



THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE *of* PENSACOLA-TALLAHASSEE

Guidelines for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, Communion to the Sick, Eucharistic Adoration, and Sundays in the Absence of a Priest 2026

Theological Foundation

The Holy Eucharist is “the source and summit of the Christian life” (CCC 1324). Through the Eucharist, Christ’s Paschal Mystery is made present and the faithful are nourished with the Body and Blood of the Lord. The Church carefully regulates the distribution of Holy Communion and Eucharistic devotion to ensure:

- reverence toward the Real Presence of Christ
- proper liturgical order
- pastoral care for the faithful, especially the sick and homebound

These guidelines help ensure that ministry is carried out in fidelity to the Church and in harmony with diocesan norms.

I. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (EMHC)

1. Nature of the Ministry

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion assist in distributing the Eucharist only when ordinary ministers are unavailable or insufficient. Ordinary ministers of Holy Communion are bishops, priests, deacons. (Canon 910 §1; GIRM 154) Extraordinary Ministers serve only when necessary and do not replace ordinary ministers.

2. Qualifications

An EMHC must:

- Be a fully initiated Catholic (Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist)
- Be at least 16 years old
- Be a practicing Catholic in good standing
- Registered in the parish where they seek to serve as an EMHC
- Demonstrate reverence and understanding of the Eucharist
- Live a life consistent with Church teaching
- Receive proper training and commissioning, namely the online training provided by the Diocese along with additional training hosted by the parish
- Maintain a prayerful life and approach the ministry with humility and service.

3. Commissioning

Extraordinary Ministers must be

- Selected by the pastor
- Trained in theology and liturgical practice

- Formally commissioned with a mandate from the Bishop or his delegate.

The commissioning may occur during Mass according to diocesan practice. Mandates may be issued for a specific term (no more than 5 years) as directed by the bishop or his delegate.

Parishes are to keep record of the EMHCs training, and it is non-transferable, meaning if a person relocates to another parish, they must go through the vetting and training process again at the discretion of the pastor or his delegate. Once the Mandate expires, a person must go through the training process again.

4. Responsibilities During Mass

EMHCs may assist with:

- Distribution of the Body of Christ
- Distribution of the Precious Blood
- Taking Communion to the sick after Mass which requires additional training and a background check

They do not:

- approach the altar until the priest has received Communion
- assist with the consecration
- purify sacred vessels (unless specifically permitted)

(GIRM 162–163)

5. Reverence and Conduct

Ministers should:

- Dress appropriately and modestly
- Show visible reverence toward the Eucharist
- Maintain a prayerful demeanor
- Handle the Eucharist carefully

If a host falls:

- pick it up reverently
- consume it or place it aside according to instructions

If the Precious Blood spills:

- cover the area with a purificator
- notify the priest or deacon
- properly handle the spilled Precious Blood with the assistance of a sacristan, instituted acolyte, priest, or deacon.

6. Distribution of Holy Communion

The minister says only “**The Body of Christ**” or “**The Blood of Christ**” or its equivalent in another language. No additional words or names are added. The communicant responds “**Amen.**”

7. Bringing Communion to the Sick

After Communion, ministers who visit the sick:

- receive a pyx containing the Eucharist and carry the pyx and the Blessed Sacrament in an appropriate burse
- go directly to the sick person

- do not retain the Eucharist longer than necessary
- return the pyx promptly

The Eucharist should never be left unattended.

II. Communion Services for the Sick, Homebound, and Institutions

The Church emphasizes pastoral care for the sick and elderly. “Those who cannot participate in the Eucharistic celebration may receive Communion outside Mass.” (Catechism 1392; HCWEOM)

1. Ministers

Communion to the sick may be brought by:

- Priests
- Deacons
- Instituted acolytes
- Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

The pastor oversees this ministry but can delegate tasks to another individual.

2. Preparation

Before leaving the church, the minister should:

- Spend a moment in prayer (if they are not sent directly from Mass)
- Ensure the Eucharist is placed reverently in a pyx and carried in a burse
- Carry a small ritual book or guide
- Bring a purificator and holy water if needed

3. Conduct During Travel

The Eucharist must be treated with utmost reverence. Ministers should:

- travel directly to the destination
- avoid unnecessary stops
- keep the pyx secure

4. Order of Communion for the Sick

A simplified liturgy is used. Typical structure:

1. Greeting
2. Penitential Act
3. Scripture reading (It is expected that the Word of God is never skipped as it, too, provides nourishment and consolation for the soul).
4. Lord’s Prayer
5. Holy Communion
6. Prayer after Communion
7. Blessing

When appropriate:

- family members may participate
- brief reflection or prayer may be offered

5. When a Priest Should Be Called

A priest should be notified when the sick person:

- requests Confession
- desires Anointing of the Sick
- is in danger of death and needs Viaticum (Viaticum is the final Eucharist for the dying).

6. Communion in Institutions

For hospitals, nursing homes, and prisons:

Ministers should:

- follow facility regulations
- maintain confidentiality
- respect patient privacy
- collaborate with chaplains and clergy

The Eucharist should never be left unattended in rooms.

III. Eucharistic Adoration and Exposition

Eucharistic Adoration extends the worship of Christ present in the Blessed Sacrament. “The Church and the world have a great need of Eucharistic worship.” (St. John Paul II)

1. Forms of Eucharistic Devotion

Common forms include:

- Exposition and Benediction
- Silent adoration
- Holy Hours
- Perpetual Adoration
- Forty Hours Devotion

These devotions deepen the faithful’s relationship with Christ in the Eucharist.

2. Ministers of Exposition

The ordinary ministers of Exposition and benediction are priest and deacon. (*Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass*) Extraordinary ministers may expose the Blessed Sacrament and repose the Blessed Sacrament but may not give Benediction.

3. Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament

The Eucharist may be exposed in a monstrance or in a ciborium. During exposition candles are lit, the altar is properly prepared, silence and prayer are maintained although music can be performed. Music during exposition and adoration should always be live music, sung by the presiders and participants, and should never be a playing of recorded music. If incense is used, it is to be used only by a priest or a deacon who is leading exposition and benediction.

4. Conduct During Adoration

Those present should

- maintain silence and reverence
- genuflect upon entering
- avoid unnecessary movement or conversation
- pray quietly

Appropriate prayers include:

- Scripture
- Rosary
- Divine Mercy Chaplet
- Liturgy of the Hours

5. Benediction

Benediction includes:

1. Eucharistic hymn (e.g., *Tantum Ergo*)
2. Incensation
3. Blessing with the monstrance
4. Divine Praises
5. Reposition

Only a priest or deacon may give Benediction.

6. Perpetual Adoration Norms

If a parish has perpetual adoration:

- the Blessed Sacrament must never be left unattended
- a schedule of committed adorers must be maintained
- substitutes should be arranged for absences

Security and safety procedures should be established. If perpetual adoration occurs in a parish, it should remain a suitable location outside the normal location of the celebration of Mass. If adoration occurs in the same location where Mass is celebrated, then the Eucharist is reposed during Mass and exposed after Mass, including funeral and wedding Masses.

IV. Celebration of the Liturgy of the Word on Sundays in the Absence of a Priest

“By tradition handed down from the apostles which took its origin from the very day of Christ’s resurrection, the Church celebrates the paschal mystery every eighth day; with good reason this, then, bears the name of the Lord’s Day” (Sacrosanctum Concilium 106). The Sunday celebration of the Mass is central to the life of the Church and each parish, and it is the Church’s desire that Mass is celebrated every Sunday in every parish.

The Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee has been blessed with enough priests and vocations to make the celebration of holy Mass a weekly reality in its parishes. However, occasionally a situation arises that makes the celebration of Mass impossible; for example, an unplanned emergency, illness of an assigned priest, a storm, or severe travel emergency.

Mass is the primordial celebration of the Eucharist and is given precedence in the sacramental life of the Church. The Church has offered a liturgical text titled *Sunday Worship in the Absence of a Priest* and has provided instructions for Communion Services in the text *Communion Services and the Celebration of the Eucharistic Mystery Outside of Mass*. Both rituals are allowed only when a Mass cannot be celebrated due to the unavailability of an ordained priest.

In case of any of the above emergency situations, *Sunday Worship in the Absence of a Priest* may be used provided the following policies are followed:

1. General Principles

- Sunday Worship in the Absence of a Priest may only be used in actual emergencies and not for convenience.
- Care should be taken to ensure there is no confusion between this liturgy and the celebration of Mass. The parish should provide ongoing formation on the mystery of the Eucharist and the celebration of Mass.

2. Advance Planning & Communication

- If it is known beforehand that no priest will be available to preside at Mass, the parish should inform parishioners in a timely manner and invite them to attend Mass at neighboring parishes.
- A parish should have several lay leaders trained to lead Sunday Worship in the Absence of a Priest, with annual updates.
- A staff member must inform the Office of Liturgy and Sacramental Practice as soon as possible.

3. When an Emergency Occurs

- When the emergency becomes apparent, the schedule of Masses at nearby parishes should be shared with the gathered congregation.
- Those present should be invited either to attend Mass at another parish or to remain for a celebration of the Liturgy of the Word.

4. When This Liturgy May Be Used

- Sunday Worship in the Absence of a Priest may be used only on Sundays (including the Saturday Vigil) and Holy Days of Obligation.
- If more than one Mass is affected, the Liturgy of the Word may be repeated at the scheduled Mass times.

5. Weekday Guidelines

- This liturgy is not to be used on weekdays that carry no obligation.
- On such weekdays, a Communion Service is allowed only if no other parish church or chapel exists within twenty miles.
- If another parish is within twenty miles, parishioners should be encouraged to attend Mass there instead.

6. Special Settings

- Communion Services are permitted in institutions (e.g., assisted living facilities, detention centers) when residents cannot attend Mass regularly.
- Priests should maintain a regular schedule of Mass at these facilities to ensure access to the Mass.

7. Leadership & Roles

- In the absence of a priest, a deacon should lead the liturgy.
- If no deacon is available, an instituted acolyte or a trained lay person may lead.
- The leader should be assisted by other ministers (lectors, cantors, musicians, servers).

8. Vesture

- Deacons should wear vesture proper to their order.
- Lay leaders should wear an alb.

9. Holy Communion

- As recently clarified by the Holy See, the distribution of Holy Communion is not permitted during Sunday Worship in the Absence of a Priest in the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee, in order to avoid confusion with the celebration of Mass in parishes where Sunday Mass is ordinarily celebrated each week.

IV. Formation and Ongoing Training

All ministers involved in Eucharistic ministry should receive:

- theological formation on the Eucharist
- instruction in liturgical norms
- pastoral training for visiting the sick
- periodic renewal sessions

Ongoing formation fosters reverence, unity, and fidelity to Church teaching.

V. Spiritual Disposition of Ministers

Ministers should cultivate:

- devotion to the Eucharist
- regular participation in Mass
- frequent Confession
- a life of prayer

Their ministry flows from their own relationship with Christ.

VI. Authority and Oversight

All Eucharistic ministry operates under the authority of the diocesan bishop through the pastor of the parish.

These guidelines follow the teachings of Sacred Scripture, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the Code of Canon Law, the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery Outside Mass, and diocesan sacramental policies.