

EXTRAORDINARY
MINISTERS OF
Holy Communion

CALLED TO

Serve

EUCCHARISTIC MINISTERS

2023 Guidelines



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Guidelines for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

The Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion (EMHC) performs a great service to the Church by assisting in distributing Holy Communion to God's people . It is an honor and a privilege to serve the Church in this capacity, and of course, requires careful preparation on the part of the extraordinary minister.



It is the purpose of this document to assist those individuals who serve as Extraordinary Ministers by providing some insight into the theological principles behind the Eucharist and the role of the EMHC, the teaching and discipline of the Universal Church on that subject, the local norms for the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee, and some suggestions that may prove useful in their service to the Church.

The Minister of Holy Communion

The document Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America defines the minister of Holy Communion.

By virtue of his sacred ordination, the bishop or priest offers the sacrifice in the person of Christ, the Head of the Church. He receives gifts of bread and wine from the faithful, offers the sacrifice to God, and returns to them the very Body and Blood of Christ, as from the hands of Christ himself. Thus, bishops and priests are considered the ordinary ministers of Holy Communion. In addition, the deacon who assists the bishop or priest in distributing Communion as an ordinary minister of Holy Communion. When the Eucharist is distributed under both forms, "the deacon ministers the chalice."

In every celebration of the Eucharist, there should be a sufficient number of ministers for Holy Communion so that it 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.



What is an Extraordinary Minister?

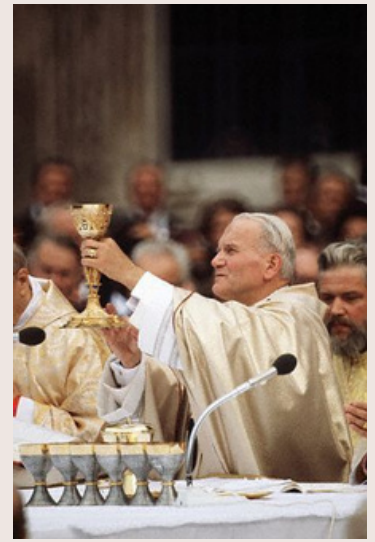
When the size of the congregation or the incapacity of the bishop, priest, or deacon requires it, the celebrant may be assisted by other bishops, priests, or deacons. If such ordinary ministers of Holy Communion are not present, "the priest may call upon extraordinary ministers to assist him, i.e., formally 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."

In short, an EMHC is a lay person or religious who has been deputed by the bishop or by a priest to assist the priest and/or deacon in distributing Holy Communion to all the faithful in a reasonable way. It is thus a privilege to which the Church invites certain individuals under given circumstances and not a right.

The distribution of Holy Communion should not be seen as a more complete exercise of the Priesthood that belongs to all believers in virtue of their baptism. Rather, it is to be understood as the exercise of a function that is proper to the ordained but which, of necessity, must be carried out by others. This highlights the extraordinary nature of this service, which, rather than being part of the structure of the Church, is instead tied to particular needs arising from the limited number of clergy.

**Pope John Paul II points this out in his instruction
Domenicae Cena:**

To touch the sacred species and to distribute them with their own hands is a privilege of the ordained, one which indicates an active participation in the ministry of the Eucharist. It is obvious that the Church can grant this faculty to those who are neither priests nor deacons, as is the case with acolytes in the exercise of their ministry, especially if they are destined for future ordination or with other lay people who are chosen for this to meet a just need, but always after an adequate preparation.



Qualifications to Serve as an Extraordinary Minister

It is important that those individuals selected to serve as extraordinary ministers be chosen carefully.

The instruction *Immensae Caritatis* describes the qualifications:

The faithful who are special ministers of communion must be persons whose good qualities of Christian life, faith, and morals recommend them. Let them strive to be worthy of this great office, foster their own devotion to the Eucharist, and show an example to the rest of the faithful by their own devotion and reverence toward the most august sacrament of the altar.

No one is to be chosen whose appointment the faithful might find disquieting.

In the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee, the following norms also apply:

- An extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, if married, must be in a valid marriage according to Church law,
- must have received the sacrament of Confirmation,
- and must be at least 16 years of age.

Way of Life of an Extraordinary Minister

Obviously, it is important that an individual demonstrate an exemplary Catholic life before becoming an EMHC. It is also important that they cultivate those virtues after they have been chosen for that position of service to the Church. Again, a bare minimum below which an individual who is presently mandated as an EMHC should disqualify himself or herself would consist of anything that would prevent him or her from receiving Holy Communion, such as grave sin, failure to attend Sunday Mass, or a choice not to maintain communion with the teachings and life of the Church.

Positively put, an EMHC should seek, like all Christians, to cultivate holiness of life, especially through frequent confession, personal prayer, especially before the Blessed Sacrament, and attendance at daily Mass if possible. They should also seek to have a good knowledge and appreciation for the beliefs of the Church, especially through the study of scripture and Church teaching. Suppose an EMHC finds it difficult to live a life appropriate to his function. In that case, he or she should withdraw for a time from the distribution of Holy Communion, or, if necessary, a pastor may find it necessary to ask an EMHC not to continue in this ministry.

Terminology for the Blessed Sacrament

The way we speak both reflects and shapes the way we believe and so it is important that our language regarding the Blessed Sacrament reflect our understanding of its nature and our faith in the real presence of Christ. Although all of Christ is present under each species, it is customary to refer to the host after consecration as “the Body of Christ.” Likewise, the chalice may be referred to simply as “the chalice” or as “the Blood of Christ.” The terms “bread” and “wine” should be used to refer to the bread and wine brought forward as gifts, but not to the consecrated species, which are no longer bread or wine, but the Body and Blood of the Lord.

Preparation for Serving as an Extraordinary Minister

In preparation for his or her service, the EMHC should make sure he or she is prepared to receive communion – is in a state of grace, and has fasted before Mass according to the norms of the Church. Secondly, it is important that he or she arrive at the church early, not only to sign in and find out his or her station but also to take some time in prayer before Mass to prepare for service.

EMHC should wash their hands upon their arrival and cleanse their hands with a sanitizing wipe before serving.

Dress

While each parish will further specify its guidelines for the dress of extraordinary ministers, the following minimal expectations apply across the diocese.

- Extraordinary ministers should dress in a way that is dignified and shows respect for the Blessed Sacrament, the assembled community, and the function they are carrying out.
- Clothes should be clean and neat, modest in appearance and coverage of the body, and reflect the importance of the celebration of the Eucharist. Generally, this is done by dressing in a more reverent fashion.
- As a minister, an important principle that must always be followed is that nothing should be worn that would draw attention to yourself or be distracting to the community.
- The EMHC should see to it that their hands are clean.
- They should also refrain from using cologne, perfume, or aftershave on their day of service since some people have sensitivities to these scents, and these fragrances often remain on one’s hands and can be transferred to the Eucharist.



Actions During the Mass

During the Mass, the EMHC sits with the rest of the faithful and should participate fully in the Mass, listening to the readings and joining the community in prayer.

Approaching the Altar

It is appropriate for the ministers to approach the sanctuary area as the Priest begins to receive communion so that they are in place when the priest is ready to distribute communion to the ministers. If the environment of the church requires that the ministers approach the altar to receive communion, then the norm of General Instruction of the Roman Missal is that they not approach the altar until after the Priest has received the Blood of Christ.

Receiving Communion

The precise arrangement for the EMHC to receive communion is to stand in an orderly way at the front of the Altar. The following norms given by the Congregation for Divine Worship must be followed:

“To avoid creating confusion, certain practices are to be avoided and eliminated where such have emerged in particular Churches: Extraordinary Ministers receiving Holy Communion apart from the other faithful as though concelebrants...”



Receiving a Vessel

After receiving Holy Communion, the extraordinary minister will need to receive a ciborium or a chalice.

After receiving the chalice, return to their previous position and distribute the Blood of Christ to the EMHC to your left. After ciborium ministers receive their ciborium, they then proceed to the location where they will distribute Holy Communion.

They are always to receive the ciborium or the chalice from the priest or the deacon. It is important that they know where their station is and if extraordinary ministers need to pass to the rear of the church, that the ushers do not permit the aisles to become crowded until the extraordinary ministers are at their stations.



Manner of Distributing and Receiving Holy Communion

While the norm for the distribution of communion in the Roman Rite remains under one species and on the tongue, specific permissions have allowed communion under both species and communion on the hand to take place. It is important to consider each of these methods of receiving communion because they each place particular burdens on the extraordinary minister.

First, communion under one species on the tongue. The communicant will make a sign of reverence (a bow is the norm in the United States) and then approach the minister standing. While standing is the norm in the United States, communion is not to be denied to those who prefer to kneel.

When ministering the Body of Christ, the minister takes the host and shows it to the communicant, saying, “The Body of Christ.” No other words are to be used, nor are names to be added to the words “The Body of Christ.” In the same way, when ministering the Blood of Christ, the minister takes the chalice and shows it to the communicant, saying, “The Blood of Christ.” No other words are to be used, nor are names to be added to the words “The Blood of Christ.” The extraordinary minister should pay attention that no small fragments of the host fall to the ground. For this reason, the host is generally held by the server in such a way that it is over the ciborium when possible.

Communion in the Hand

The practice of receiving communion in the hand, which is permitted in the United States by a special indult from the Holy See places additional requirements on the extraordinary minister because it is necessary that they make sure that the Body of Christ is properly consumed and that it is treated with reverence by the communicant. Pope John Paul II describes this difficulty: “In some countries, the practice of receiving Communion in the hand has been introduced. This practice has been requested by individual episcopal conferences and has received approval from the Apostolic See. However, cases of a deplorable lack of respect towards the eucharistic species have been reported ... This is in no way meant to refer to those who, receiving the Lord Jesus in the hand, do so with profound reverence and devotion in those countries where this practice has been authorized.”

Thus it is necessary for the extraordinary minister to observe the person receiving communion until he or she consumes the host. If they begin to walk off without receiving communion (as is sometimes the case with children who have not received proper catechesis or non-Catholic adults), it is important that the extraordinary minister follow that individual and either ask him to consume the host or to retrieve the host. It is important to note that the decision to receive communion on the tongue or in the hand is on the part of the communicant, and it is not allowed to compel them to receive on the hand or on the tongue.



Both Species

The permission to distribute communion under both species in certain cases was granted by Pope Paul VI with the instruction *Sacramentali Communionem* in 1970 and with the publication of the revised General Instructions of the Roman Missal (GIRM) in 2001. The responsibility for determining when it is appropriate to permit communion under both species rests with the diocesan bishop. In the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee, communion under both species is permitted at all Masses, meaning that the individual Priest celebrant may decide whether to offer communion under one or two species.

The only words used in distributing the Blood of Christ are “The Blood of Christ.” In distributing the Blood of Christ, it is important to avoid any danger of spillage. Care should be taken to make sure that the communicant has taken the chalice firmly before releasing it.

The extraordinary minister should, in ordinary circumstances, not hold on to the chalice while an individual receives communion. After distributing communion, the Extraordinary Ministers should take the chalice, wipe the lip of it with the purificator, and rotate it slightly. If communion is offered under both species, the decision to receive from the chalice or not belongs to the individual communicant.

Communion for those with Celiac Disease

Some individuals, for medical reasons, are unable to receive even a small particle of the Body of Christ. The Church accommodates those who suffer from this disease in two ways.

It is permitted for individuals to receive only the Blood of Christ. In such cases, communion from the chalice is distributed just as when the communicant receives under both species. It is also possible, with the Bishop’s approval, to make use of approved low-gluten hosts for those who suffer from this disease. The Bishop delegates all pastors to give this approval in individual cases.

A list of sources for the Vatican approved low-gluten hosts is in the appendix, as well as a sample letter to give to those suffering from this disease to present to pastors other parishes they may visit to see which form the pastor may allow.

Intinction

Although the Church also permits Holy Communion under both species by intinction, that is not a custom in the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee. Occasionally, you will find some who would like to intinct the host themselves into the chalice with the Precious Blood, but that is never allowed. Only a Priest is allowed to administer Holy Communion by intinction.

Redemptionis Sacramentum emphasizes, “The communicant must not be permitted to intinct the host himself in the chalice, nor to receive the intincted host in the hand.” If someone should approach a minister of the Precious Blood indicating they want to use intinction, the minister should cover the chalice with the purificator and politely tell the person that intinction in that manner is not allowed.

Blessings

Although they are not a part of the approved rite of the Mass, nor has there been any guidance from Rome about this practice, it has become customary in many parts of the United States for individuals who are not receiving Holy Communion to come forward and ask for a blessing. Often this is indicated by hands crossed across the chest, although in some cultures, particularly Latin ones, people desiring to receive Holy Communion on the tongue may also come forward with crossed arms. If the extraordinary minister determines that a person is seeking a blessing, it is appropriate to respond with a prayer that is clearly distinct from the blessing given by a priest. It is recommended to say, “*May God bless you,*” possibly while raising your hand. It is important that you not use the host in giving a blessing and that you not touch the person with the fingers you use for distributing Holy Communion.



Denying Holy Communion

There are practically no situations when Holy Communion should be denied by an extraordinary minister. Referencing the Code of Canon Law (843, paragraph 1), *Redemptionis Sacramentum* says: “In distributing Holy Communion, it is to be remembered that “sacred ministers may not deny the sacraments to those who seek them in a reasonable manner, are rightly disposed, and are not prohibited by law from receiving them.” Hence, any baptized Catholic who is not prevented by law must be admitted to Holy Communion.”

The extraordinary minister should not make a judgment on the worthiness of any individual to receive Holy Communion. In the case of individuals clearly living a life in discrepancy with church teachings, the decision is to be made by the pastor in consultation with the Bishop, and he will then inform the extraordinary ministers involved.

If the extraordinary minister is unsure whether an individual is Catholic or has received their first communion, he should ask them or their parent. Usually, the parent will take care of the child.

If the person is not Catholic, the extraordinary minister should politely let the person know that communion is reserved to Catholics.

Returning the Blessed Sacrament to the Altar

After distributing communion, the extraordinary minister should return to the altar, hand the ciborium or chalice to the priest or deacon, or place it on the **altar's corporal**. *If the celebrant priest is not present, the first EM that returns their ciborium to the altar is to stay in place until the celebrant priest arrives.* If the extraordinary minister is distributing the Blood of Christ, the extraordinary minister is permitted to consume whatever remains of the Blood of Christ before returning to the altar. If the vessel is empty, the priest celebrant may determine that the vessel be placed on the credence table, rather than the altar, for purification immediately or following Mass.

If the extraordinary minister has been distributing the Body of Christ, he should take the opportunity to purify his fingers of any particles that may have clung to them **and dry them using a purificator**.

For this purpose, a small bowl of water is often provided at the Tabernacle.

Accidents Involving the Blessed Sacrament

While every care should be taken to avoid accidents involving the Blessed Sacrament, the extraordinary minister should be prepared to respond to them should they occur. The most common sort of accident involves a particle of the host falling on the floor or another object. If a particle of the host falls on the floor, it should be picked up and consumed. If, for some reason, it cannot be consumed (for example, if it has already been in an individual's mouth who is unable to consume it, or the minister determines it is not healthy to consume the soiled host), it should be placed on the altar's corporal for the deacon or priest to dissolve in water and the water later poured down the sacrarium.

A greater difficulty is presented if some of the Blood of Christ should fall to the floor. The extraordinary minister should ensure that no one steps on the spot, perhaps by delegating an individual to guard it. A clean purificator could be used to mark the spot. Then (perhaps with the deacon's assistance), water should be brought and poured over the spot. The resulting spill should later be blotted with a purificator to remove as much as possible. If some of the Blood of Christ should drop on an individual's clothing or possessions, it should be treated in the same way, with due respect for the individual involved.

Purification of Vessels

Purification should be carried out by a priest, deacon, or instituted acolyte either after communion or immediately following Mass. If done during Mass, the purification can take place on the altar or at the credence table. This requirement helps to emphasize that the purification of vessels is not simply “doing the dishes” but a part of the ritual of the Mass, by which respect is shown to Christ present in the Blessed Sacrament. Lay ministers may still assist in any cleaning or washing of the vessels that take place, but only after the ritual purification is complete.



Proper use of the Sacrarium

A sacrarium is a special sink located in the sacristy. The drain of the sacrarium empties directly into the ground and is never connected with any other drainage pipe.

The GIRM states the following about the sacrarium.

“The practice should be kept of building in the sacristy a sacrarium into which is poured the water from the washing of sacred vessels and linens.”

“If a host or any particle should fall, it is to be picked up reverently; and if any of the Precious Blood is spilled, the area where the spill occurred should be washed with water, and this water should then be poured into the sacrarium in the sacristy.”

Nothing else should ever be poured down the sacrarium, including any remaining Precious Blood. The Precious Blood must always be consumed.

