

Catholic Diocese of Superior

Norms for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of these norms is to provide some general observations and principles regarding Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion. These norms define the content of liturgical law, the requirements of the Eucharistic liturgy, and the expectations of the universal and local Church pertinent to this ministry.

MINISTRY OF HOLY COMMUNION

1. The administration of Holy Communion during the Mass is rightfully considered a ministry. It entails bringing the sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ to the People of God. It is also the ministry of witnessing to faith in the real presence of Christ in the action of sharing in the Eucharistic meal of Christ's sacrifice. This ministry must, therefore, be regarded with the utmost dignity and reverence.

2. In every celebration of the Eucharist there should be a sufficient number of ministers so that Holy Communion can be distributed in an orderly and reverent manner. Bishops, priests, and deacons distribute Holy Communion by virtue of their office as ordinary ministers of the Body and Blood of the Lord. (*Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America #27*)

When the size of the congregation or the incapacity of the bishop, priest or deacon requires it, the celebrant may be assisted by other bishops, priests, or deacons. If such ordinary ministers of Holy Communion are not present, "the priest may call upon extraordinary ministers to assist him, i.e., formally instituted acolytes or even some of the faithful who have been commissioned according to the prescribed rite. In case of necessity, the priest may also commission suitable members of the faithful for

the occasion." (*Norms #28; General Instruction of the Roman Missal #162, 284*)

REQUIREMENTS

3. Baptized and confirmed Catholics, 16 years of age and older, are eligible for this ministry. They should be persons who sincerely try to live the Gospel message in their communal and individual lives. They should faithfully participate in the Sunday Eucharist and with God's grace strive to live their faith in every aspect of their lives. If married, their marriages must be recognized by the church as sacramental.

4. Candidates for the ministry of Holy Communion are to be properly trained before they are commissioned for service (*Norms #28*). This training must include:

A. The history of the Eucharist: Old and New Testament and the teachings of the church.

B. The spirituality of the Eucharist and ministry.

C. A practicum demonstrating and practicing how to minister the Body and Blood of Christ.

5. Before they are commissioned, the names of the candidates are to be submitted to the bishop accompanied by a letter from their respective pastors verifying that these individuals have been fully trained and meet all diocesan requirements for this ministry. Upon approval by the bishop, the Office of Worship will record the names of all candidates and prepare certificates for them which the bishop will sign and send to each pastor.

6. All new extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion should be commissioned, preferably

during a Sunday Mass. The Rite of Commissioning is found in the *Book of Blessings*. (chapter 63, page 795 [Catholic Book edition])

7. Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion should wear clothing in keeping with their primary role as members of the assembly. The use of albs for extraordinary ministers of Communion is discouraged as is the use of other external adornments.

As a normative liturgical principle, an individual should exercise only one ministry in any given liturgy. Therefore extraordinary ministers of Communion should not function as readers, altar servers, cantors, etc...at the same liturgy at which they are distributing Communion unless necessity requires it.

8. At least once a year, pastors or parish directors should arrange a program or special gathering to renew the faith, prayer and commitment of the current ministers. These renewal sessions could also include the discussion of issues or problems that have arisen during their ministry.

9. It is appropriate that a term of service be mutually agreed upon by the individual and the pastor and/or pastoral council. Parishes should consider commissioning their Communion ministers for a specific period, e.g., four years. This will allow both the ministers and the parish community an opportunity to evaluate the individual's continuation in this ministry and provide, when necessary, a gracious means to discontinue one's ministry. Should the minister, in consultation with the pastor, decide to remain in this ministry, he/she may simply continue to do so without a re-commissioning ceremony unless this is desirable or advantageous for the parish community.

PROCEDURE DURING MASS

10. Ordinarily, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are not part of the entrance procession, and simply take their places within the assembly before the liturgy begins.

“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.” (*Norms #29*)

11. At the Preparation of the Gifts, the priest or deacon prepares the bread and wine on the altar. It is not the role of the communion ministers to prepare the elements and vessels at the Preparation of the Gifts.

If the number of communicants is small, the chalice should contain an adequate amount of wine for the Communion of all. If the number is large, several chalices should be used to accommodate the number of communicants.

The use of flagons is permitted only to contain the wine until the Preparation of Gifts. They may not be used for the consecration of the Precious Blood.

12. When the priest presider receives Communion, the Communion song should begin and the ministers of Communion may enter the sanctuary.

13. The priest presider receives Communion first. After the priest has received Communion, he distributes Communion under both kinds to the assisting deacon, if present.

Then Communion under both kinds may be given to the ministers by the priest, assisted by the deacon who ordinarily distributes the Precious Blood.

If the entire assembly is not being offered the Precious Blood, it is not appropriate to offer it to the ministers only.

Neither deacons nor lay ministers may ever receive Holy Communion in the manner of a concelebrating priest. (*Norms #39*)

The practice of extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion waiting to receive until after the

distribution of Holy Communion is not in accord with liturgical law. (*Norms #39*)

As the priest or deacon approaches the minister with the Body or Blood of the Lord, the minister bows his or her head as a sign of reverence and responds with a clear “Amen” to the invitation, “The Body of Christ” or “The Blood of Christ.” Next, a vessel containing the Body or Blood of the Lord is handed by the priest or deacon to each minister, and he/she moves to the respective station for the distribution of Communion to the assembly. (*Norms #38-40*)

14. Since enough bread and wine for each Mass should be presented at the Preparation of the Gifts, the need to distribute consecrated hosts from the tabernacle is greatly diminished.

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* states, “It is most desirable that the faithful, just as the priest himself is bound to do, receive the Lord’s Body from hosts consecrated at the same Mass and that, in the instances when it is permitted, they participate in the chalice (cf. no. 283), so that even by means of the signs Communion will stand out more clearly as a participation in the sacrifice actually being celebrated.” (85)

Further supporting this understanding is the fact that the *GIRM* makes no mention of bringing ciboria with hosts consecrated at a previous Mass to the altar during the Eucharistic Celebration.

However, if the ministers of the Body of Christ realize that they do not have sufficient hosts for the number of communicants, they or another minister may go to the tabernacle to obtain more hosts.

DISTRIBUTION OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

15. The Body of Christ (Communion under the form of bread) is administered only with the words: “The Body of Christ.” After the communicant has responded “Amen,” the host is placed in the hand or on the tongue according to the manner indicated by the communicant. It is

the communicant’s personal choice to receive the Body of Christ in the hand or on the tongue. (*Norms #41*)

“The norm for the reception of Holy Communion in the dioceses of the United States is standing.” Communicants should not be denied Holy Communion because they kneel. Rather, such instances should be addressed pastorally, by providing the faithful with proper catechesis on the reasons for this norm. (*GIRM #160*)

“When receiving Holy Communion, the communicant bows his or her head before the Sacrament as a gesture of reverence and receives the Body of the Lord from the minister . . . When Holy Communion is received under both kinds, the sign of reverence is also made before receiving the Precious Blood.” (*GIRM #160*)

Ministers are discouraged from using the names of individuals when distributing the Body and Blood of Christ. Such a practice, while meaningful to those whose names are known, could be hurtful to those whose names are not, thereby creating an expression of disunity at the very moment when the community’s oneness in Christ ought to be most visible.

16. The Body of Christ is always ministered to the communicant. Communicants are not permitted to take the consecrated host and communicate themselves.

17. If a host should fall during distribution, the minister should pick the host up without excessive display, place it in the Communion vessel or on the altar, and consume it after everyone has received.

18. It is logical and preferable that only those who will be receiving Holy Communion be a part of the Communion procession. If, however, someone who is not receiving Communion comes in the Communion procession to the minister of the Body of Christ, the minister may offer a simple greeting, e.g., “May Jesus be with you always.” Words or gestures of blessing, e.g.,

the Sign of the Cross, should be avoided since the blessing is imparted to all the faithful at the end of the liturgy.

19. After the distribution of Communion, if the number of hosts is not too great, and provided there are sufficient hosts in the tabernacle, the remaining hosts should be reverently consumed by the ministers of Communion at the altar or side table.

COMMUNION FROM THE CHALICE

20. In the Diocese of Superior, Communion under both kinds, the Body and Blood of Christ, is normative on Sundays and holy days – as well as at weekday Masses. In order to insure that this is done in a reverent and orderly manner, the availability of sufficient ministers is essential. Ongoing catechesis as to the theological and liturgical importance of this practice is also essential. The freedom of the communicant to choose whether or not to receive under both species is to be respected. If a person is unable to receive Communion under the form of bread, he/she may choose to receive the Communion under the form of wine – the Blood of Christ. (*Norms #24, 25, 46*)

“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*)

21. When the members of the assembly drink from the chalice, ordinarily there should be two ministers of the chalice for each minister with the hosts. Each parish, however, will need to determine what ratio is most suitable for itself. Ministers should stand at an appropriate distance from each other to facilitate the Communion procession and not unduly impede the assembly’s easy movement.

MINISTRATION OF THE CHALICE (BLOOD OF CHRIST)

22. The chalice is offered to the communicant with the words, “The Blood of Christ,” to which the communicant responds, “Amen.” Generally, the communicant should hold the chalice firmly in both hands and drink from it. However, in the case of physical disability or weakness, the minister should be ready to assist in holding the chalice.

23. After each person has received the Blood of Christ, the minister should wipe both sides of the rim of the chalice with a purificator and turn the chalice slightly before repeating the procedure for the next communicant.

24. Any danger of spilling the Precious Blood should be carefully avoided. If, by chance, the consecrated wine should spill, the area should immediately be covered with a purificator and washed thoroughly after the Liturgy.

25. The chalice may never be left on the altar or another place to be taken by the communicant for self-communication (except in the case of concelebrating bishops or priests), nor may the chalice be passed from one communicant to another. (*Norms #44*)

26. The Precious Blood may not be reserved, except for giving Communion to someone who is sick and unable to receive Communion under the form of bread. When this is the case, the consecrated wine is placed in the tabernacle until after the Mass and then carried to the sick in a closed vessel that prevents the danger of spilling. If any of the Precious Blood remains after the infirmed person has received Communion, it should be consumed by the minister who would also purify the vessel. (*Norms #54*)

27. The reverence due the Precious Blood of the Lord demands that it be fully consumed after Communion is completed and never poured into the ground or the sacrarium. (*Norms #55*)

COMMUNION BY INTINCTION

28. Communion by intinction, i.e., dipping the host into the Precious Blood, is permissible. However, since this method of distributing Communion eliminates the communicant's choice to receive Communion in the hand, and also denies the right of the faithful to receive Communion under the form of bread only, it is not recommended.

Among the ways of ministering the Precious Blood as prescribed by the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, Communion from the Chalice is generally preferred in the Latin Church. (*Norms #42*)

The use of individual communion cups, common in some Protestant traditions, is not permitted.

29. If Communion is administered by intinction, the following should be remembered:

A. The formula to be used by the minister is: "The Body and Blood of Christ." After the communicant responds, "Amen," the dipped host is placed on the tongue.

B. The communicant is not allowed to dip his/her own host into the chalice. It is always dipped and administered to the individual by the minister.

PURIFICATION OF VESSELS

30. Following the distribution of Communion, the remaining hosts are either consumed or placed in the tabernacle. The Precious Blood is completely consumed by the priest, deacon or extraordinary ministers of Communion.

The sacred vessels are purified by the priest, deacon, or an instituted acolyte after Communion or after Mass, in so far as possible at the credence table. The purification of the chalice is done with water alone or with wine and water which is then drunk by whoever does the purification. The paten is

usually wiped clean with the purificator. (*GIRM #279*)

31. If the vessels are purified after the Mass, they are placed at the credence table or in the sacristy and covered with a white cloth. After a priest, deacon or acolyte has purified the vessels, Communion ministers may assist in the cleansing of these with soap and water.

CHILDREN AND COMMUNION FROM THE CHALICE

32. Since Communion under both species is normative at all Eucharistic celebrations in the Diocese of Superior, children are to be prepared for this option both catechetically and liturgically. To avoid unseemly facial expressions children should be exposed to the taste of altar wine prior to their First Holy Communion.

NORMS FOR MINISTERS TO THE SICK

33. Ordinarily each commissioned Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion may take Communion to the sick. However, there may be Communion ministers specifically commissioned to take Communion to the sick on a regular basis.

"Priests with pastoral responsibilities should see to it that the sick or aged, even though not seriously ill or in danger of death, are given every opportunity to receive the Eucharist frequently, even daily, especially during the Easter Season." (*Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum #72*)

34. Ideally, ministers to the sick are sent by the parish community each Sunday to take the Eucharist to those who are prevented from being present because of age or illness.

This may be done after the Post-Communion Prayer. The ministers may be blessed and ritually sent to extend the unity of the Eucharist with those who are sick. The formula for the ritual sending may be in these or similar words:

“My brothers and sisters, you are sent to bring the Word of God and the Bread of Life from the assembly to the sick and shut-in members of our parish family. Go to them with our love and our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.”
(*Liturgical Life* 1988, Vol. II, No. 4, p.9)

Ministers may be sent in this manner from weekday Masses also.

35. The minister to the sick follows the rite as outlined in chapter three of *Pastoral Care of the Sick*; using either “Communion in Ordinary Circumstances” or “Communion in a Hospital or Institution.” Only those ministers who are trained and delegated by the bishop as Lay Leaders of Prayer may preside over Communion Services.

36. When the Eucharist is brought to the sick it should be carried in a pyx designed for this sacred purpose. The host may not be carried in a handkerchief, envelope or other such unworthy containers. Ideally, a table with a cloth, cross and candles is to be prepared in the home to which the Blessed Sacrament is taken. A vessel of holy water may also be available.

37. It is recommended that hosts for the sick and homebound be consecrated in the Mass from which they will be taken and in which the Extraordinary Ministers have participated. Hosts which cannot be distributed immediately or consumed by the sick and homebound should be consumed by the minister or returned to the tabernacle. The Blessed Sacrament may never be reserved in private homes, offices or automobiles.

“No one may carry the Most Holy Eucharist to his or her home or to any place contrary to the norm of law. A priest or deacon or an extraordinary minister who takes the Most 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 profane business so that any danger of profanation may be avoided and the greatest reverence for the Body of Christ may be ensured.”
(*Redemptionis Sacramentum* #132-133)

VIATICUM

38. The norm for the reception of viaticum is within the context of the celebration of Mass with the dying person. However, when this is not possible due to circumstances and/or the condition of the dying person, a minister of Holy Communion may distribute viaticum outside of Mass. (*Pastoral Care of the Sick*, chapter 5)

CONCLUSION

39. “Receiving the Bread of Life, the disciples of Christ ready themselves to undertake with the strength of the Risen Lord and his Spirit the tasks which await them in their ordinary life. For the faithful who have understood the meaning of what they have done, the Eucharistic celebration does not stop at the church door.” (*Dies Domini* #45)

It is the expressed hope that these Norms for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion will serve not only to safeguard the importance and dignity of this sacred ministry, but also to extend the Eucharistic Celebration beyond the doors of the church into the homes and hearts of all believers.

(The structure of this document was adapted from the *Guidelines for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion* issued by the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and used with permission.)

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