do for them, if they need to see the parish priest for reconciliation or anointing of the sick.
- Thank the person(s) for the opportunity to pray with them and for their hospitality.

#### **DON'T:**

- Don't visit a sick person if you are not feeling well yourself. Find a substitute.
- Don't stay too long or take the role of a counselor or confidant.
- Don't compete with a television or radio. Politely ask if these can be turned off during the service.
- Don't carry the consecrated host in a plastic bag, purse, pocket or other unsuitable container. Use a pyx to carry the consecrated host(s).
- Don't leave the consecrated host if the person cannot receive it. Instead, return at a later time to see the sick person. Consume any consecrated host(s) or return it to the tabernacle in the church.
- Don't take hosts home or leave them in your car.

#### **Acolyte**

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal makes a distinction between a formally instituted acolyte, which is a permanent ministry, and other ministers who serve the priest or distribute communion as an extraordinary minister.

A formally instituted acolyte may assist the priest as an extraordinary minister in giving communion to the people. In the absence of a deacon the acolyte may administer the chalice to communicants. (GIRM 187, 191)

The acolyte is instituted for the service at the altar and to assist the Priest and Deacon. It is his place principally to prepare the altar and the sacred vessels and, if necessary, to distribute the Eucharist to the faithful as an extraordinary minister. (GIRM 98).

In the ministry of the altar, the acolyte has his own proper functions (GIRM 187-193), which he must carry out in person.

#### **PREPARATION OF GIFTS**

Enough bread for each Eucharist should be brought forward at the Presentation of the Gifts. The need to go to the tabernacle before the distribution of Communion is discouraged. (GIRM 85)

If one chalice is not sufficient for Holy Communion to be distributed under both kinds, either additional empty chalices are placed on a corporal on the altar and filled with wine along with the main chalice after the presentation of the gifts, or additional chalices are filled with wine before Mass and brought to the altar at the preparation of the altar. It is not permitted to pour the consecrated wine into other chalices (GIRM 83). Sufficient chalices should be brought to the altar at the Preparation of the Gifts.

The extraordinary ministers of communion are no longer permitted to assist the priest in breaking the bread (GIRM 83), or to purify or cleanse the sacred vessels --this is reserved to a formally instituted acolyte, a deacon or the priest (GIRM 279).

Ordinary ministers (Bishop, Priest Celebrant or deacon) distribute the consecrated bread into ancillary vessels. If this is to take place at the altar, the vessels are brought forth during the Lamb of God. In the case of large assemblies, this distribution into ancillary vessels may take place at a side table within the sanctuary to which ministers take the consecrated bread. Once the vessels are filled, it is not necessary to take them to the altar for handing to the ministers of Communion. When necessary, extraordinary ministers may assist ordinary ministers in this distribution.

*\*Sacrarium is a special sink, usually found in the sacristy, that drains directly into the ground. If your church is without a sacrarium, water is to be poured into the ground.*

## **Sources**

*2012 GIRM*

*ORDO – Liturgical Calendar, pastoral notes*

*Some information was taken from a document from the Diocese of Norwich.*

*Some information was taken from a document from the Diocese of San Diego.*

*Some information was taken from a document from the Archdiocese of Santa Fe.*

*Some information was taken from the document from the Archdiocese of Boston.*

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