

**DIRECTIVE ON CONCERNS REGARDING SOME  
PRACTICES BY EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF  
THE EUCHARIST**

February 28, 2001

To: Pastors, associate pastors and members of the pastoral teams

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

I am pleased to observe that an ever-increasing number of parishes are distributing Holy Communion under both species at every Sunday Mass. This necessitates the employment of an increasing number of extraordinary ministers. However, three recent developments have occurred which I need to share with you for your reflection and action.

First, a priest assisting in a parish on a weekend, witnessed extraordinary ministers washing chalices in a sink before the contents had been consumed. Another priest spoke of the reluctance of some ministers of the cup to consume the Precious Blood remaining because of the number of people who had drunk from it.

Second, I have received a report that some ministers taking Holy Communion to shut-ins were narrowly prevented from taking unconsecrated hosts to fill their pyxes, not realizing that they required consecrated hosts. Both these incidents reveal that we cannot take for granted that the eucharistic theology of the faithful is adequate to make them fit extraordinary ministers. It also raises serious questions about the understanding of the Eucharist present in the pews.

Finally, I have received a letter from the Chief of Police, a Catholic, of one of our major cities. He recounts an incident which occurred after an early Sunday Mass. An extraordinary minister of the Eucharist, exiting the parking lot, almost collided with an unmarked police car. She was stopped and found to smell of alcohol which she explained by telling the officer that she had consumed the remnants of the Cup she had administered.

The following quotation of the Chief's letter give me serious concerns and ones which you need to share:

The subsequent police actions, with the arrival of a road supervisor, evaluation of all information and using the discretion I encourage officers to do, led to no further follow-up action, but identified several potential issues I share with you.

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## L I V A

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1. Alcohol was provided within authorization or permit.
2. Alcohol was served prior to serving times outlined in both the municipal by-law and Liquor License Act.
3. If a collision should have occurred, would the insurance company seek restitution from the diocese?
4. Does the knowledge of such practices place both you and me, other dioceses and other police administrators in a position to be named in civil litigation?

While I am pressing for legal advice on the questions received, it is imperative that each of you take immediate steps to re-educate your eucharistic ministers and re-examine your practices regarding the distribution of the Precious Blood. As a guideline for this re-examination, I pose these questions:

- \$ Have the ministers been prepared for ministry by careful instruction in the theology of the Mass and the theology of the Eucharist as sacrifice and sacrament?
- \$ Does the reverence of their administration and particularly the disposition of the unconsumed Precious Blood reflect the truth of the Catholic faith? Does a genuflection, for example, occur at appropriate moments to acknowledge the presence of Our Divine Lord?
- \$ Are the ministers of the Cup frequently encountering the expectation that they will consume inappropriate amounts because few communicants choose to use the Cup?
- \$ Are the ministers who go to the sick provided with an appropriate ritual for prayer so that their visit cannot be mistaken for merely social visit?

The new Director of our Office of Liturgy, Christina Ronzio, with the Commission has been working on revised guidelines for Eucharistic Ministers. Regional workshops will be organized in the near future to explain and implement the guidelines and I invite you and your extraordinary Eucharistic ministers to attend.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Rev. John Michael Sherlock  
Bishop of London

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