

The Online Handbook for EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION

I. INTRODUCTION:

The Sacred Congregation for the Discipline of the Sacraments permits qualified persons to distribute Holy Communion when the Ordinary Minister (a priest) is lacking or is impeded because of age, health, the demands of pastoral ministry or when Mass would be unreasonably prolonged. It is stressed that there must be a visible need in each situation; that the parish priest (s) will continue to minister the Eucharist; that the communicant have the option of receiving Communion from a priest; and that there will be an adequate education program for all the faithful.

II. WHO QUALIFIES?

The Rite for the Commissioning of an Extraordinary Minister states: “You have been chosen for an important office and must now strive more earnestly than ever to live the Christian life, to give good example, to take your faith more seriously, and to be devoted to this great mystery which beautifully signifies the unity of the Church and wonderfully brings it about.”

III. CATECHETICAL BACKGROUND:

You must be able to distinguish between doctrine and discipline in the Church. Doctrine includes essential truths of the Faith received through revelation and the continuing authentic Tradition of the Church. Doctrine undergoes no change, although there is growth and understanding. With respect to discipline, however, circumstances bring about modifications of rules and practices. Here it is not a question of divine regulation, but the norms brought into being by the varying circumstances of history. The norms, which are of human origin in the Church, must always strive to preserve and protect doctrine and facilitate and promote the salvation of souls.

The practice of the laity distributing Communion falls under the area of discipline and practice. The past history of the Church records instances when the laity were privileged to administer Holy Communion. Theologically, this ministry is rooted in that priesthood of which the first letter of Peter speaks when it names the Christian people “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a people set apart.” (1 Peter 2, 9) In other words, this ministry is a way of realizing the share in Christ’s priestly office which all the people have through the sacrament of initiation.

The Sacrament of Holy Orders bestows the ministerial priesthood on some - priesthood different in essence from the common priesthood of the faithful. Thus the ordained minister brings about the sacramental presence of Christ in the Eucharist. This is a matter of doctrine and the teaching of the Church. The matter of the distribution of the Holy Eucharist so confectioned by the ordained priest is a matter of discipline.

In the early centuries of the Church’s life, it was common to entrust the Eucharist to lay persons. Hippolytus describes the practice, current in his time, of receiving the Eucharist in one’s home, so that a person could take Communion daily. With the development of minor orders and the gradual falling off from frequent Communion, these practices fell into disuse.

In the 8th century there appears documents reserving the distribution of Communion to the priest. From the 9th century to the present, the priest has been the ordinary minister of the Eucharist and the deacon the extraordinary minister.

This is the one ministry that is not to be given just for the purpose of having lay people involved. So when there are needs to be met, as described in the first paragraph, then the ministry should be inaugurated. Care must always be taken to provide the proper reverence due to the blessed Eucharist.

IV. GENERAL GUIDELINES:

Because a distributor is such an important office (cf., commissioning rite) or better still such an awesome task, the worshipping community notes your external “attitudes” and “appearances”. Therefore, one should bear in mind the following:

1. Because the distributor is very intimately connected with building unity in the Church (parish) with the parish priests, it almost would be sacrilegious to exercise this office if you would not be at one with the parish priests and an active builder of unity within the parish community.

2. People do talk. So, we ask the men to be attired in coat and tie; the women in a dress or pants suit.
3. Commitment: you will receive a schedule in advance as well as being in the bulletin the week before you are to distribute. It will be your responsibility to get a substitute and if that would be impossible, at least inform the rectory on Saturday morning before you are to distribute that you have tried to get a substitute and cannot be at church to distribute. We are sorry, but this commitment is so important that if you have two unexcused or uncovered absences you may forfeit your privilege to distribute.
4. You must be an active parishioner. This would and does involve many things. The minimum would be two precepts of the Church: you must be a regular contributor, through the envelope system, to the financial support of your parish and you must attend Mass weekly and not only be seen when you are scheduled to distribute. Also, if something should happen in your personal life that would be scandalous to continue in this ministry, you would have the decency to resign.
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MINISTRY TO THE HOMEBOUND

If you think you might be interested in taking Holy Communion to those in our parish who are shut-ins, here is a brief summary of what is involved:

Currently, there are about 25 - 30 parishioners (or elderly parents of parishioners) who are homebound and have requested receiving the Blessed Eucharist on Sunday. We currently have six teams (about 5 - 7 people per team) who visit those who are ill - which means each Eucharistic Minister visits the homebound about once every 4 - 6 weeks.

Taking the Blessed Eucharist to these people is a very rewarding experience—many of the Extraordinary Ministers involved have been doing this for years, in fact, since its inception in 1982. At that time, there was little or no training. Today we prepare you for this extremely important ministry.

We will not try to make this appear to be an easy commitment—it certainly is not easy- picture this - struggling on a very cold Sunday morning, in the snow and ice, to take Holy Communion to five or six people. But also think about this: the happiness that you bring to those who are sick, and perhaps dying! Nothing surpasses the reward YOU feel in bringing Jesus to them at a time when He is so very important to them.

Please consider giving some of your time to this Ministry to the Homebound. Let us know of your interest and we will talk to you more about the ministry.

PROCEDURES FOR IN-HOME AND REST HOME DISTRIBUTION OF HOLY COMMUNION.

FOR IN-HOME: On Saturday early evening (after 5 PM Mass), contact your In-home communicants to schedule a time for them to receive on Sunday morning.

FOR ALL SITES: Please pick up the current list of those to receive in an envelope on the bulletin board in the Sacristy when you check in for Mass.

Before Mass, go into the main sacristy, where you will find the unconsecrated hosts in a small covered round container on the large counter. Take the number you require, put them in your pyx and place them on the tray to go on the altar. If someone has already put the tray on the altar, take your open pyx into church, walking between the Ambo and credence table. When you are behind the altar, genuflect or bow to the tabernacle, then go up to the altar and place your pyx on the tray. Return from the altar in the same manner as you approached.

Do not present a pyx for hosts in the Communion line. The pyx should be placed on the altar and removed after Mass, (using the same procedure as when the pyx is placed on the altar before Mass) if you attend any Mass except the 8:00 A.M. Sunday Mass where the dismissal rite is used.

After Communion at the 8:00 A.M. Mass only, the priest will call you up to the altar for a dismissal prayer. Go to the front side of the altar and face the altar with your back to the congregation. The priest will hold the tray out to each of you. Pick up your closed pyx and hold it while the priest says the dismissal prayer. Each group has its own type of pyx, so as to make them easily identifiable.

Leave Mass when dismissed. Proceed to your car in a quiet and respectful manner and immediately leave for your first assigned home (or the nursing home you are assigned to). Do not take the pyx containing the consecrated hosts home or delay the start of your ministry. You may pick up your pyx with

consecrated hosts after attending any Mass, but you should plan on going on your visits immediately following that Mass.

After saying Communion Prayers and giving Communion to the patient allow a few minutes for silent prayer and then do the concluding prayer. If your schedule permits, you may add parts of the in-home liturgy, such as one of the readings or the Gospel, at the appropriate time. Please try to spend some time with the Communicant, as you may be their only visitor for the week. They truly appreciate the company and an opportunity to speak to someone from the parish (helping to foster a sense of the larger parish community). Talk to them about what is going in the parish or in the community at large.

SPECIAL NOTES:

If you are calling on Rest Home communicants and you find a patient has been moved to another room, make a note and call the secretaries at the church office so that information can be forwarded to others in your group. Likewise, if the patient is no longer at the home, please let the church office know of that.

If a patient is medicated and asleep, do not try to awaken them. Call their name and if you receive no response, do not force the issue.

If you have a Host left and cannot return it to the church you may consume it. It goes without saying that this should be done in a prompt and reverent manner.

Those taking Communion to the sick will be placed on a schedule with an experienced minister the first time out.

PROCEDURES FOR EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION (EMHC) - IN CHURCH DISTRIBUTION

FIRST SUNDAY of Each Month - Communion under both Forms

Requires Hosts 1-2-3-4 (and two priests) and Cups 1-2-3-4-5-6 (plus 2 choir members to distribute to choir only)

ALL OTHER Sundays of the Month (and all summer Sundays) - Host only

Requires Hosts 1-2-3-4 (and two priests) (plus 1 choir member to distribute to the choir only)

Choir Distributors are to determine how many in the choir are to receive and will provide this information to the presider before Mass, so that only the hosts that are needed are taken to the choir loft. The choir distributor will not need to return to the main floor until after Mass, when they will take their ciboria or cup to the purification room for cleansing.

At all Masses on all Sundays - (review diagram):

There will be THREE STATIONS in the front in the sanctuary. These stations shall be:

At the front (left side aisle - north): TWO HOSTS (Host 3 and Host 4)

At the front (center aisle): TWO PRIESTS

At the front (right side aisle - south): TWO HOSTS (Host 1 and Host 2)

When there is Communion under both forms (first Sunday of month):

Simply add one Cup distributor for each Host and note the Cup distributor's station on the diagram.

Sign in at least 10 - 15 minutes before Mass begins. Sign-in sheet is on the counter in the outer Main Sacristy (in the blue book). If you do not sign in at least 5 minutes prior to the start of Mass, your position may be taken by another EMHC.

Distribution during the Mass:

DURING THE "Sign of Peace", start forward to the Sanctuary and take your assigned place in front of the Altar; in the center on the floor there will be the four Host positions (there will be three cup distributors on either side of the host positions when communion is under both forms). Two Priests will be at each Mass and will always be Host distributors in the Sanctuary in the center aisle. You do not bow when approaching the Sanctuary!

After the Celebrant has received, the two priests will come forward and give the Host to all. If there is Communion under both forms, the Priests will give a cup to Host 2 and 3, who after receiving the cup will turn and offer the cup to Host 1 and 4, saying "the Blood of Christ". This will continue down each line until the cup reaches Cup 3 and 6.

When Communion is under only one form, the Host distributors and the servers will receive under both forms, but the Precious Blood will be given from the Chalice.

The Priests will give the distributors their Ciboria or Cups (the distributors will NOT have to come to the altar to receive their vessels).

All distributors will leave for their stations at the same time, when the priests are ready. (The choir distributors will leave for the choir loft as soon as they receive their vessels). You will stand just in front of the bottom step of the sanctuary (if you are a host distributor).

On host weekends, host distributors who are located on either side aisle, when finished distributing there, may turn and check to see if the priests need additional assistance. If so, take up positions when Cup 3 and 4 would normally stand near the pews. There should be no more than four distributors (2 priests and 2 lay distributors) at the main aisle of the church.

If you are a cup distributor and you have finished at your assigned station and you still have Precious Blood in your cup, staying in place and turning toward the Altar, consume the remaining Precious Blood. (Please do NOT return to the altar to consume that which is left). If there is too much for you to consume by yourself, ask another distributor to assist you in consuming the balance in your cup. Do not attempt to take up a position other than your own, even if there are still communicants to distribute to in the other aisles.

Please return both ciborium and cups to the trays on the altar, and Host 1 will remain to take the tray to the purification room and then return to their pew. When Communion is under both forms, Cup 1 will remove the tray with the cups to the purification room and then return to their pew. After the priest empties the ciboria, Host 1 removes the tray from the altar and places it in the purification room behind the Sanctuary, and then returns to their pew.

At the 8:00 A.M. Sunday Mass, prior to the general dismissal, assigned in-home ministers will be called forth for a special dismissal rite, at the conclusion of which they will leave the church for their assigned duties without delay.

Guidelines for the purification of vessels at Mass at St. Matthew Church

For the patens and ciboria:

The assisting priest (or deacon) consolidates the hosts at the altar after Communion; remaining particles are deposited with the hosts in the ciborium. The assisting priest then reserves the ciborium in the tabernacle. [Note: periodically, the ciborium should be cleaned of those particles gathered there either by depositing them in the celebrant's chalice or by cleaning the ciborium outside of Mass in the sacristy by the priests, making use of the sacrarium] Host 1 takes the tray to the sacristy, then after Mass returns the tray to the priests' sacristy.

For the communion cups:

The Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion carries the communion cups from the altar to the sacristy, as has been our custom.

After the assisting priest (or deacon) has reserved the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle, he goes to the sacristy and simply rinses the cups of any remaining Precious Blood. The cups can then be left "wet" for the E. M. to wash and dry after Mass. The cleaned cups are then returned to the priests' sacristy.

If you are new to the ministry, please observe what is going on during the distribution of Communion so that you can familiarize yourself with the procedures. If you have any questions, please talk to one of the priests prior to Mass.

Terms Used

CORPORAL - Square cloth placed on altar under the chalice and paten. Folded envelope style to keep dropped particles from falling out.

CHALICE - the cup for the wine used by the Presider.

PURIFICATOR - The rectangular folded cloth used by ministers to wipe the rim of the cups when distributing the Precious Blood.

SACRARIUM - The sink compartment to the right of the standard sink found in the Priest's sacristy. The drain of this sink goes into the ground rather than into the sanitary system. This is used for disposing of any particles or drops of consecrated bread or wine.

CIBORIUM (CIBORIA, pl.) - the vessels used to hold the hosts for distribution.

Other Information

It is important to make eye contact with each communicant as you present the Host or Precious Blood.

The appropriate words for distributing the Host are "The Body of Christ".

The appropriate words for distributing the Cup are "The Blood of Christ".

Do not call the communicants by name for several reasons:

1. It might be impossible for you to name each person you distribute to.
2. It takes away from the unity and centrality of the Eucharist.

It is not appropriate to bless children who come with their parents and are not yet old enough to communicate. The entire assembly receives a blessing from the Presider at the end of Mass.

If it appears that you will run out of hosts, they may be broken into two pieces. The method for doing this will be shown at practice. If you run out of Precious Blood, cover your cup with your purificator and remain in position until all are ready to return to the altar.

Should a host be dropped, pick it up and return it to the ciborium.

Should Precious Blood be spilled, lay your purificator on the spot. Get a new purificator from the altar and continue serving. The spot may be cleaned following Mass.

It is important to determine whether the communicant wants the host on the hand or in the mouth. Distribute accordingly.

Should you see that if a communicant does not consume the host, try to note where the person is sitting and tell the presider when you return to the altar. Under no circumstances do you administer more than 1 host to each communicant, especially if they present a pyx for you to fill. There are special procedures for this mission, and they do not include furnishing hosts to communicants in the communion line. If they persist, ask them to see a priest after Mass.

Distributors of the host should either brush any crumbs off their fingers over the ciborium or wipe their fingers on the corporal when they return to the altar.

It is important that the stance and attire of all ministers convey their awareness of the presence of God in our midst. Please dress appropriately.

The new schedules will be available in the Sacristy at least 1 weekend prior to expiration of the current schedule.

Should you be unable to serve when scheduled, please try to arrange for a substitute, or you can request one through this website. It might be easier if you first try to swap your assignment with someone else. An updated list of all Eucharistic Ministers will be attached to your schedule, or is available electronically upon request.

Frequently Asked Questions

At what time should I come forward during the Mass?

You should START forward at the beginning of the Sign of Peace and be in position BEFORE The Lamb of God (Agnus Dei) ends.

If there are not enough ministers, how long do I wait before filling in for anyone who is missing?

If there are less than 4 EMHC's (or 10 for a cup weekend) please come forward AFTER the Prayer of Humility (Lord, I am not worthy..).

What if there are three priests at the altar?

At larger masses, there are often three priests available to distribute. There will still be a need for the full number of ministers scheduled. To the contrary, if there is only one priest, it is likely that he has already made arrangements to have a lay minister help. If you are scheduled, you will still be expected to serve.

What if I have been asked to fill in for a priest? What should I do?

You should come forward at the same time as everyone else, but stand off to the side of the altar. You will distribute in the front where the assisting priest usually stands.

Who is supposed to administer to the wheelchair bound?

All distributors should be aware of wheelchair bound in their respective areas. However, Do not go beyond the front pews.

Should I offer the cup to the wheelchair bound?

Yes, if they are capable of taking the cup in hand and wish to receive.

If someone goes to the wrong station, what should I do?

If they take your station, take theirs. Do not make a big scene about the mistake, and do not try to correct it during the process of the Mass, especially if it involves changing cups with ciboria. This adds to the risk of spills and is not necessary.

Who does the Clean Up after Mass, and what does it entail?

During Mass, it is very important that those in the #1 position (host or cup) go back after Mass to the purification room behind the Sanctuary. Please make sure you carefully rinse all vessels into the sacrarium (the diamond shaped sink) prior to washing (if necessary).

When do I leave for my station to distribute?

When the priests are ready to depart.

Who pours during a cup mass?

The cups will be prepared before Mass.

Are there any special preparations I should make before Mass?

Yes. You should review the position you have been assigned for the Mass, making certain you know exactly where to go and what to do for that position. Once you arrive at the church, sign your name on the list in the book near the Main Sacristy so you will be recorded as being present for your assignment.

It is almost time for the Mass I am assigned is to start, and I can't make my assignment or get a substitute. What should I do?

If you do not show up and sign in within 5 minutes before Mass starts, someone else will take your place.

Must I attend the Mass I serve at?

Yes. Unless you are ministering to the homebound, you should serve at the Mass which you will be distributing at.

Who distributes to the Choir?

Designated choir members will distribute to the choir. They will use an additional ciborium and cup for this function.

I can't find my schedule. Is there anywhere else to get one other than at Church?

Yes. All schedules for the assigned ministries are on the Internet at www.stmmin.org.